

**The perceptions of a group of first year undergraduate  
Malawian students of the essay writing process.**

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**ATTESTATION OF AUTHORSHIP**

“I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.”

Signed: .....

Date: .....

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions of the essay writing process of first year undergraduates at Chancellor College (University of Malawi) and to a lesser extent those of the lecturers responsible for teaching academic skills.

A mixed methods design, combining qualitative and quantitative techniques, was employed in order to obtain richer data for deeper understanding of the students' writing process. Two hundred students from the humanities and social science faculties responded to a self-completion questionnaire towards the end of semester one. Based on the students' responses, an open-ended questionnaire was administered to four full time English for Academic Purposes (EAP) instructors.

Findings from this study indicate that most students find it very challenging to obtain sufficient and relevant source text information, paraphrase or summarise information, and use an appropriate academic writing style. As solutions to these challenges, the students suggested the need for timely essay writing instruction, availability of resources for essay writing, increased amount of time spent on essay writing instruction, and discipline specific instruction in essay writing. EAP instructors identified lack of teaching and learning materials, large EAP classes, and students' negative attitude towards the EAP course, as some of the challenges they encounter when teaching the course. The EAP instructors proposed an increase in the number of staff members, making students aware of the significance of the EAP course at an early stage, and the availability of up to date resources, as some of the ways in which the teaching of the course can be improved. Overall, the findings seem to suggest that difficulties that students encounter during the writing process and teaching challenges that EAP instructors face, have great impact on students' perception of academic writing as well as their approach to writing tasks. The findings also suggest a lack of dialogue between the students and their lecturers. This is evident in students' unawareness of the nature of the writing demands of their lecturers and disciplines; students' desire to have timely essay writing instruction; and the lecturers' concerns about students' negative attitude towards the EAP course.

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **1.1 Rationale for the study**

The study was conducted at Chancellor College, one of the largest constituent colleges of the University of Malawi. The College has enrolment of about 1,812 students and 262 members of academic and administrative staff (University of Malawi, 2007). Students are eligible for university education after passing the national secondary school examinations (with at least six credits, including English language). However, to be admitted to Chancellor College as is the case with other constituent colleges of the university, students are required to write university entrance examinations. These examinations assess students' proficiency in three areas, namely, English language, numeracy, and reasoning. Undergraduate students are enrolled in four-year degree programmes in various disciplines. These disciplines are offered by twenty-three departments which fall under five faculties, Humanities, Education, Social Science, Science, and Law (Honours).

The vast majority of students enrolled at Chancellor College are second language speakers of English, and normally come from a background of eight years of studying in English as the language of instruction. That is, from standard 5 to 8 of primary education and through secondary school (forms 1 to 4); English is the medium of instruction (Matiki, 2001). English is also taught as a subject throughout primary and secondary education. At Chancellor College, as in other tertiary institutions in Malawi, the language of instruction and communication is English. Due to the significance of English and the general outcry in the University of Malawi that students have poor communicative skills in English (Matiki, 2001), first year undergraduates are required to enrol in an obligatory course, English for Academic Purposes (EAP).

The EAP course, offered by the Department of Language and Communication (LAN), is essentially skills-based rather than content-based, and is designed to address language problems of specific subject areas (Language and Communication Department, 2001). Thus, the course is divided into three categories, namely English for Humanities, English for Science, and English for Social Science.

In addition to the EAP course, first year students also enrol in four subject courses in their respective disciplines. One of these courses may be outside their discipline although they are not allowed to major outside their field of study.

The EAP course is currently offered only to first year students, although there are plans to extend it to students in other years (2 and 3) when the department has adequate staffing. The course is offered in two semesters of the academic year, and has five contact hours in semester one and four hours in semester two per week for the 13 weeks of teaching. In the first semester, the additional hour is used to familiarize students with library resources and research skills.

The course covers four skills, namely listening, reading, writing, and seminar presentation in the academic context. Listening and reading skills are taught in the first semester. The former includes how to take down lecture notes, while the latter covers summary and book review writing as well as tools for locating information in source texts. The second semester is allotted to teaching of writing. Oral presentation skills, which include testing students' English speaking proficiency, are also taught in this semester.

In academic writing, students are taught how to write different types of summaries, book reviews, reports, and essays. However, essay writing is the most important component. Essay writing instruction is mainly concerned with teaching students how to write different text types such as narrative or description, exposition, and argument. For the exposition text type, students are taught different patterns. These include comparison-contrast, cause-effect, problem-solution, definition, and classification-enumeration. Students are frequently required to write expository essays, as well as argumentative and narrative/descriptive essays.

Second language process-based research indicates that academic writing plays a vital role at university. This central role of writing is due mainly to the fact that it is through writing that students' learning is assessed and through which instructors can establish the extent and nature of students' understanding of subject matter (Maclellan, 2004; Krause, 2001). Writing also appears to promote learning (Manchón and Roca de Larios, 2007; Ellis and Drury, 2005).

However, it has been established that L2 students' learning through the writing process is affected by various challenges. These problems range from those related to the writing process itself (Evans and Green, 2007; Mahfoudhi, 2003) to those attributed to the university context (Krause 2001; Barker, 2000). The challenges together with students' misconception of academic writing have also been identified as having impact on the strategies that students employ when performing writing tasks which in turn affects the quality of the written work (Ochieng, 2005; Petrić and Czár, 2003).

Although these findings are of significance for students around the world, the majority of the studies have been conducted in Asia, America, and Europe. Thus, it appears that there is lack of extensive research on L2 writing in African tertiary institutions.

In addition, even though previous research has identified writing challenges that undergraduates experience during the writing process, not many of these studies have also obtained views from the participants on how these challenges could be resolved. Apart from the identified gaps in the literature, at Chancellor College, undergraduates are not given opportunity to offer their views on issues that affect their academic writing process. This is the case despite the fact that it is evident from their written material that most students find the process of academic writing very challenging. Thus, there is lack of enquiry into factors that contribute to most undergraduates' failure to satisfy academic writing requirements.

## **1.2 Aims of the study**

The primary purpose of this study is to explore the perceptions of the essay writing process of first year undergraduates at Chancellor College (University of Malawi) and to

a lesser extent those of their EAP lecturers. In particular, the study aims to answer the following questions:

- What strategies do first year undergraduates employ when writing essays?
- What difficulties do they encounter while writing essays?
- What are their perceptions of essay writing process?
- What are their solutions to the difficulties they encounter?

The study was conducted in two phases. The first phase, carried out towards the end of first semester, involved 200 first year humanities and social science undergraduates enrolled in four-year degree programmes. The second stage, which was based on the results of the first phase, involved four EAP instructors. In both phases, a self-completion questionnaire was used.

It is hoped that the findings of this research will provide EAP instructors with a more holistic picture of the essay writing behaviour of first year undergraduates, the challenges they face during the writing process, as well as their general perception of essay writing. This awareness may help the instructors to address the difficulties that students encounter during the course of writing, rather than just errors in students' written work.

The identified challenges that EAP instructors face when teaching the course and their proposed ways of improving the teaching of EAP may prove useful to Chancellor College administrators as they strive to improve students' learning.

In addition, the findings of this research may contribute to knowledge in the EAP field, and in particular to L2 academic writing, since it provides insight into students' writing behaviour and their writing challenges in the context of an African tertiary institution where research in this field seems to be limited.

### **1.3 Organization of the study**

This thesis consists of six chapters. Chapter two places the present study in the context of L2 academic writing at tertiary level. In particular, it discusses the nature of academic

writing at university, and the process-based approach to L2 writing research which is adopted in this study. Major findings from a number of empirical studies concerning L2 students' writing process are also reviewed.

Chapter three provides the methodological approach employed in this study. In order to obtain rich results, the study employs a mixed methods design; that is, a combination of qualitative and quantitative techniques. The data collection instrument, participants, data collection procedures, and data analysis techniques are discussed.

The findings of this study are presented in chapter four, and they include quantitative and qualitative data from students and EAP instructors.

In chapter five, the findings are discussed in relation to the research questions of this study and previous relevant literature.

The final chapter provides a summary of the study. Pedagogical and theoretical implications, as well as suggestions for further research are presented. Limitations of this study are also identified.

## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### 2.1 Introduction

In recent years, there has been an increase in emphasis placed on the importance of English communication skills such as writing in many tertiary institutions in Malawi. Chancellor College, which offers many courses in the Humanities and Social Sciences, is no exception. Although at Chancellor College the emphasis placed on writing differs from one discipline to the other, the reasons for the importance of writing across the disciplines are similar. Apart from the need for students to have written communication skills for their academic success, the importance of these skills goes beyond the classroom. Recent years have seen more employers in Malawi emphasizing the need for excellent communication skills in both the national language (Chichewa) and English from prospective employees. The ability of potential employees to express themselves competently in written form, is one of the skills that is most required by employers. There has also been an increase in students who seek to do their postgraduate studies in overseas institutions. In order to qualify for these institutions, potential candidates are required to have good communication skills, including writing.

With these developments in mind, writing instruction is given a central place in the EAP curriculum at Chancellor College, with the aim of preparing the students for their prospective employers' expectations and needs; as well as their future further studies within the country and overseas.

Despite the emphasis in academic writing instruction, most students across disciplines face difficulties with academic writing. In addition, discussions between EAP lecturers and discipline lecturers have indicated concerns about the decline in students' writing standards. However, lack of enquiry into the underlying factors contributing to the students' declining writing standards at Chancellor College, has resulted in failure to

successfully address the students' writing challenges. The present study, therefore, addresses this lack of enquiry by investigating essay writing process of first year undergraduates. Since the present study builds on findings from other related studies, this chapter places this study in the context of academic writing at university in general, and second language (L2) writing in particular, as well as L2 students' writing process.

The literature review first provides a brief overview of the nature of academic writing at university and the role of EAP in academic writing. The next section discusses the process based approach to academic writing research. This is followed by a detailed discussion of L2 students' writing behaviour, in terms of major writing strategies employed in the writing process and affective factors that influence students' writing process. A summary of how the reviewed literature relates to the present study is presented in the final section.

## **2.2 Nature of academic writing at university and role of EAP in academic writing**

Academic writing holds a central place in the academic curriculum at university, and research into student writing at university shows that this central place of writing in the curriculum is due to the vital role that writing plays (Zhu, 2004; Fukao and Fujii, 2001; Jones, 1999; Leki and Carson, 1994). A number of studies, for instance, have shown that it is mainly through writing that student learning is assessed and through which instructors establish the extent and nature of students' understanding of subject matter (Zhu, 2004; Maclellan, 2004; Fukao and Fujii, 2001; Krause, 2001; Lillis, 2001; Jones, 1999; Torrance, Thomas, and Robinson, 1999; Leki and Carson, 1994). In addition, students' written products are also usually used as major indicators of students' academic potential and success within many tertiary institutions (Jones, 1999).

Several scholars have also argued that learning can be promoted through writing (Manchón and Roca de Larios, 2007; Ellis, Taylor, and Drury, 2005; Ellis, 2004; Bacha, 2002; Krause, 2001; Lillis, 2001; Zamel, 1998). This is because through writing, students can acquire content knowledge (Ellis et al. 2005; Ellis, 2004); and through the writing process, students can develop such cognitive skills as analysis, synthesis, evaluation, and



inference; as well as writing skills such as cohesion, summarizing, and text organizing (Bacha, 2002). Manchón and Roca de Larios (2007) further contend that through writing, students have opportunity to develop their second language since writing involves solving linguistic problems.

In order to realize these goals of academic writing, students are required to perform different types of writing tasks. Among different genres of writing, the academic essay is singled out as the most common writing task assigned to students, especially in the social sciences and humanities (Ellis et al. 2005; Ellis, 2004; Bacha, 2002; Krause, 2001; Lillis, 2001, 1999; Henry and Roseberry, 1999; Jones, 1999; Zamel, 1998). However, performing essay writing tasks is considered a complicated process for students due to the complexity of academic writing (Liu and Braine, 2005; Kruse, 2003; Fukao and Fujii, 2001; Torrance et al. 1999; Jones, 1999; Campbell, 1990). This complexity is described by Lannon (2004) who asserts that:

Writing is a conscious, deliberate process- not the result of divine intervention, magic, miracles, or last minute inspiration. Nothing ever leaps from the mind to the page in one neat and painless motion- not even for creative geniuses. Instead, we plan, draft, and revise. Sometimes we know right away what we want to say; sometimes we discover our purpose and meaning only as we write. But our finished product takes shape through our decisions at different stages in the writing process. (p.2)

### **2.2.1 Factors contributing to the complexity of academic writing**

A number of factors have been identified as accounting for the complexity of academic writing. Firstly, writing requires an integration of many skills, which include generating ideas, gathering information, paraphrasing and summarizing resources, organizing ideas in a logical order, editing, and proofreading (Fukao and Fujii, 2001). Hence, students find it difficult to fulfil all these requirements (Campbell, 1990).

Secondly, academic writing requires students to be familiar with complex linguistic structures and rhetorical styles that are not typically used in everyday social interactions (Harklau, 2003; Kruse, 2003). Thirdly, as writing involves both generating content and

finding ways of expressing ideas, it tests students' ability both to use a language and articulate ideas (Liu and Braine, 2005; Hyland, 2003; Torrance et al. 1999; Jones, 1999). This can result in students' cognitive resources being overwhelmed (Jones, 1999).

Lastly, since writing involves a complex relationship between writers, readers, the text, and reality (Silva and Matsuda, 2002), student writers need to consider a number of factors when writing an academic text (Paltridge, 2004). These factors include the audience of their text, the requirements of the discipline in which they are writing, the values and expectations of the academic community at which the text is aimed, and the purpose of the text (Paltridge, 2004; Carvalho, 2002).

Thus, due to the complexity of academic writing, the writing process brings with it challenges and demands for L2 students (Evans and Green, 2007; Yasuda, 2005; Ryu, 2003; Mahfoudhi, 2003; Barber, 2002; Fukao and Fujii, 2001; Krause, 2001; Torrance et al. 1999). Hence, in order to facilitate L2 students' learning of academic writing conventions at university, writing instruction is an important part of academic work in many tertiary institutions (Fukao and Fujii, 2001; Lillis, 2001). Writing instruction in most of these institutions is usually offered in English for Academic Purposes (EAP) programmes, with a general aim of facilitating students' acquisition of English language academic discourses (Hyland and Hamp-Lyons, 2002; Hamp-Lyons, 2001).

### **2.2.2 The role of EAP in academic writing**

According to Flowerdew and Peacock (2001) and Jordan (1997), EAP simply involves teaching English in order to facilitate learners' study or research in the language. However, as Hyland and Hamp-Lyons (2002) and Hyland (2006) have observed, EAP encompasses different domains and practices, which include design of teaching materials, classroom tasks, classroom interactions (teacher feedback, tutorials, and seminar discussions), and student writing (Hyland, 2006).

Within EAP, a distinction is made between what is called English for General Academic Purposes (EGAP) and English for Specific Academic Purposes (ESAP). With EGAP, instruction mainly focuses on teaching study skills such as academic writing, as well as language forms regarded as applicable to all disciplines (Hyland, 2006; Jordan, 1997).

EGAP is regarded as the key component of EAP as most EAP courses are centred on study skills (Jordan, 1997).

However, since university students study different subjects within or across disciplines, and thus encounter different academic sub-genres (Hyland, 2002a; Jordan, 1997), EAP courses may incorporate ESAP. This branch of EAP focuses on instruction in skills and language forms related to the demands of particular disciplines or subjects (Hyland, 2006).

In academic writing, EGAP instruction mainly concerns teaching general writing skills which may be transferred to different contexts (Zhu, 2004). On the other hand, ESAP instruction mainly involves teaching of unique thought and communication processes applicable to different disciplinary contexts (Zhu, 2004).

#### **2.2.2.1 Challenges of incorporating ESAP in EAP curriculum**

Although there has been an acknowledgement of the need to incorporate ESAP in EAP courses (Hyland, 2006, 2002a; Zhu, 2004; Samraj, 2004; Hyland and Hamp-Lyons, 2002; Lea and Street, 2000; English, 1999; Lea and Street, 1998; Spack, 1998), doubts have been raised about the feasibility of teaching ESAP within EAP programmes (Hyland, 2006, 2002a; Spack, 1998). This is due to a number of factors. Firstly, it is argued that the EAP teacher lacks expertise to teach subject specific conventions; hence the suggestion that the teaching of these conventions should be left to subject specialists themselves (Spack, 1998). However, recent studies (Hyland, 2006, 2002a) have argued that subject specialists are not in a better position to teach disciplinary literacy skills as they lack the expertise to teach EAP courses as well as the desire to do so.

Secondly, it is believed that ESAP is too advanced for students at the lower levels of tertiary education, who need to first acquire general literacy skills suitable for all contexts, before they can study discipline specific discourse (Hyland, 2006; 2002a).

Thirdly, considering that there are other institutional constraints, such as limited time allotted to EAP courses, inadequate resources, large EAP classes, and heterogeneity of

EAP classes, the task of teaching ESAP is regarded as challenging for an EAP teacher (Hyland, 2006, 2002a; Hyland and Hamp-Lyons, 2002).

Given these challenges, several factors regarding the teaching of ESAP have been raised which need to be addressed by those who wish to incorporate ESAP in the EAP curriculum. These include EAP teachers' methods of teaching aspects of ESAP, whether there should be collaboration between EAP and subject teachers in EAP teaching with the latter helping with ESAP instruction, and the stage at which students should be taught ESAP considering that EAP is usually offered in first year (Hyland, 2006, 2002a; Hyland and Hamp-Lyons, 2002; Spack, 1998).

#### **2.2.2.2 Role of EAP in L2 academic writing**

Considering that at university most L2 students experience certain types of writing for the first time (Leki and Carson, 1994), EAP plays a major role in facilitating students' integration into academic discourses during their transition from secondary/high school education to tertiary education (Ezer and Sivan, 2005; Harklau, 2003; Creme and Lea, 2003; Hyland and Hamp-Lyons, 2002; Krause, 2001; Pennycook, 1997). For instance, EAP has a role of familiarizing students with conventions of writing in different disciplines in order for them to understand writing requirements in these disciplines and facilitate their writing process (Ezer and Sivan, 2005; Zhu, 2004). Thus, as Leki and Carson (1994) observe, EAP courses are formative as they not only prepare students for writing requirements in content courses in their first year of study, but also in later years.

EAP courses also help to raise awareness in students about the nature of academic writing at university, general writing expectations of university teachers, and what is required of students in order to meet writing expectations of their teachers and the concerned institutions (Ezer and Sivan, 2005).

Hence, the recognition of the need to integrate L2 students into academic discourses of the university has given rise to research into various aspects of academic writing with the aim of informing academic writing instruction in EAP courses. In order to investigate aspects of academic writing, researchers have either employed product-based or process-

based approaches or both. This study has adopted a process-based approach, the reasons for which are explained in the next section.

### **2.3 Process-based approach to L2 writing research**

The process-based approach to L2 writing research generally arose out of the recognition that only examining features in students' written products, is a limited way of understanding certain aspects of students' writing behaviour (Yasuda, 2005; Mahfoudhi, 2003; Fukao and Fujii, 2001; Polio, 2001). For instance, Yasuda (2005) and Fukao and Fujii (2001) have argued that despite the significance of the studies based on the analysis of students' written products in terms of identifying students' writing problems and textual features, these studies only manage to reveal surface problems. That is, the studies neglect some of the problems that do not surface in the students' written work, but are still perceived by students as impeding their writing success (Fukao and Fujii, 2001). This latter observation is evident in the findings of studies that have examined both students' written products and their writing process. These studies, for instance, have revealed that not all the writing problems that students articulate are found in their written work (Fukao and Fujii, 2001; Mahfoudhi, 2003). For example, such problems as students' inability to find relevant reference materials and lack of time management skills, may not be apparent in students' written products; but are perceived by students as problems and have an impact on the quality of students' written work (Fukao and Fujii, 2001).

Fukao and Fujii (2001) have also observed that research based only on students' written work tends to overlook students' perception of issues concerning academic writing, since the research is exclusively based on the researcher's perception of the students' written work. However, there is extensive recognition of the impact of learners' perceptions of and attitudes towards academic writing on their written products (Yasuda, 2005; Ellis et al. 2005; Ellis, 2004; Basturkmen and Lewis, 2002; Lavelle and Zuercher, 2001; Fukao and Fujii, 2001; Lantolf, 2000; Gillette, 1994). Hence, when researchers only examine what is readily observable in students' written work, the impact of students' perception of and attitudes towards writing is neglected (Fukao and Fujii, 2001).

In addition, Yasuda (2005) and Fukao and Fujii (2001) contend that research based solely on students' written work, fails to reveal how students deal with assigned writing tasks. It is argued that process-based research provides insight into the activities that students are engaged in during the course of writing, as well as their motives behind such activities (Yasuda, 2005). Thus, considering the insights regarding students' writing behaviour that can be gained from process-based research, this study adopts this approach.

In order to understand students' writing behaviour, such as their writing processes, there is a need to understand students' orientation to writing (Yasuda, 2005). This is because this orientation may affect their approach to writing tasks and thus their learning outcomes (Yasuda, 2005; Basturkmen and Lewis, 2002; Gillette, 1994). Hence, this study not only investigates the strategies that students employed when writing their last essay, but also their perceptions on writing the last essay and essay writing in general.

## **2.4 Research on L2 students' writing process**

Studies that focus on students' writing process and their teachers' views and practices regarding the writing process, mainly examine how students produce their written work, as opposed to the analysis of features in the written products (Polio, 2003; 2001). According to Polio (2003), research on students' writing process either focuses on the entire writing process or some part of it. Thus, the former mainly aims at investigating what happens from the time a writing assignment is introduced until the time teachers hand back marked scripts to students; while the latter focuses on some aspect of the students' writing process (Polio, 2003).

The following sections present a summary of major findings from some of the process-based studies. The first section (2.4.2) presents some of the strategies that L2 students employ when producing their texts. Affective factors which influence the writing process of L2 writers are discussed in the next section (2.4.3).

### **2.4.1 L2 students' composing strategies**

L2 writing studies have demonstrated that the act of writing generally involves three stages, namely, pre-writing, writing, and post-writing (Petrić and Czár, 2003;

Mahfoudhi, 2003). These stages, however, are not completely separate since they may overlap due to the non-linear nature of the writing process (Manchón and Roca de Larios, 2007; Petrić and Czár, 2003; Feng, 2001; Zainuddin, 1995). In these writing stages, L2 students use a broad range of strategies. Based on Cohen's (1998) definition of learning strategies, Petrić and Czár (2003) define writing strategies as actions or behaviours consciously carried out by writers in order to make their writing more efficient.

Writing strategies can be differentiated according to whether they are cognitive, metacognitive, social, and affective (based on Oxford's 1990 classification of language learning strategies). The present study focuses on metacognitive strategies which Oxford (ibid.) describes as actions which provide a way for learners to coordinate their writing process. According to Leki and Carson (1994), these strategies include those for managing the text (for example planning, revising, and drafting); managing sources (such as summarizing, synthesizing, and paraphrasing); and managing research (for instance, library skills and research skills). The following sections present some of the strategies which have been identified as frequently used by students when writing their texts.

#### **2.4.1.1 Revising**

According to Yasuda's (2005) modified version of Roca de Larios, Murphy, and Manchón's (1999) restructuring behaviour model, revision occurs during the entire writing process at three different discourse levels; namely, ideational, textual, and linguistic. According to Roca de Larios et al. (1999) and Yasuda (2005), revision at the ideational level consists of two different forms, namely, message abandonment and message elaboration. The authors observe that in the former, writers find the first attempted formulation unnecessary and abandon it; while in the latter, writers attempt to make their intended meaning more specific as well as refine their viewpoint. These forms of revision are usually undertaken within sentences or at the clause level (Yasuda, 2005).

Textual revision, on the other hand, occurs when writers attempt to control the structure of written discourse beyond the clause level (Roca de Larios et al. 1999; Yasuda, 2005). Thus, revision at this level consists of three aspects; namely, manipulation of coherence/cohesion, stylistic concerns, and following task requirements. Firstly, in

manipulation of coherence or cohesion, writers control coherence/cohesion of the discourse by manipulating logical connectors that link propositions or clauses/sentences. Secondly, in stylistic concerns, writers control the written discourse by employing stylistic devices such as avoiding repetition or using emphatic forms. Lastly, in following task requirements, writers adjust their text requirements to meet the task demands and the teacher's expectations.

Yasuda (2005) observes that while ideational and textual levels of revision help writers to improve their writing globally (that is, introduce meaning-level changes); writers are also concerned with such local aspects as word choice and sentence structure. Thus, according to Roca de Larios et al. (1999) and Yasuda (2005), the third level of revision, linguistic-level revision, is undertaken to solve two types of problems, namely lexical and syntactic. In the former, L2 writers use linguistic revision when they have difficulty in finding a suitable L2 equivalent for their intended meaning in the L1; while in the latter, L2 writers use linguistic revision when they find it challenging to produce pragmatically appropriate sentences to express their ideas in the L1.

Although revision is regarded as a general process which includes editing (Yasuda, 2005), a distinction is sometimes made between the two. The revising process is viewed as being mainly concerned with deep-level changes that affect the meaning of a text, while the editing process is regarded as involving surface-level changes that do not affect the meaning of a text (Wong, 2005; Mahfoudhi, 2003). In addition, while revision is often done either during the composing process or when reading over an entire draft, editing is regarded as the last stage of the composing process (Wong, 2005; Mahfoudhi, 2003).

### ***Research findings on L2 students' revision behaviour***

The process of revising is the focus of many process-based studies. Most of these studies have examined L2 students' ways of revising their written work, and have identified differences in the revising behaviour between skilled and less-skilled student writers. For instance, the findings from Mahfoudhi's (2003) case study of eight Tunisian second-year undergraduate English majors indicate that most of the students' revision behaviour



reflected that of unskilled writers. That is, the students' revision focused more on making changes to grammar, spelling and capitalization, than on introducing substantial changes to improve their drafts. The latter characterized the revision process of skilled writers. Mahfoudhi's (ibid.) findings are quite similar to Kamimura's (2000) results from his investigation of composing strategies of skilled and unskilled Japanese EFL freshman writers.

In addition to the differences in revision strategies between skilled and less skilled student writers, some studies have reported a significant relationship between students' conception of revising and their particular revision acts. These findings are evident in Yasuda's (2005) case study of three Japanese ESL students' revising behaviour at an Australian university and Campbell, Smith and Brooker's (1998) investigation of forty-six undergraduates' conceptualization of essay writing activities. The studies revealed that students who conceptualized revision as central to the writing process and relevant to the improvement of the whole text's quality, attended more to global issues such as idea elaboration, coherence, and unity, while students who regarded revision as a rereading activity for the purpose of checking grammar and lexicon, focused more on surface level features such as producing accurate linguistic forms.

In recognition of the role that revision plays in shaping the quality of students' written products and the value of feedback in the revision process, a number of process-based studies have investigated the impact of peer and teacher feedback on L2 students' revising behaviour. For instance, studies which have examined the impact of peer feedback on students' revision of their texts indicate that with peer feedback, students are able to make more appropriate changes to texts at both meaning and textual levels, which results in improved texts (Min, 2006; Berg, 1999). Berg (ibid.) attributes this type of revision to students' ability to sense the incongruity between their intended meaning and what they had actually communicated to a reader in their writing. This awareness, however, is facilitated by peer reviewers who are able to point out unclear aspects in students' texts (Nelson and Carson, 1998). Thus, the peer reviewers act like an audience who provide a different perspective on the writing (Richards and Miller, 2005).

Other studies have compared the impact of teacher and peer feedback on students' revision behaviour. For example, in their comparative study of the impact of peer and teacher feedback on EFL students' essays at a Chinese University, Miao, Badger, and Zhen (2006) found that both types of feedback resulted in successful revisions. However, there was a difference in the extent to which the students adopted the two types of feedback. Students incorporated 90% of the teacher's feedback in their revisions compared to 67% of the peer feedback. Despite students' preference for teacher feedback, Paulus' (1999) study reveals that not all students' texts are improved due to teacher feedback. Paulus (ibid.) attributes the failure of teacher feedback to improve students' texts to students' lack of strategies to effectively incorporate the feedback in their texts.

In recognition of differences in students' adoption of peer and teacher feedback, some studies have investigated students' perception of peer feedback. A number of reasons have been offered for students' preference for peer feedback. For instance, students have cited such reasons as the ability of peers to provide more feedback at various phases of the writing process, such as when generating ideas, revising ideas, and editing (Krause, 2001; Jacobs, Curtis, Braine, and Huang, 1998). Other reasons concern the emotional support that accompanies peer feedback. This includes peers' offer of encouragement, and peers' more understanding and less threatening nature (Krause, 2001; Jacobs et al. 1998). On the other hand, some students do not prefer peer feedback since they do not trust it (Zhang, 1995). This is because peer feedback might be incorrect (Miao et al. 2006). Other students also fear ridicule from peers due to their poor writing proficiency (Zhang, 1995).

What is clear from the summary of the findings on L2 students' revision behaviour is that the revising process holds a central place in the composing process of students. Thus, these studies seem to suggest that it is vital for EAP instructors to understand their students' ways of revising and how effective the students' revision process is in the overall improvement of their written work. This can be achieved by examining students' revision behaviour. However, for students to be successful in the revision process as well as other writing sub-processes, they need to be aware of, and consider, their audience.

#### **2.4.1.2 ‘Audience’ in academic writing**

In academic writing, the concept of ‘audience’ generally refers to people who are expected to read a text (Grabe and Kaplan, 1996). However, authors like Zainuddin and Moore (2003) and Vandenberg (1995) argue that the concept of audience is elusive as the concept refers to a variety of representations. For instance, one perspective states that ‘audience’ is invoked or is an imagined/hypothetical construct for rhetorical purposes, and thus does not represent a real or concrete audience (Long, 1990). Thus, according to Long (*ibid.*), writers create a persona that the reader should take on during reading. Another perspective states that audience evolves in relation to the discourse context and the writer’s goals (Wong, 2005; Johns, 1993). Unlike the previous perspective, this perspective emphasizes the importance of addressing real audiences (Ramanathan and Kaplan, 1996; Johns, 1993). This perspective is related to the concept of ‘discourse community’, which according to Barton (1994, p.57), refers to “a group of people who have texts and practices in common”. According to this perspective, audience shifts when one is writing for different discourse communities or members of different disciplines (Johns, 1993).

Despite the lack of agreement in the description of the concept of audience, the significance of audience in the process of writing is recognised in academic writing research. This is mainly because of the impact that audience has on text production (Zainuddin and Moore, 2003; Grabe and Kaplan, 1996; Swales and Feak, 1994). For instance, Kruse (2003) and Kirsch and Roen (1990) have observed that audience influences many decisions of the writer, which include the content of the text and rhetorical strategies.

Thus, the recognition of the significance of audience throughout the writing process, and the observation that the concept of audience is not emphasized in EAP writing courses (Zainuddin and Moore, 2003; Johns, 1993) has given rise to several studies investigating the concept of audience in L2 writing.

### *Audience in L2 students' writing*

Studies that have investigated L2 writing at tertiary level indicate that students have difficulty conceptualizing their audience and its demands (Krause, 2001; Cava, 1999). For instance, in his study of first year students' essay writing experience, Krause (2001) found that most students failed to clearly refer to the audience of their essay. Those who demonstrated some awareness of their targeted audience did so with uncertainty. Krause (ibid.) observed that this lack of awareness or uncertainty of targeted audience appeared to make the essay writing process difficult, as students were not aware or certain of the expectations of their audience. Similar findings have also been reported in Cava (1999). Her investigation of unsuccessful L2 writers' strategies indicated that the students were not aware of, or concerned with, the audience of their writing task, although they demonstrated awareness of the requirements of the writing task. Thus, as Cava (ibid.) observed, it appears that the students displayed more task awareness than audience awareness.

Apart from examining students' awareness of audience of their texts, other studies have investigated the impact of writer's perception of their intended audience on the writing process. For instance, Zainuddin and Moore's (2003) study of four bilingual ESL students' awareness of audience in argumentative essay writing, indicates that students' perception of their audience affected the content of their essay as well as their rhetorical strategies. For example, those students who addressed an invoked audience evaluated what background information to include in their texts, with an aim of establishing a shared perspective between themselves and their audience. In addition, these students were able to apply inferences about their audience in persuading their readers to accept their position, by frequently evaluating their own arguments against perceived readers' traits and needs. Thus, these students were able to balance their writing purpose and their audience needs. On the other hand, those students who did not address an external audience other than themselves failed to expose their arguments to evaluation and reflection against their readers' imagined position. In addition, they did not critically evaluate their assumptions, and thus frequently took for granted that their audience would understand what they were saying.

The impact of writers' perception of their text's audience on their composing process is also reflected in Wong's (2005) study. Wong (*ibid.*) investigated the possible relationship between audience perception of four L2 advanced writers and their composing strategies. The findings of the study indicate that students who perceived their audience as a teacher-evaluator seemed to write for the purpose of knowledge display, and appeared to be less able or ready to make use of a broad range of composing strategies. This is because the students were constrained by their perception of their audience as an expert and evaluator with authority and superior knowledge. On the other hand, the students who perceived the target audience as a teacher-coach appeared to compose for the purpose of writing to learn. Thus, they were more willing to try out ideas in order to solicit feedback from their audience.

These findings clearly indicate that in order to produce successful texts, L2 students need to be aware of and understand their audience as well as pay attention to the latter's needs, interests and expectations during the writing process. In light of these findings, this study examines students' awareness of audience when writing. In order to take care of their audience's needs, students need to plan their work.

#### **2.4.1.3 Planning in academic writing**

In academic writing, planning encompasses various processes which include interpretation of the writing task, setting goals for the writing task, generating content related to these goals, and organizing content (Ellis and Yuan, 2004; Feng, 2001; Beare, 2000; Cava, 1999; Levy and Ransdell, 1995).

Two approaches to planning have been identified; namely, the linear stage model and the cognitive processes model. In the linear stage model, planning refers to all activities at the prewriting stage (Feng, 2001). This prewriting stage involves writers employing different strategies such as brainstorming, free writing, making a list of key words, and outlining, in order to generate and subsequently organize their ideas (Feng, *ibid.*). In contrast to the linear model, planning in the cognitive processes model (based on Flower and Hayes' (1981) cognitive processes theory) occurs not only in the prewriting stage, but also throughout the entire writing process (Feng, 2001). This offers writers an

opportunity to plan and replan both the conceptual content and formulation of the message (Yuan and Ellis, 2003).

As one of the composing strategies that students employ when producing their written texts, planning is the central focus in a number of L2 writing studies. In the following section, major findings of some of the studies are presented.

### ***Planning in L2 students' writing***

Several studies have examined the impact of planning on the quality of texts that L2 writers produce. Ellis and Yuan (2004), for example, investigated the impact of pre-task planning and on-line planning on the composing process and the textual output of 42 full-time EFL undergraduates at a Chinese university. The participants were divided into three groups according to the planning conditions they were exposed to; namely, no planning, pre-task planning, and on-line planning. Based on the outcome of the narrative written task that the students were assigned as well as questionnaires and interviews, the results indicated that pre-task planning enhanced the writers' output as manifested in the greater quantity, fluency and complexity of language produced, although such planning appeared to have little effect on accuracy. Ellis and Yuan (ibid.) attributed these results to the assistance that pre-task planning offered students in internal goal setting, generating content, and rhetorical organization of the text. On the other hand, students who adopted on-line planning produced texts with high accuracy in terms of error-free clauses and correct verbs. This finding was attributed to the view that with on-line planning, students were able to monitor their output during writing. With these findings, Ellis and Yuan (2004) concluded that the two types of planning have different effects on the quality of textual output since they facilitate different components of the writing process. This conclusion is in accord with Yuan and Ellis' (2003) argument that the nature of planning that writers engage in predisposes them to prioritize different aspects of writing.

Other studies have investigated the planning behaviour of skilled and less-skilled writers. For instance, Feng's (2001) investigation of six Taiwanese graduate students in an EFL context reveals that the more skilled and less-skilled writers differed in the number of strategies employed in the pre-task planning stage of writing an academic paper. For

example, before they began writing, the more skilled writers used planning to set goals, generate and organize ideas for the entire writing task. On the other hand, the less skilled writers failed to pre-plan how they were going to develop their entire paper. Instead, they thought about how to write a paragraph just before they were about to write it. However, it was observed that some writers produced plans for the sake of having a plan, rather than to use it as a guide through the writing process. Based on this observation, Feng (2001) suggests the need for students to be aware of the purpose of planning in writing.

Although some studies have indicated that pre-writing planning results in a better final product, Cava's (1999) study contradicts the findings of these studies. In her investigation of metacognitive strategies used by four non-native English speakers enrolled at a community college in New Jersey (USA), Cava (ibid.) found that despite some students spending much time on pre-task planning, their planning was not effective in terms of assisting them to produce high quality work. For instance, the writers strayed from the topic being dealt with, the flow of their ideas was scattered, and they did not develop and direct ideas based on their goal of writing. Thus, although the students were aware of the need for pre-task planning, they lacked the ability to effectively use the plans in their writing.

In addition to the students' lack of effective ways of using their plans, Cava's (ibid.) study reveals the students' failure to modify their plans during the writing process. That is, the students were rather rigid in their planning; as a result, they were reluctant to introduce ideas in their texts which were not presented in their initial plans. This lack of flexibility in modifying initial plans once writing is in progress, was also observed in Torrance et al.'s (1999) study of twenty-five first year undergraduates' writing strategies at the University of Birmingham (UK).

These findings support Mahalski's (1992) observation that the presence of a plan does not guarantee success in writing; rather learners need to be aware of the nature and purpose of metacognitive strategies, such as planning, as well as how to effectively use these strategies (Purpura, 1999; Campbell et al. 1998; Norton and Crowley, 1995; Prosser and Webb, 1994). In order to address students' planning needs, it is vital to first

understand their planning behaviour. One way of achieving this is to examine the kind of planning that students use when performing writing tasks, which is one of the concerns of this study. Since planning usually ends in drafting and the two processes are intricately connected, drafting is a very important process in writing.

#### **2.4.1.4 Drafting**

Based on Flower and Hayes's (1981) cognitive processes theory, drafting also referred to as the act of composing or translating, generally involves the process of putting ideas into visible language (Feng, 2001). According to Feng (2001), drafting is considered a demanding task for students due to several reasons. First, the process of drafting requires writers to employ a diverse range of writing skills, since the language of thought may be represented in various modes that range from non-verbal imagery to words in the target language (Feng, 2001). Second, writers have to deal with a number of writing constraints such as demands for integrated knowledge, linguistic conventions of written text, and the constraints of rhetorical problems (Feng, 2001).

A number of studies indicate that most undergraduates produce more than one draft during the process of writing (Paulus, 1999; Campbell et al. 1998; Torrance et al. 1999; Mahalski, 1992). Findings from some studies such as Paulus (1999) and Mahalski (1992) indicate a positive correlation between number of drafts students produce and their performance in terms of grades as well as text improvement. However, as Campbell et al. (1998) and Mahalski (1992) observe, multiple drafting in itself does not determine the quality of the final product. This observation is evident in Lee's (2006), Paulus' (1999), and Mahalski's (1992) findings, where the effectiveness of students' multiple drafting is attributed to meaningful revising process at each drafting stage. Nevertheless, establishing the number of drafts students do when performing a writing task is a first step towards understanding their drafting behaviour, which would help in addressing students' problems related to the process of drafting. Since at university the process of composing/drafting usually involves drawing from source texts, the use of information from source texts is regarded as one of the important aspects of academic writing as it determines the quality of the written product (Carson, 2001; Feng, 2001; Hale, Taylor, Bridgeman, Carson, Kroll, and Kantor 1996).



#### **2.4.1.5 Managing sources: Source information use**

A number of researchers have investigated how L2 students use information from source texts in their writing. For instance, Leki and Carson (1997) investigated ESL undergraduate and graduate students' experience of writing with and without source texts. Their findings indicate that students perceived writing from source texts useful because to most students source texts acted as a springboard for ideas. That is, source texts provided them with ideas to analyze as well as to produce longer texts. In addition, for those students who were not familiar with discipline-specific vocabulary and preferred syntactic patterns, source texts served as a writing model for vocabulary items, sentence structures, and rhetorical forms.

Although students find source texts useful in the writing process, several studies indicate that L2 students, especially undergraduates, experience problems integrating information from source texts into their writing (Pecorari, 2003; Leki and Carson, 1997; LoCastro and Masuko, 2002; Howard, 1995). For instance, research in L2 students' textual borrowing practices reveals students' inappropriate use of source texts (Abasi, Akbari, and Graves, 2006; Sutherland-Smith, 2005; Shi, 2004; Pecorari, 2003; Belcher and Hirvela, 2001; Barks and Watts, 2001; Currie, 1998; Pennycook, 1996, 1994; Howard, 1995; Deckert, 1993). These studies have identified several potential factors contributing to L2 students' behaviour of plagiarism. Apart from the intention to claim authorship of other people's ideas (Liu, 2005; Pecorari, 2003; Currie, 1998; Howard, 1995), other possible explanations have been offered. These include students' limited language proficiency and lack of or inadequate task-specific writing skills which result in their heavy dependency on copying from source texts (Liu, 2005; Hyland, 2001; Currie, 1998; Pennycook, 1996; Howard, 1995); lack or limited familiarity with and understanding of appropriate citation conventions (Currie, 1998; Pennycook, 1996) which results in students' use of source texts without attribution; and lack of appreciation of intellectual property as well as their perception of source texts as authoritative (Abasi et al. 2006; LoCastro and Masuko, 2002; Howard, 1995).

In addition to students' plagiarism, other studies have focused on how students use source text integration conventions. Keck (2006), for instance, conducted a comparative study

on L1 and L2 undergraduates' use of paraphrasing as a textual borrowing strategy. Using a taxonomy of paraphrase types (near copy, minimal revision, moderate revising, and substantial revision) to analyze the students' written summaries; she found that although both groups of students employed all the paraphrase types, they differed in the extent to which they paraphrased their texts. For example, L2 students used significantly more near copies than L1 students who used more moderate and substantial revisions. Keck (ibid.) attributes the L2 students' behaviour of copying exactly from source texts to lack of awareness of appropriate paraphrasing strategies, as well as limited proficiency in the L1 which resulted in their inability to use moderate and substantial revisions.

Campbell (1990) also examined attribution strategies of 30 undergraduate native and non-native speakers of English at a university in the USA. From her analysis of the students' compositions based on a source text, Campbell (ibid.) found that both groups of students displayed lack of thorough knowledge of the proper use of source texts. For instance, the students made minimal reference to the author of the source text they were using, and frequently used quotations and footnotes rather than other attribution strategies such as paraphrasing or summarizing. Campbell (ibid.) attributes this writing behaviour to a number of reasons. These reasons include the students' assumption of their instructors' familiarity with the source text since they were only using a single text; lack of familiarity with and experience of using acceptable citation conventions in various disciplines; for the non-native speakers, inadequate English proficiency, which made them rely more on copying from the source text; lack of awareness of or attitudes towards copying or plagiarism; and time constraints for students to use source text information properly due to classroom writing constraints.

In view of the difficulties that students face when incorporating source text information into their texts, it seems significant to find out from students themselves which aspects related to source text use they perceive as problematic.

#### **2.4.2 Affective factors influencing L2 students' writing**

The affective side of the learner is identified as one of the major influences of students' learning success in various literacy skills, apart from their use of metacognitive strategies

(Gan, Humphreys, and Hamp-Lyons, 2004; Hyland, 2003; Young, 1999; Oxford, 1990). According to Oxford (1990), the concept of 'affect' refers to the domain of emotions and feelings. In academic writing, affective factors such as beliefs and attitudes towards writing, writing anxiety, and writing difficulties have been identified as having impact on students' writing process; and in particular, the strategies that they use and their writing outcome. The following sections, therefore, discuss major findings of some studies which have investigated these affective factors in L2 writing.

#### **2.4.2.1 Writing anxiety**

Research into affective factors in writing at university indicates that writing is one of the most anxiety provoking tasks (Johanson, 2001; Madigan, Linton, and Johnson, 1996). Although the notion of writing anxiety has been identified as a complex phenomenon with various factors contributing to its existence, research indicates that factors that affect students' self-efficacy contribute a great deal to their writing anxiety (Cheng, 2002; Johanson, 2001; Cheng, Horwitz, and Schallert, 1999; Madigan et al. 1996; Pajares and Johnson, 1994). These factors include self-evaluation of writing ability and fear of evaluation.

Most of the studies which have investigated the relationship between anxiety and students' self-evaluation of their writing ability indicate a negative relationship between students' beliefs about their own writing capability and writing anxiety (Cheng, 2002; Cheng et al. 1999; Cava, 1999; Pajares and Johnson, 1994). For instance, students who have reported low levels of confidence in their writing ability and unrealistic beliefs of their writing competence such as perfectionism, have also reported experiencing high levels of anxiety (Cheng 2002; Cheng et al. 1999; Yan, 1998; Cava, 1999). Thus, as MacIntyre, Noels, and Clément (1997) have observed, those students who underestimate their ability to write successfully and who have negative expectations about their performance in writing tasks, tend to feel more anxious when faced with a writing task. These students are also likely to cope with their anxiety less effectively, which may result in their disengaging from the anxiety-producing task (Aida, 1994; Scheier and Carver, 1992).

Writing anxiety is also associated with students' fear of negative evaluation. Studies such as Johanson's (2001) and Cheng et al.'s (1999), have found negative correlation between writing anxiety and fear of receiving negative criticism from instructors or peers. That is, those students who reported experiencing fear that the readers of their work will judge them according to their limited writing proficiency, also reported experiencing high levels of anxiety. However, writing anxiety due to fear of evaluation has been shown to have negative impact on students' writing process. Lee (2001) and Oxford (1990), for instance, have observed that due to fear of evaluation, students become inhibited from taking appropriate risks during the writing process, as they adhere to rigid rules of writing.

In recognition that even students with high writing proficiency experience high levels of anxiety, some researchers have concluded that the relationship between students' writing anxiety and self-evaluation is stronger than the relationship between writing anxiety and students' achievement or writing skills (Cheng, 2002; Cheng et al. 1999; Yan, 1998; Madigan et al. 1996). That is, writing anxiety is regarded as an experience strongly influenced by students' negative thoughts and talk, and not necessarily their writing skills (Madigan et al. 1996). Thus, as also observed elsewhere (Cheng, 2002; Feng, 2001; Cheng et al. 1999; Saito and Samimy, 1996; MacIntyre and Gardner, 1994), the first step to identifying and addressing students' writing anxiety would be to investigate their self-evaluation of their writing capability as well as their attitude to writing and evaluation.

#### **2.4.2.2 University students' attitudes towards academic writing**

An attitude is considered as consisting of three components; namely, cognitive, affective, and behavioural (Mantle-Bromley, 1995; Wenden, 1998). According to Mantle-Bromley (1995) and Wenden (1998), the cognitive component encompasses what a person knows or believes about the object of the attitude, while the affective component is the degree of like or dislike, approval or disapproval associated with the attitudinal object. The behavioural component consists of attitudes that predispose people to act in a certain way.

In academic writing, a student's attitude towards the writing process is considered as one of the major factors which have a greater influence on the student's writing behaviour. Several studies report that students' attitudes affect their writing preference (Ching, 2002; Lavelle and Zuercher, 2001; Wynn, 1998). For instance, in her study of effects of collaborative learning on first year undergraduates' writing anxiety, attitude, and writing quality, Wynn (1998) found that students with positive attitudes were likely to view writing as enjoyable. On the other hand, those with negative attitudes tended to dislike writing and fear the writing process or avoid writing situations. Ching (2002) and Lavelle and Zuercher (2001) report that some of the students' reasons for their dislike of writing include finding the writing process challenging and time consuming; while their wish to improve their knowledge and self-expression are some of the reasons for enjoying writing.

Students' positive or negative writing attitudes have also been found to affect their writing process or their products. For instance, Cava's (1999) investigation of four L2 writers' attitudes toward their writing experience reveals that students with negative attitudes seemed impatient with the writing process. This resulted in their unwillingness to engage in such processes as revising, composing and planning. Even those who were willing to engage in these processes did so without investing much effort and time. On the other hand, students with positive attitudes seemed more committed to the demands of the writing process.

Writing attitudes are to a large extent dependent on students' prior writing experience. For instance, students with extensive prior experience in writing have been observed to cope well with the demands of writing programmes, and have positive attitudes towards writing (Taylor and Drury, 2005), unlike those students with little prior writing experience who tend to face many problems with academic writing tasks. These problems may result in most of the inexperienced students having negative writing attitudes (Taylor and Drury, 2005).

Performance in previous writing tasks has also been linked to students' writing attitudes. Thus, as Ivanič, Clark, and Rimmershaw (2000) and Norton (1990) have observed,

assessment has an impact on students' confidence and enthusiasm for the assigned written tasks.

#### **2.4.2.3 L2 students' writing challenges**

A number of process-based studies have documented the challenges that L2 students, especially undergraduates, face from the time a writing task is introduced until the time they hand in their final drafts for assessing. As Fukao and Fujii (2001) observe, these challenges that students face during the writing process may or may not appear in students' writing in form of errors, but are generally recognized and dealt with in the students' minds during the writing process. Based on Krause's (2001) classification, writing challenges can be categorized as those that are posed by the writing process itself and those that are posed by the university context.

##### ***Challenges posed by the writing process***

Several studies have documented L2 student writers' challenges that are directly related to the writing process itself. These writing challenges can be classified into three categories; namely those related to language skills, library research skills and source managing skills, and text managing skills. These categories are adapted from Leki and Carson (1994). In terms of problems related to language skills, a number of studies have indicated that due to limited L1 (English) proficiency, students find it difficult to communicate ideas appropriately and accurately (Evans and Green, 2007; Ching, 2002). This problem is worse for students who start university education with a poor background in English writing skills, considering that success at university is usually judged by their display of competence in these skills (Matiki, 2001, Hyland, 2000). These students usually fail to express complex ideas in their writing as they lack appropriate vocabulary, both general and technical (Mahfoudhi, 2003; Fukao and Fujii, 2001; Leki and Carson, 1997, 1994).

With regard to library research skills and source managing skills, several studies indicate that finding the required and relevant number of reference materials by either searching computer databases or the library is one of the difficult tasks reported by students (Ochieng, 2005; Krause, 2001; Fukao and Fujii, 2001; Leki and Carson, 1994). In

addition, most students find the use of reference materials, such as synthesizing ideas from a range of source texts, selecting the most relevant points for a paper, deciding which points to omit, as well as the proper use of in-text and end-text referencing challenging (Stapleton, 2003; Bacha, 2002; Krause, 2001; Fukao and Fujii, 2001; Barker, 2000; Leki and Carson, 1997; Mahalski, 1992).

Students have also indicated facing challenges in managing their texts. Some of the challenges that have been cited include revising ideas, generating ideas, organizing ideas, determining scope of tasks in terms of subject knowledge and individual opinion required; as well as the use of writing styles appropriate to the disciplines in which they are writing, their lecturers, and the tasks (Ochieng, 2005; Mahfoudhi, 2003; Ching, 2002; Fukao and Fujii, 2001; Vardi, 2000; Barker, 2000; Leki and Carson, 1997; Mahalski, 1992). In addition, students have reported lack of time management skills as an obstacle to their writing process (Ochieng, 2005; Petrić and Czár, 2003; Fukao and Fujii, 2001; Krause, 2001; Barker, 2000). That is, these students have reported finding it difficult to make adequate time for writing their tasks due to heavy workload or because they procrastinate (Fukao and Fujii, 2001; Krause, 2001; Gillette, 1994; Gambell, 1991). Hence, students have indicated their failure to produce multiple drafts and revise their work because they find these processes time consuming (Ochieng, 2005; Petrić and Czár, 2003; Fukao and Fujii, 2001; Gambell, 1991). This lack of time management has been reported to negatively affect the quality of students' texts in terms of coherence, organization, and number of source text materials used (Fukao and Fujii, 2001).

### ***Challenges posed by the university context***

In addition to the writing challenges posed by the writing process itself, the academic culture of the university also contributes to the writing challenges students face (Krause, 2001; Barker, 2000). For instance, it has been observed that due to lack of experience and prior instruction in research and academic genres, most students lack knowledge of the nature of academic writing and its demands at the beginning of their university studies (Nampota and Thompson, 2008; Evans and Green, 2007; Harklau, 2003; Creme and Lea, 2003; Spack, 1998). As Hyland (2000) observes, these challenges are usually worse for first year undergraduates because they are confronted with a more complex style of

learning which is different from what they knew at secondary school. Thus, there is often a big gap between teachers' and students' understanding of academic writing conventions and writing requirements of teachers, as well as different disciplines (Jackson, 2005; Creme and Lea, 2003; Krause, 2001; Lillis, 2001; Barker, 2000; Vardi, 2000; Lea and Street, 2000, 1998).

This gap is evident in some studies that have investigated both students' and their lecturers' views on various aspects of writing at university. For instance, Leki (1995) investigated how ESL students perceived their content-area and writing instructors' perceptions of good writing. The findings indicated a lack of agreement between what the students believed their instructors thought and the actual views of the instructors. That is, the students interpreted their instructors' perception of good academic writing differently from what it actually was.

The gap between students' and teachers' knowledge of the nature of academic writing is further widened due to the distinct writing requirements of different courses and the diversity of instructors' perspectives of good writing. This diversity is evident in Leki's (1995) study. Her findings indicate that there was disparity in interpretations of good writing between writing instructors and content-area instructors. For instance, the focus of their writing concerns differed, with writing instructors being more concerned with students demonstrating knowledge of rhetorical skills; while content-area instructors emphasized the quality of content in the students' writing.

Leki's (1995) findings are in line with Zhu's (2004) investigation of business and engineering faculty members' views on the nature of academic writing at university. Two views were identified, namely, academic writing as being concerned with the transfer of general writing skills to different contexts, and academic writing as mainly involving knowledge of unique thought and communication processes, with general skills serving as a foundation. However, both business and engineering instructors emphasised the second view in recognition of the uniqueness of writing requirements in the two disciplines.



However, as Lea and Street (2000, 1998) have observed, the diversity in writing requirements of different disciplines seems to confuse students. Lea and Street (2000), for instance, argue that this confusion appears to arise from students' observation that what seems appropriate writing in one discipline or for one instructor, is sometimes inappropriate in another discipline or for another instructor. Thus, as Lea and Street (ibid.) contend, students may assimilate general advice on writing skills, but find it difficult to apply this knowledge to texts in different disciplines. However, as Hyland (2000) argues, presenting writing skills as universal and transferable misguides students as it misrepresents academic writing as lacking variability. At the same time, it may deny students the opportunity to learn the types of writing that they might be required to do for their jobs after graduating. As Elbow (1991) contends, each different type of job "constitutes its own discourse community with its own purposes, audiences, and genres" (p.136). Students' confusion is also attributed to their lack of awareness of conflicting requirements and expectations when writing for different lecturers and in different disciplines (Vardi, 2000). Thus, even though instructors are fully aware of the variation of writing requirements in and across disciplines, this is rarely explicitly conveyed to students (Jackson, 2005; Lillis, 2001, 1999; Barker, 2000; Lea and Street, 2000, 1999; English, 1999).

In addition to the writing challenges that students face, their awareness of learning through writing has an impact on their writing process as well as the writing outcome. The following section, therefore, presents findings on students' perceptions of writing as a learning tool and how their perceptions influence their writing process.

### **2.4.3 Writing as a learning tool**

Based on Marton and Booth's (1997) 'The Experience of Learning' model, learning through writing can be represented at three levels. These include the act of learning which is the writing process and the understanding that comes with it; the direct object of learning which can be the knowledge gained from what is being written about; and the indirect object of learning which is identified as written communication skills and technological literacy skills that develop with the writing process (Ellis, 2004).

Research into learning through writing indicates that undergraduates have different conceptions of writing as a learning tool, and this affects their writing approach. For instance, Ellis' (2004) investigation of first year undergraduates' approaches to writing a science paper reveals students' different views on what they thought they were learning through writing the science paper. Some students' conception of writing did not reveal an awareness of the knowledge being written about. Other students conceived of the writing process as a way of engaging with science that was not only relevant to their immediate needs in the subject, but that was also relevant to their later related studies and even employment. These concepts, however, are linked to students' approaches to the writing process. For instance, in Ellis' study (*ibid.*), students who did not associate their writing with understanding the science were primarily concerned with completing the task. These findings are in accordance with Hounsell's (1997) and Ellis' et al. (2005) observations that not all students are aware that through the writing process, they can develop an understanding of the subject matter.

The quality of students' conception of writing is also closely linked to the quality of their written product. For instance, Prosser and Webb's (1994) study of undergraduates' essay writing at the University of Sydney revealed that students who conceived of an essay as a mere collection of points related to a topic but not contributing to a whole view of the topic, produced a disjointed essay. In contrast, those who conceived of the essay as an argument produced coherent essays, with ideas included because they contributed to the case being argued in the essay and not simply because they related to the essay question.

The differing views of students on writing as a learning tool suggest that not all students are aware that writing is integral to the students' learning at university. Thus, from the literature it seems that it is not enough for students to be aware of how they can use writing strategies effectively, but that students also need to be aware of the potential of learning through the writing process.

The literature also suggests that how students feel about writing and the writing challenges they face cannot be dismissed. Hence, the need to identify and address

students' misconceptions of academic writing, sources of their writing anxiety, and other writing related challenges, if students are to learn through writing.

## **2.5 Summary**

The findings from previous studies provide insight into students' writing behaviour and writing challenges. These findings may be generalized to the present study and may provide explanation for the outcomes of this study in the areas of students' writing strategies, perception of writing, and writing challenges. However, a closer look at the literature shows that there is lack of extensive process-based research on L2 undergraduates' writing in the context of African tertiary institutions. In addition, although previous studies have examined difficulties L2 student writers encounter during the writing process, most of them have not identified possible solutions to these difficulties from the perspective of the participants. Instead, the researchers themselves have provided suggestions on how the challenges can be alleviated. It is further observed that not many process-based studies have investigated issues related to academic writing from the African students' perspectives.

This study is an attempt to fill these gaps by investigating the essay writing process of first year undergraduates in the African context in general and Malawian context in particular, as well as from the students' perspective. It is argued here that one of the important conditions of successfully addressing students' writing challenges is to let the students themselves identify their challenges as well as suggest possible solutions. Since students may not have ways of communicating their writing related concerns to their instructors, research based on their views is also one way of facilitating dialogue between the two parties. The instructors' awareness of the students' concerns may help in addressing the latter. Chapter 3 provides a detailed discussion of the methodological approach and data collection techniques adopted to provide these insights.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

In order to investigate the perceptions of first year undergraduate students and their EAP instructors regarding the essay writing process, this study employed a mixed methods approach which combines qualitative and quantitative techniques. This chapter discusses the research design, the participants, the methods employed to recruit participants, the research instruments, ethical issues specific to this study, data collection procedures, and data analysis techniques.

#### **3.2 Participants**

The study involved two groups of participants, namely 200 first year undergraduates enrolled for the 2006/2007 academic year and four full-time EAP lecturers in the Language and Communication Department at Chancellor College.

##### **3.2.1 First year undergraduates**

These students are enrolled in full-time four-year degree programmes in the humanities and social sciences. Apart from courses in their respective disciplines, the students were also enrolled in an obligatory course, English for Academic Purposes (EAP). Participants were selected from the humanities and social sciences because essay writing is extremely important in these faculties. Hence, it was thought that the findings of this study would be more applicable to students from these faculties. In addition, by the time the questionnaire was administered, the students from these faculties had had some essay writing experience. Thus, the students were in a better position to provide relevant information concerning their essay writing processes.

First year undergraduates were also selected as participants because as also observed elsewhere (see Section 2.4.2.3), it is usually undergraduates, and especially first year students that encounter most writing difficulties after transition from secondary school education. At Chancellor College, these problems are identified through lecturers' analysis of students' written work and not from asking the students about their writing

problems. Thus, it was considered necessary to find out from the students themselves the essay writing challenges they encounter during the writing process.

As in other courses, these students do not have an opportunity to evaluate the EAP course. The only way that EAP instructors become aware of the impact of EAP instruction on students' writing is through examining students' written work. Therefore, involving the students in the present study was another way of establishing the impact of essay writing instruction on the students' essay writing process.

The study sought views from students in the two faculties in order to obtain a broader picture of their essay writing processes, and to be able to draw conclusions from the findings.

As Lillis (2001, 1999) has stressed the importance of dialogue between students and their instructors, it was necessary to investigate students' essay writing process from both students' and their instructors' perspectives. Leki (2001), and Basturkmen and Lewis (2002) also support the need for dialogue between students and instructors since it can offer valuable insights otherwise unavailable to instructors.

### **3.2.2 EAP lecturers**

The lecturers are second language speakers of English. Each lecturer has his/her own EAP paper that he/she teaches. However, since there are seven EAP papers offered and only four lecturers currently teaching the papers, the remaining three papers are shared among the four. Sometimes, part-time instructors help in teaching classes with large numbers of students. The part-timers also help with grading students' written work.

As these staff members are instructors of writing skills and in particular essay writing, the study aimed at obtaining their views on issues raised in the students' responses to a questionnaire administered earlier. Since these lecturers have experience in teaching the EAP course, it was hoped their responses would facilitate a better understanding of the students' views. Thus, the study aimed at finding out the challenges that the instructors face in teaching the course, as well as their thoughts on what can be done to improve the teaching of the course.

### **3.3 Recruitment of participants**

In February 2007, I contacted Chancellor College through the head of Language and Communication Department (LAN) for assistance with my research. I requested permission to conduct the research at Chancellor College and to involve first year undergraduates and EAP lecturers. I also requested the help of members of staff in the same department in the recruitment of student participants and administering of the students' questionnaire on my behalf. The College granted me permission to involve its students and members of staff. Members of the LAN department agreed to help me with administering the students' questionnaire, and also agreed to take part in the study.

A self-reported questionnaire was administered to 290 first year undergraduate students, who included 164 social science students and 126 humanities students. A total of 200 responses were returned; 102 responses from the social science group and 98 responses from the humanities group. This represented a response rate of 62% and 78% respectively. Overall, the response return rate was 69%. I also sent an open-ended questionnaire to four full-time EAP lecturers and all of them responded.

### **3.4 Methodological approach and research instrument**

#### **3.4.1 Methodological approach**

The study employs a mixed methods design; that is, a combination of qualitative and quantitative techniques (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 1998). Incorporating techniques from both the quantitative and qualitative research traditions enables the researcher to “combine them in unique ways to answer research questions that could not have been answered in any other way” (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 2003, p. x). That is, due to the complexity of social phenomena, the integration of the two approaches within the same study provides richer data for deeper understanding of the phenomenon under study than could be obtained from either approach on its own (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Creswell, Plano-Clark, Gutmann, and Hanson, 2003; Onwuegbuzie and Teddlie, 2003; Erzberger and Kelle, 2003; Tashakkori and Teddlie, 1998).

In this study, a combination of the two approaches facilitated a better understanding of what is meaningful to first year undergraduates and EAP lecturers at Chancellor College

in terms of the essay writing experience and the teaching experience of the EAP course respectively. Data collection was done in two phases. The first phase collected quantitative data which was derived from a mostly quantitative survey. However, the survey contained some qualitative elements which provided qualitative data. The survey responses were used to inform the nature of the qualitative open-ended questionnaire for the second phase.

Although data analysis at the two phases was done independently using quantitative and qualitative techniques, these two techniques were combined when analyzing qualitative data. That is, the qualitative data was quantified (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 1998) by transforming it into numerical form through a frequency count of the identified themes (Sandelowski, 2001). As Creswell et al. (2003) have observed, coding qualitative data facilitates comparison and corroboration with quantitative data.

Qualitative and quantitative findings were discussed jointly at the data interpretation stage. Creswell et al. (2003) and Erzberger and Kelle (2003) contend that this involves examining qualitative and quantitative data for converging and diverging or contradictory findings. It also entails examining qualitative and quantitative data for complementarity (Erzberger and Kelle, 2003). In this study, findings from the open-ended questions helped in interpreting the statistical results.

#### **3.4.2 Students' questionnaire**

The first phase of the study employed an extensive survey approach. In order to gather data on the students' essay writing process, a self-completion questionnaire was used (see Appendix 3). The self-completion questionnaire, which requires respondents to read and answer the questions themselves (Bryman, 2004), proved useful to the present study in several ways.

Firstly, as observed elsewhere (Marshall and Rossman, 2006; Nardi, 2006; Bryman, 2004; Hyland, 2003; Polio, 2001), with the self-completion questionnaire it is possible to involve a large group of participants in a study. In this case, it was possible to obtain views on essay writing process from 200 students in different disciplines. This helped to obtain a broad picture of how these students approached essay writing, as well as the

challenges they faced during the writing process. Thus, it was possible to draw conclusions from the findings, and come up with recommendations.

Secondly, the self-completion questionnaire facilitates participants' anonymity (Ferguson, Yonge, and Myrick, 2004; Neuman, 2003). Considering that the study was interested in students' personal views on such sensitive issues as their essay writing challenges, attitudes to essay writing, and essay writing capability, the self-completion questionnaire helped to assure the student anonymity. Anonymity has been observed to allow participants to be more open when responding to the questionnaire (Nardi, 2006).

Thirdly, considering that data collection was done by staff members in the LAN Department (Chancellor College) on my behalf, the self-completion questionnaire was the most feasible method of collecting data. This is because it is easier and quicker to administer (Bryman, 2004; Hyland, 2003).

However, the self-completion questionnaire as a data collection instrument has its own limitations. For instance, although it allows respondents to be open, it is difficult to determine the honesty of their responses since some respondents may deliberately falsify their responses (Marshall and Rossman, 2006; Nardi, 2006; Cohen, Manion, and Morrison, 2000). Thus, as a researcher, I have to assume that the responses are honest.

The responses to the questionnaire may also not reveal what participants actually do when writing their essays, but rather it gives the students' self-perception of what they think they do or what they think they should be doing (Petrić and Czár, 2003; Torrance et al. 1999). This is especially the case with questions in form of rating scales. As Cohen et al. (2000) and Tashakkori and Teddlie (1998) have observed, with rating scales there is potential for extremity bias. That is, respondents may avoid or prefer the extreme categories at each end of the continuum. Rating scales are also prone to central tendency bias (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 1998); whereby respondents are likely to select the middle category of the response scale. This behaviour may arise from participants' desire to provide impressionistic responses; that is, they may choose responses that they think are socially desirable (Nardi, 2006; Bryman, 2004; Petrić and Czár, 2003). Participants' responses may also be limited by their memory (Bryman, 2004).



In addition, despite the advantage of the self-completion questionnaire to minimize the researcher influence on participants' responses due to various ways of explaining questions or response categories to different participants (Nardi, 2006; Bryman, 2004; Neuman, 2003), lack of opportunity to have the questions clarified may have negative effects on the research findings. For instance, it may lead to some respondents' failure to answer some questions correctly due to misunderstanding of questions or response categories (Bryman, 2004). It may also result in respondents not answering some questions which they perceive as difficult to understand (Bryman, 2004). This creates a problem of missing data for the variables that are created (Bryman, 2004).

In the case of open-ended questions, the lack of opportunity to probe respondents to elaborate on an answer (Bryman, 2004), means that it is difficult for a researcher to obtain a clarification on responses that are not clear because of either illegible handwriting or wording of their responses. As Neuman (2003) has observed, this may result in the responses being meaningless to the research.

#### **3.4.2.1 Questionnaire design**

The questionnaire, which was compiled in English, was used to obtain both qualitative and quantitative data. It was designed to obtain the following:

1. background information of the participants; regarding their age, gender, the faculty to which they belonged, and their first language
2. writing strategies that the students used when writing their last essay
3. students' perception of essay writing
4. essay writing difficulties that the students experienced
5. students' proposed solutions to their essay writing difficulties.

Most of the questions were closed. According to Bryman (2004), with a closed question, respondents are presented with a set of alternatives from which they have to choose an

appropriate answer using a tick or a circle. The closed questions included multiple-choice items and Likert-scale items.

Given that the main aim of the present study was to investigate essay writing behaviour of first year undergraduates, it was necessary to include closed questions. This is because closed questions are deemed to facilitate the comparison of participants' responses (Bryman, 2004; Neuman, 2003). Thus, it is possible to determine the distribution of characteristics, attitudes, and beliefs in a particular population (Marshall and Rossman, 2006; Petrić and Czár, 2003).

However, since it was difficult to provide the respondents with all the possible response categories, a category of 'other' was included in some closed questions. Three reasons account for including this response category. First, in order to minimize any feelings of frustration that participants may have as a result of being unable to find a category that they feel applies to them, which may result in their omission of the concerned questions (Bryman, 2004, Neuman, 2003); next, to give the participants a chance to offer responses that were not provided, since as Bryman (2004) has observed, there is a possibility that students may provide interesting responses that are not included in the response categories; and finally, to minimize the possibility of participants being forced to choose response categories that they would not otherwise choose (Neuman, 2003).

The questionnaire contained one open-ended question. According to Neuman (2003), open-ended questions give participants a chance to offer any answer they wish. In this case, the open-ended question provided students with an opportunity to articulate solutions to their writing problems without any constraints. The students were given a choice to respond to the open-ended question either in English or Chichewa (the native language of the majority of the students [see Section 4.2.1] and the researcher). As Fukao and Fujii (2001) have observed, allowing informants to choose the language with which they feel most comfortable and confident in expressing their thoughts and feelings, enables them to communicate with their entire linguistic repertoire. In this case, since most of the students have English as a foreign language, allowing them to use their native language offered them an opportunity to express what they really wanted to say as they

are probably more comfortable with Chichewa. However, the majority opted to respond in English.

Some of the questions referred students to their previous essay and others referred them to essay writing in general. Considering that essay writing is a common way of assessing the students at Chancellor College, it was assumed that by the time the questionnaire was administered (towards the end of semester one) the students would have had some essay writing experience.

It was decided to refer participants to their last essay since, as Petrić and Czárł (2003) and Cohen (1998) have observed, referring to specific instances of writing helps to capture what respondents do in particular situations. In this case, the questions were used to help establish what strategies the students used when writing their last essay, as well as the difficulties they encountered during the writing process. In addition, Bryman (2004), Neuman (2003), and Davidson and Torich (2003) assert that participants are likely to remember recent experiences, as well as specific situations. This applies to this study where some questions required the students to recall their essay writing process. On the other hand, the general essay writing questions were meant to help in gaining understanding of the students' perceptions of essay writing.

The questions in the students' questionnaire were adapted from several related studies (Evans and Green, 2006; Petrić and Czárł, 2003; Krause, 2001; Torrance et al. 1999; Campbell, Smith and Brooker, 1998; Mahalski, 1992; Norton, 1990). However, the questions were modified in order to suit the participants and the context of the study. For instance, to facilitate students' understanding of questions, explanations of some technical words were provided in parentheses. This has the benefit of minimizing the number of participants responding randomly to questions that they do not understand (Petrić and Czárł, 2003).

Using existing questions from other studies has an advantage of allowing a researcher to draw comparisons with other research findings (Bryman, 2004). In this case, it helped to compare the participants' essay writing problems, essay writing strategies, and perception of essay writing with what other studies on similar issues have discovered.

### **3.4.3 EAP lecturers' questionnaire**

The second phase of the study also employed a self-completion questionnaire. The open-ended questionnaire for the EAP lecturers (see Appendix 6), which was in English, was based on the responses of the students to the questionnaire administered earlier. It was used to obtain the lecturers' views which it was hoped would clarify some of the students' responses.

As Bryman (2004), Ellis (2004), Neuman (2003), and Cohen (1990) have observed, open-ended questions enable respondents' levels of knowledge and understanding of issues to be tapped. This is because they provide information that could be missed by using closed questions (Johnson and Turner, 2003). Therefore, in the present study, open-ended questions were designed to allow EAP lecturers to clarify from their perspective some issues raised by the students. One of the drawbacks of this particular method is that data derived from this type of questions may be highly individualized, and thus prevent a researcher from determining overall patterns (Neuman, 2003; Cohen et al. 2000; Cohen, 1998). However, to minimize this potential problem, the questions were formulated based on two major themes, namely, the challenges that the lecturers face when teaching the EAP course and what they thought would help to improve the teaching of the course. This was done to ensure that their responses were within these themes.

The questionnaire was limited to two questions since an open-ended questionnaire demands great effort, thought, and time on the participant's part (Nardi, 2006; Bryman, 2004; Neuman, 2003; Cohen et al. 2000).

## **3.5 Ethical considerations**

There were several ethical issues that were addressed in the study in order to minimize the negative impact of the research process on participants.

### **3.5.1 Students**

Since the student participants were in a dependent relationship with the administrators of the questionnaire (EAP lecturers), I was aware that some students might feel strongly pressured to respond to the questionnaire. This pressure to participate might arise from

students' fear of compromising their relationship with their lecturers should they decide not to participate; hence their participation might be related to a desire to please the lecturers (Ferguson et al. 2004). I therefore advised the questionnaire administrators not to administer the questionnaire to students who were registered in EAP courses that they were teaching, and for whom they had grading responsibilities (see Appendix 2). Students were also informed very clearly that participation was entirely voluntary and that they would not be disadvantaged in any way should they decide not to participate (see Appendix 1).

I was also aware that some participants were likely to feel embarrassment or discomfort due to some questions that seemed to assess their writing capability. However, students were assured that they would not be individually identified in the report as there were no questions in the questionnaire that would enable me to identify individual students. In addition, students were given a choice of not responding to questions they did not feel comfortable answering. In order to assure them of the confidentiality of individual data, I further informed student participants that should they decide to participate, their raw data would only be available to me and my supervisors.

### **3.5.2 EAP lecturers**

Since the EAP lecturers' questionnaire was based on students' responses, there was potential for some lecturers to feel embarrassed or uncomfortable with issues that students raised that would be viewed as critical. As it is not the tradition at Chancellor College for students to evaluate their lecturers' teaching, there was a possibility for some lecturers to be suspicious of the motives of researcher and study. Therefore, I stated clearly in the lecturers' information sheet (see Appendix 4) that the purpose of the study was not to embarrass them nor point out their teaching flaws.

In addition, since Chancellor College is identified in the report and there are currently only four EAP lecturers in the Department, it is possible that someone who knows them well and is aware of their views might be able to identify them. This was clearly pointed out in their information sheets. As the EAP lecturers are my colleagues, I also pointed out in the information sheet that I might be able to recognize their individual responses on

issues raised in the questionnaire, even in the absence of their names and any material that could identify them. Since their views would be used to illustrate the identified themes in the report, I pointed out in their information sheet that I was more interested in establishing patterns or trends than in presenting individual perspectives.

### **3.6 Data collection procedures**

#### **3.6.1 Piloting of students' questionnaire**

Prior to administering the students' questionnaire to the target population, the questionnaire was piloted with several undergraduate second language (L2) speakers of English studying at Auckland University of Technology (AUT) in New Zealand. These students were in their first and second years of study, had been or were enrolled in an EAP course, and had experience in essay writing.

Although the questionnaire was piloted with students from a different context, they shared several similar features with the target group; namely, being L2 speakers of English and undergraduates, having some essay writing experience, and having been exposed to EAP. As Petrić and Czár (2003) contend, piloting a questionnaire with a different group other than the targeted participants is deemed acceptable, provided that the piloted group matches the description of the target group.

As Hyland (2003, p. 253) has observed, since a self-completion questionnaire provides no opportunity for immediate follow up and clarification of responses, researchers need to be confident that items in the questionnaire can be interpreted unambiguously and that instructions for completing the questionnaire are clear. Thus, there were four aims for pre-testing the questionnaire. Firstly, it was done to check if the instructions in the questionnaire were clear; next, to check whether the questions and response categories were clear; that is, whether there were ambiguities in the wording of the questions and response categories which could result in problems of interpretation on the part of the respondents; thirdly, to determine the approximate duration of responding to the questionnaire; and lastly, to obtain opinions on the format of the questionnaire. As a result of the piloting, substantial changes were made to the questionnaire based on individual student's responses and opinions. Thus, some response categories were

removed, added, and compressed. In addition, the wording and format of the questions were improved.

### **3.6.2 Data collection phases**

Data collection was done in two phases. The first phase involved administering the questionnaire to students and in the second phase, EAP lecturers responded to their questionnaire.

#### **3.6.2.1 First phase**

Towards the end of the first semester (May 2007), I sent the students' questionnaire, research information sheet introducing myself and my study, and protocol sheet for administering the students' questionnaire to the EAP department at Chancellor College. With the assistance of the department members, the questionnaire was administered to the students.

#### ***Protocol for administering students' questionnaire***

Since the students' questionnaire was administered by staff members in the Department of Language and Communication on my behalf, it was necessary to provide them with guidelines on how to handle the questionnaire administering process. For instance, to emphasize the voluntary nature of participation in the study, the questionnaire administrators were advised to inform the students that participation was entirely voluntary and that they would not be disadvantaged in any way should they decide not to participate. In addition, the questionnaire administrators were advised to inform students that should they feel disturbed by the questionnaire, they could seek help from members of staff in the Department of Language and Communication.

To ensure that the anonymity of students was preserved, the protocol contained some guidelines on how the questionnaires were to be handled at the end of the administration process. The administrators were advised to collect all questionnaires, both answered and unanswered, and to seal them in envelopes in the presence of students. They were also advised not to label the envelopes with course names, and that all the envelopes were to be sent to me in New Zealand through the safest means.

Since there were four people responsible for administering the questionnaire, the protocol was necessary to ensure that the questionnaire was administered under the same conditions, such as when to administer the questionnaire and what information to provide the students with.

### ***Administration of the questionnaire***

At the beginning of normal sixty minutes EAP classes, the lecturers informed the students about my study and my interest in having the students as participants. Students were then given both the information sheet containing the research details and the questionnaire to read and ask questions related to the questionnaire. The whole data collection procedure took between 20 and 45 minutes. This included the time that was needed for students to read the information sheet with the research details, ask any questions related to the questionnaire, decide on whether to participate or not, and respond to the questionnaire.

The students' questionnaire was administered during a normal class for two reasons. Firstly, it was done to preserve the anonymity of the students. Secondly, due to the large number of student participants, it would have been very difficult for administrators of the questionnaire to collect the questionnaires from each student participant outside of class.

In the second phase of the research, I sent each EAP instructor a questionnaire, information sheet, and a consent form by email.

### **3.7 Data analysis**

Prior to computing quantitative data using SPSS, response categories of closed questions were coded. This involved giving a number to each response group to facilitate statistical analysis (Davidson and Tolich, 2003). Non-responses (missing data) were also given a code (a standard procedure with SPSS). Due to the large number of questions in the survey, the data was initially examined using exploratory analysis (numerical and graphical) to identify those areas where statistically significant results were indicated. Subsequently, the focus of the analysis was on these results. Both inferential and descriptive analyses were undertaken. A key analytical method was cross-tabulation which allowed an investigation of the interrelationship between responses. Cross-tabulation is an often overlooked method in survey research. However, it is



fundamentally correlative and allows for a deeper analysis of relationships between and among questions and their response categories. For example, level of confidence in writing essays was cross-tabulated with enjoyment of essay writing (see Table 6). Chi-square tests for independence were also performed to explore the relationship among variables.

The qualitative data obtained from the student open-ended question and all of the EAP instructor responses were coded. Coffey and Atkinson (1996) contend that coding consists of bringing fragments of data together to create categories that have some common property and argue that the “important analytic work lies in establishing and thinking about such linkages” (p. 27). Neuman (2003) notes that coding qualitative data consists of two simultaneous activities, the mechanical data reduction and the analytical categorization of the data. Thus, coding is essentially identifying categories of interest (Davidson and Tolich, 1999), and the way to generate a coding theme is to read through the collected data several times with different foci. Initially, I condensed the mass of data into general categories. In a second reading of the data, I focused on organizing recurring patterns and developing subcategories.

## CHAPTER FOUR

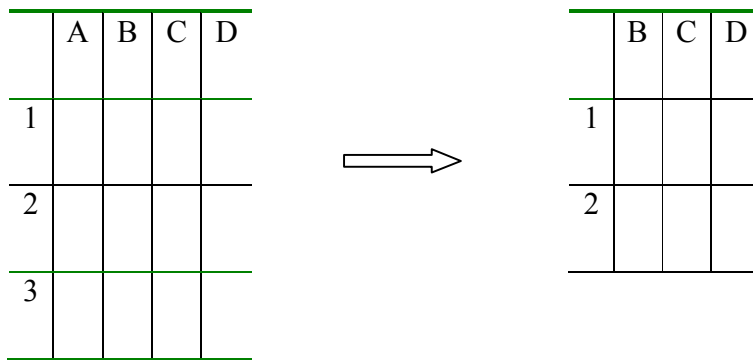
### FINDINGS

#### 4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the findings of the study are presented in two main parts. The first section (Section 4.2) presents quantitative and qualitative results obtained from the students' self-completion questionnaire. Qualitative findings from the EAP instructors' open-ended questionnaire are reported in Section 4.3. It is worthwhile mentioning that this section is subsidiary hence not very extensive. A summary of the findings is provided at the end of the chapter.

#### 4.2 Results from students' questionnaire

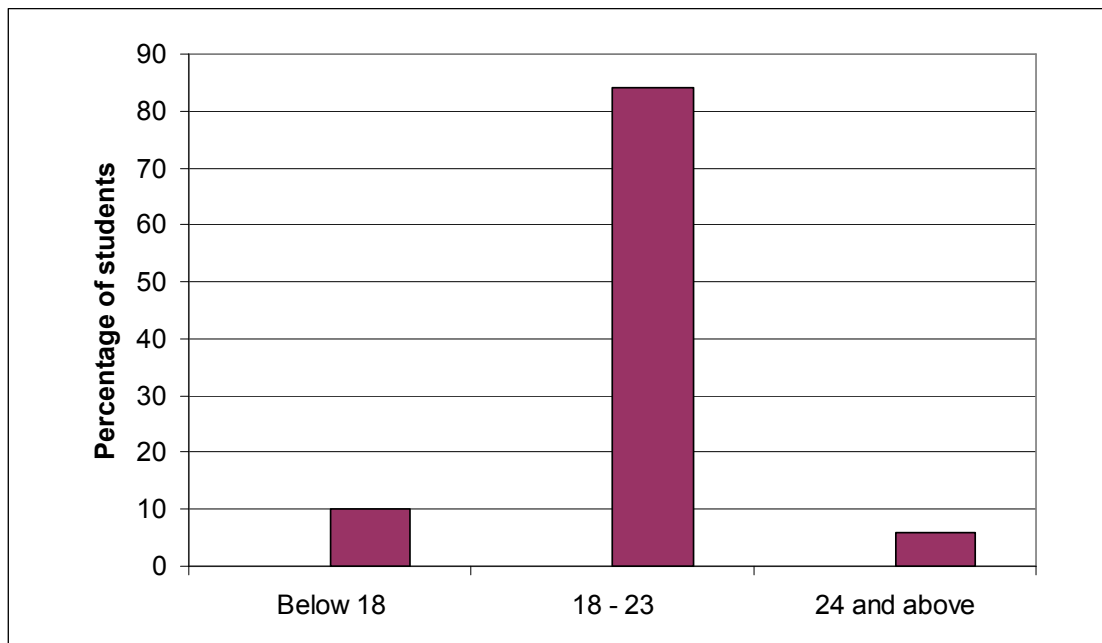
As discussed in chapter 3, most of the quantitative data was computed using SPSS. Descriptive statistical analyses were performed to obtain the frequency distribution of responses. Cross-tabulation and chi-squared analyses were also used to establish the level of significance of the relationship among variables. The chi-square p value was based on the alpha level set at .05. Thus it was assumed that if the significance level of .05 or less was obtained, then the results did not occur solely by chance, but were indicative of a statistically significant relationship. In order to increase the likelihood of validity for chi-square analysis, all cells with expected frequency of less than 5 were treated as missing data. That is, to reduce the potential effect of the small size of these cells on the value of the chi-square, responses to categories with very low frequencies were entered into SPSS as missing data. This was made possible because cells with frequencies below 5 fell into the same row or column (see Agresti and Wackerly, 1977, p. 112 for further details). The overall effect was the elimination of a category in terms of a row or column. This process is illustrated by the following diagram:



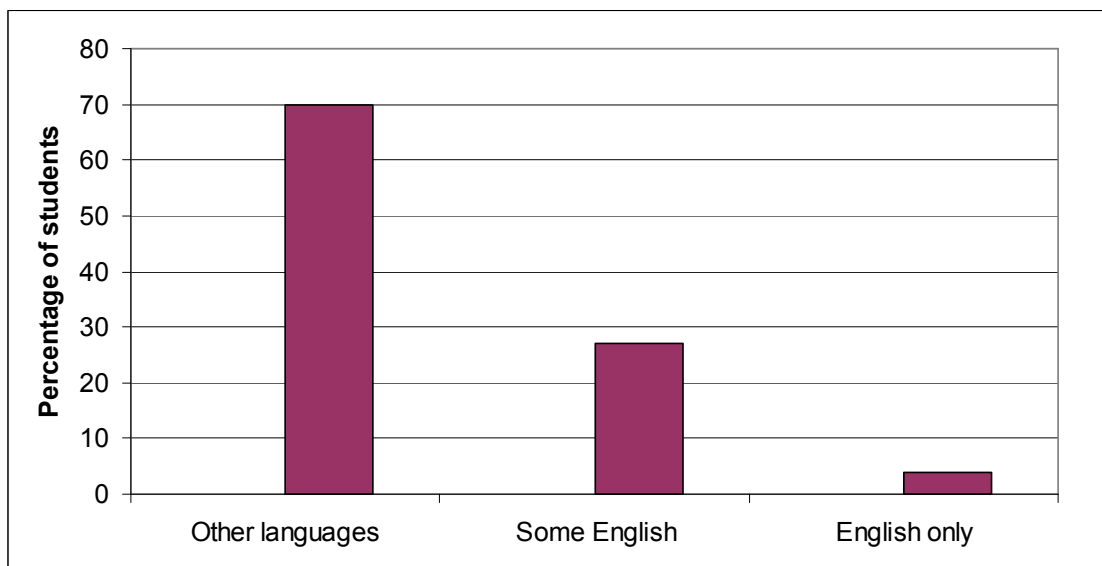
Where more than one response was available (that is where the response categories were not mutually exclusive), data responses were tallied and percentages calculated. This data is presented in graphical form. It should be noted that due to rounding, the total percentage in some cases does not equal 100.

#### 4.2.1 Students' background

Respondents were 66% male and 34% female. 49% are enrolled in humanities faculty and 51 % in the social sciences. As shown in Figure 1, the respondents were predominantly below 24 years and 70% spoke the indigenous languages at home (see Figure 2).



**Figure 1: Age ranges of students**



**Figure 2: Languages spoken at home**

#### 4.2.2 Essay writing strategies

As one way of understanding the students' essay writing process, several writing strategies were examined. These included how students employed sources of information, how they planned their essays, the ways which they considered their audience, and the drafting and revising of their work.

##### 4.2.2.1 Source information use

Students were asked to specify from the response categories provided the number of sources they used in the last essay. Results indicated that almost three quarters of the students used less than six source materials. In order to establish the nature of these source materials, students were asked to indicate the type of sources used. Several response categories were provided, as well as a category of 'other' for those who used sources other than the ones provided. The results are presented graphically in Figure 3 below.

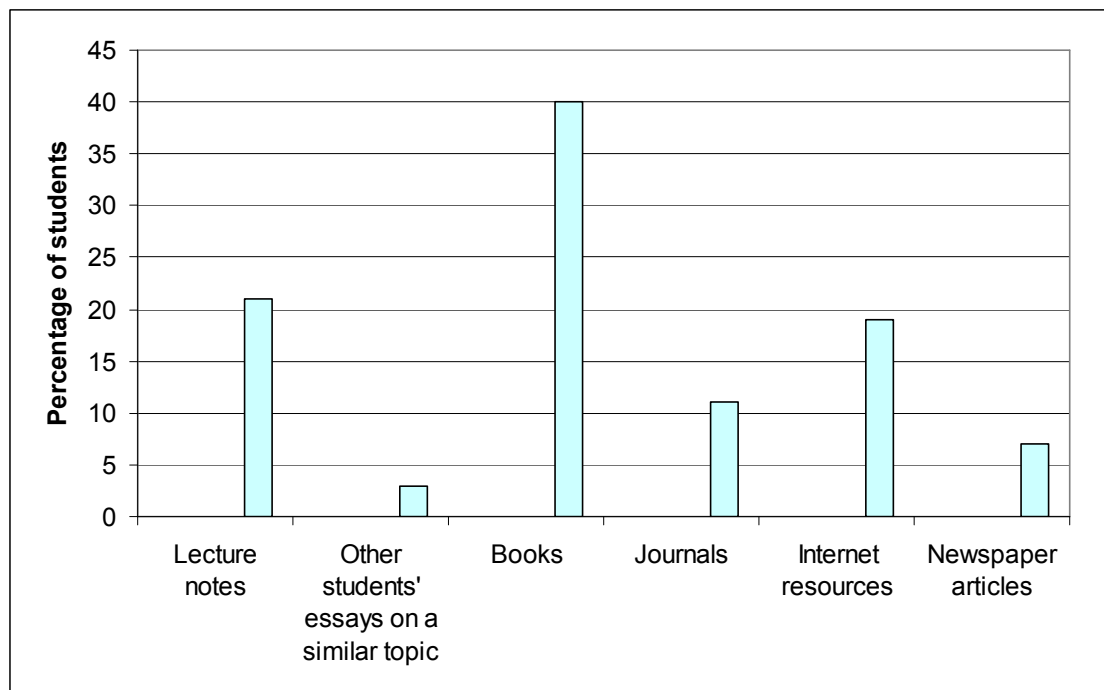


Figure 3: Type of sources used in last essay

Although many students reported using more than one type of source materials, Figure 3 seems to suggest that a larger percentage of students relied more on books than the other sources.

#### 4.2.2.2 Planning

Students were asked whether they made a plan of their last essay before starting to write. The results showed that the great majority of the students had a plan. Those who made a plan were further asked to choose from the provided response categories their type of plan. These included rearranged plan (notes prepared and then rearranged into an ordered sequence), basic plan (plan a beginning, middle, and an end), extended plan (main points written down and numbered for reference to a more detailed text), evolving plan (a plan that is continually being modified during the writing process), and mental plan (a plan in the head with nothing written down). Figure 4 illustrates the frequency distribution of students' responses. It should be noted that these results include students who used more than one type of plan.

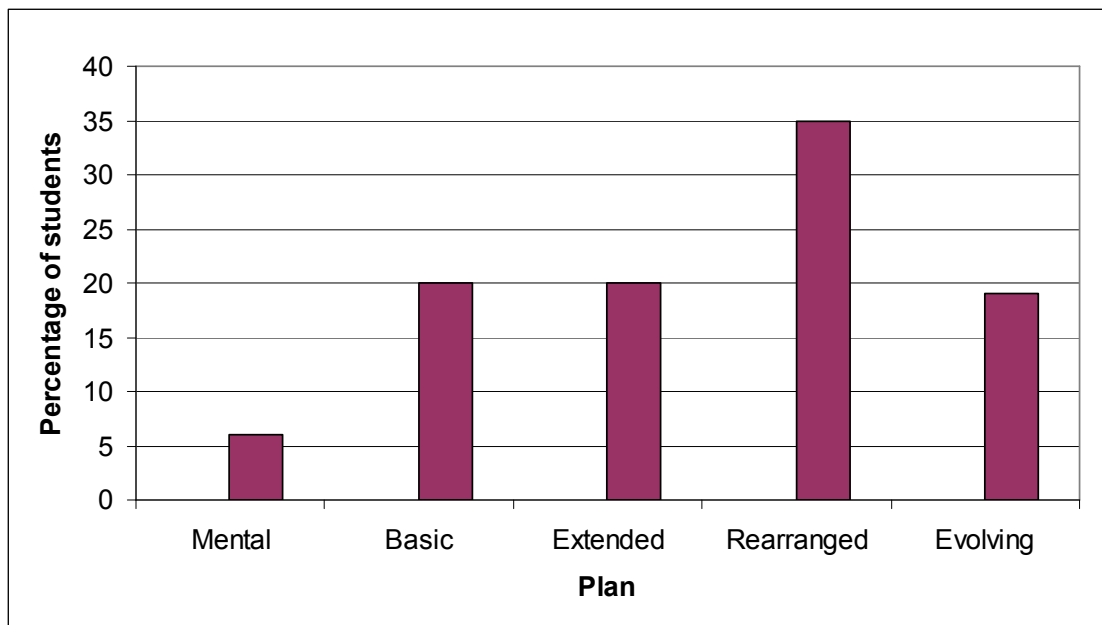


Figure 4: Type of plan used in last essay

Even though there is a marginal difference between the percentage of students who opted for basic and extended plans on the one hand and evolving plan on the other, it appears that the evolving plan was not the most preferred plan.

#### 4.2.2.3 Audience

Participants were asked whether or not they had an audience in mind when writing their last essay, and to specify which audience. For the latter, participants were offered response categories. A category of ‘other’ was also provided. Results showed that 81% of the respondents considered their audience, and as illustrated in Figure 5 below, although almost two-thirds of the respondents had lecturers as their audience, some also considered themselves as an audience and a wider general audience.

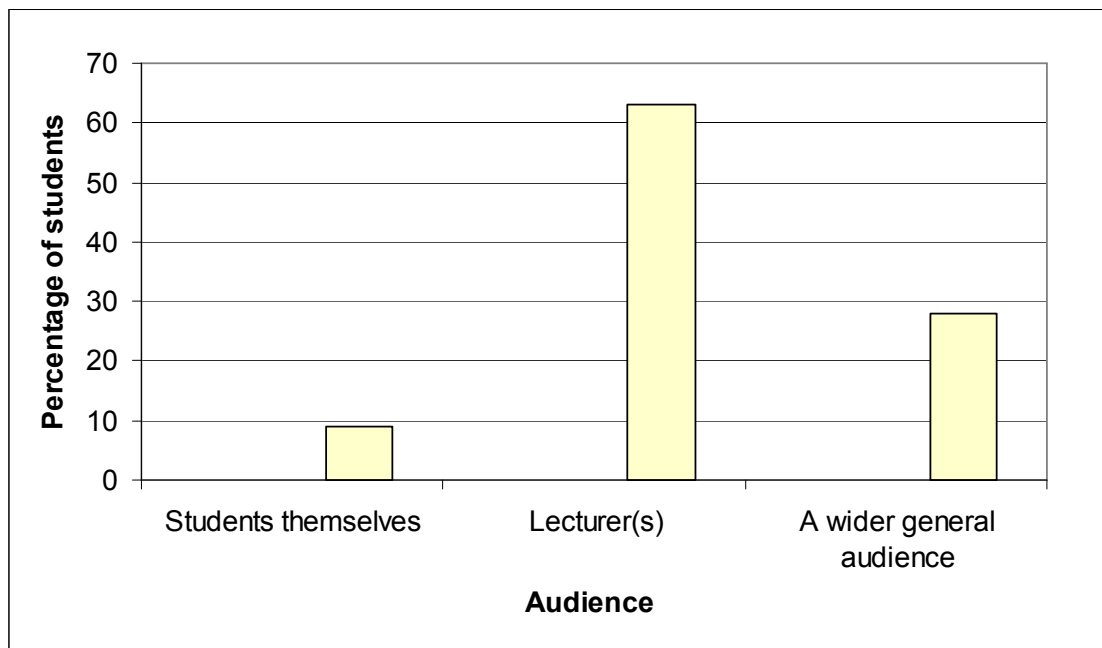
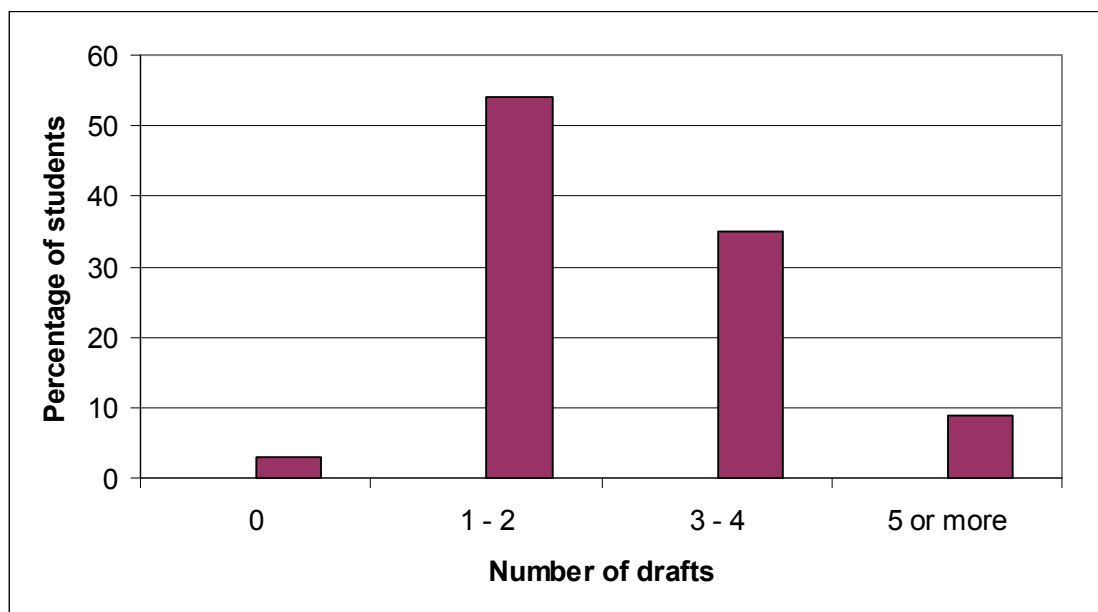


Figure 5: Type of audience considered in last essay

#### 4.2.2.4 Drafting

In order to establish the drafting behaviour of the students, the questionnaire asked the participants to indicate the number of drafts which they made. Several response categories ranging from 0 to 5 or more were provided. Figure 6 demonstrates that slightly over half of the students produced less than three drafts.

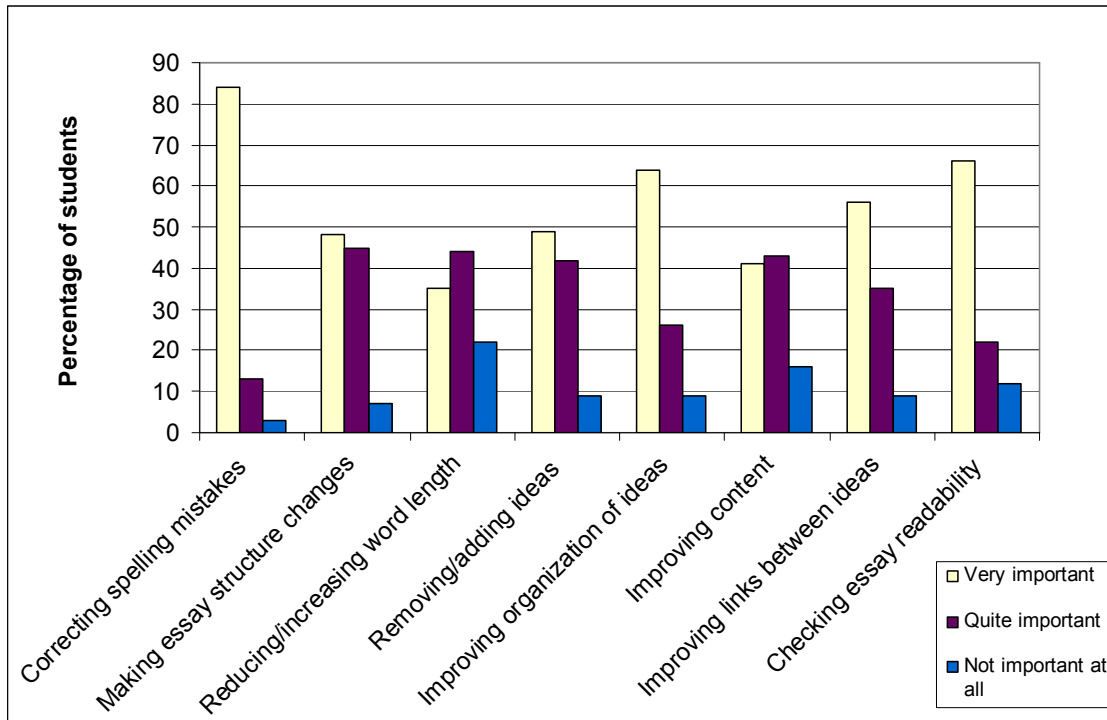


**Figure 6: Number of drafts**

#### **4.2.2.5 Revision**

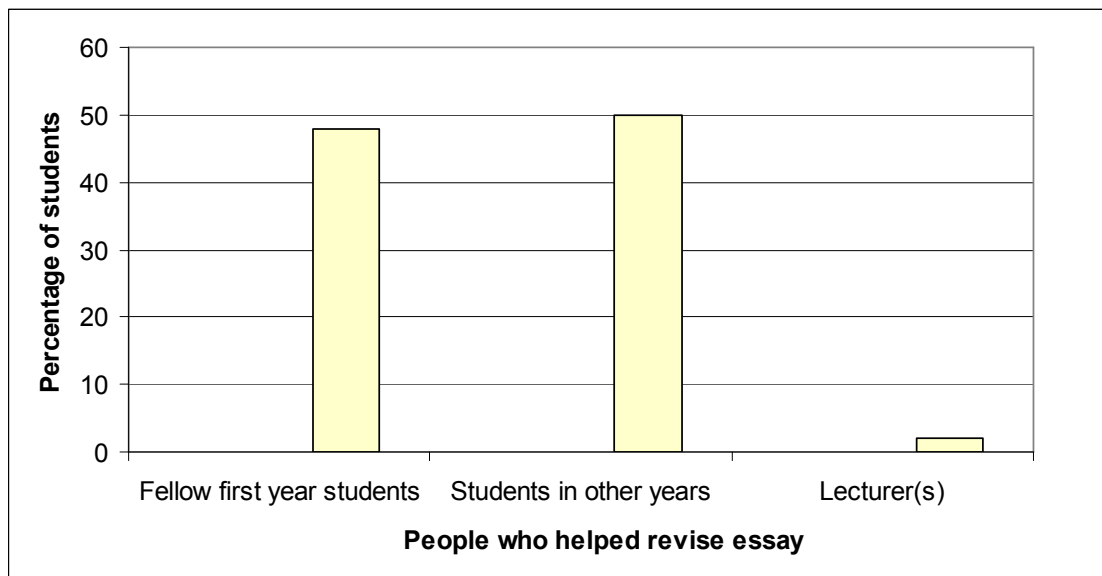
Students were asked whether or not they revised their last essay before handing it in for marking. Initial analysis of responses showed that the majority (95%) of the respondents revised their essay. Students who revised their essay were further asked to specify the purpose for doing so. Thus, the questionnaire asked them to assess how important the given eight reasons were when revising their essay on a scale ranging from 1 ('very important') to 3 ('not important at all'). The results, as illustrated in Figure 7, seem to suggest that the students' main focus was on such aspects as correcting spelling mistakes, checking readability of essay, and improving organization of ideas, rather than improving the content of their work.





**Figure 7: Students' evaluation of reasons for revising last essay**

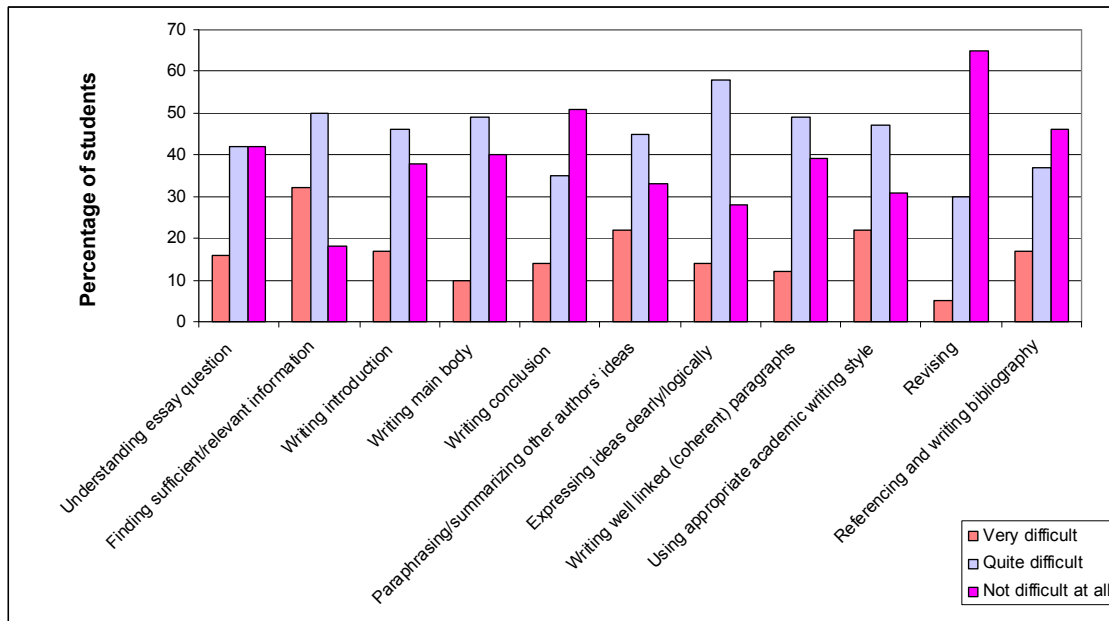
In addition to self-revision, students were asked if they sought help from others when revising their essay. The results indicated that about half of those who reported revising their essay, obtained feedback when revising; and as shown in Figure 8, almost all the feedback was obtained from fellow students rather than from lecturers.



**Figure 8: Help in revising last essay**

### **4.2.3 Essay writing challenges**

To investigate their essay writing challenges, students were asked to evaluate the degree of difficulty they experienced with the given aspects of essay writing on a scale of 1 ('very difficult') to 3 ('not difficult at all'). The students' evaluation is provided in Figure 9.



**Figure 9: Students' evaluation of difficulty in writing last essay**

The findings seem to suggest that obtaining sufficient or relevant information for the essays, paraphrasing or summarizing information from source texts, and use of appropriate academic writing style proved more difficult to the students, than revising or editing, writing conclusions, and referencing and writing bibliographies. Some writing aspects appear to have been perceived as moderately difficult. These include expressing ideas clearly or logically, writing the main body of the essay, and writing well linked (coherent) paragraphs.

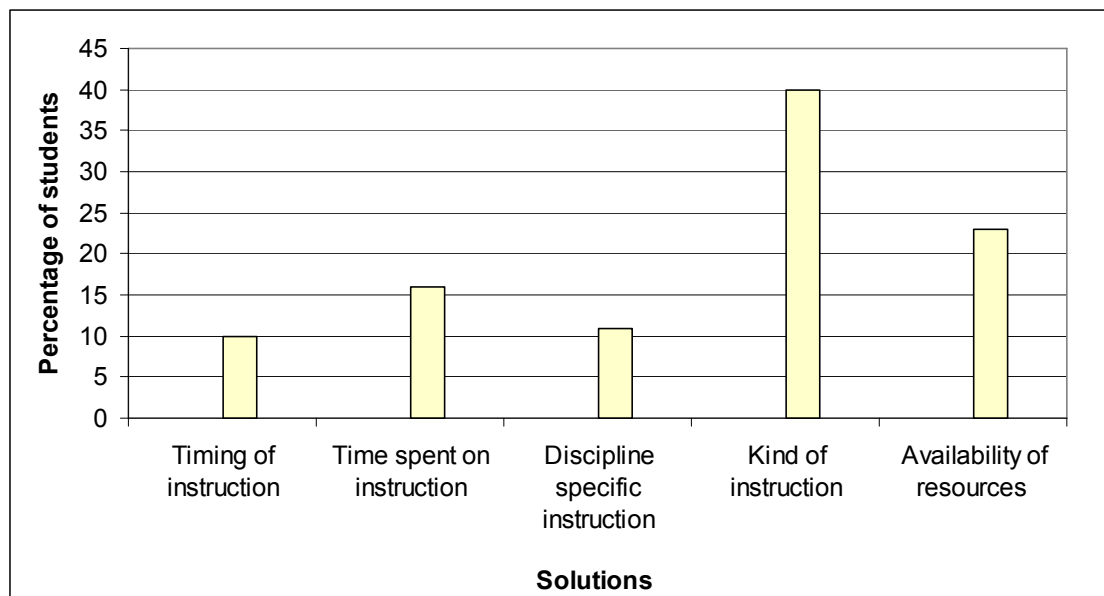
#### **4.2.4 Students' proposed solutions to their essay writing challenges**

In addition to the challenges they experienced when writing their last essay, students were asked to provide their views on the kind of support that could help them overcome the essay writing problems that they had when writing their last essay. Their suggested solutions were coded into five general categories that emerged through reading data several times (see Section 3.7 for details on coding). Below is a summary of the categories:

- Timing of essay writing instruction

- Time spent on essay writing instruction
- Discipline specific instruction in essay writing
- Kind of essay writing instruction
- Availability of resources for essay writing

Responses were then tallied under the identified categories and percentages calculated. The frequency distribution of their responses is displayed in Figure 10. It should be noted that respondents offered many comments, but only a few that seem to illustrate the views of the majority for each identified theme have been presented.



**Figure 10: Students' proposed solutions to essay writing challenges**

#### **4.2.4.1 Kind of essay writing instruction**

As evident in Figure 10, one of the most frequently mentioned solutions related to the kind of writing instruction that students would like to receive. 40% of the comments made concerned students' desire to have proper training in essay writing. For instance, some students proposed that emphasis should be on teaching essay writing aspects such

as the proper use of source texts. This includes referencing, quoting, paraphrasing, and writing a bibliography. These views are reflected in the following comments:

“Being trained sufficiently on how to cite resources, quote items and writing bibliographies which are based on interviews, documented programs and other resources.”

“I would rather like a lecture on proper referencing from sources, say journals, newspaper articles and magazines.”

“I think the language & communication lecturer should emphasize more on teaching students proper accademic (sic) essay writing mainly referencing and proper citation.”

Students also felt that they needed thorough training in proper essay organization, which includes how to write an introduction, main body, and conclusion, as well as what information to include in these sections. The following quotations are typical of these suggestions.

“I need an elaborate explanation on the overview of essay format.”

“Being taught how to conclude an essay and how ideas should flow logically.”

“Need to know what kind of information is needed in an introduction and conclusion and how to write those two.”

Students further suggested that lecturers should adopt certain ways of teaching essay writing; namely, use of examples or models of past essays written by lecturers and students, revision of essay writing mistakes in class, provision of handouts on essay writing, detailed lectures on essay writing, and introduction of lecturers' required essay writing standards or expectations prior to assigning writing tasks to students. These suggested ways of teaching are generalized by the following comments:

“Possibly revising in class i.e. making corrections where necessarily (sic) so the same mistakes won’t be made next time.”

“I think we should be provided with some written essays so that we should at least have a clear picture on how to academically write them, and even have a picture on how things like referencing, citation and bibliography are written.”

“I think it would be better if the lecturers firstly introduce their standards of essay writing.”

“If the lectures (sic) gives (sic) handout on essay writing.”

#### **4.2.4.2 Discipline specific instruction in essay writing**

Related to students’ preferred kind of essay writing instruction is their wish to have discipline specific instruction in essay writing. As shown in Figure 10, 11% of the comments indicated that students seem to be aware of the variation in lecturers’ essay writing expectations, as well as differences in writing requirements in diverse disciplines. However, what they do not know are the actual expectations and requirements since they are not provided to the students. Thus, students felt that some of their essay writing challenges would be overcome if they were taught specifically how to write essays in different fields of study. Their comments suggest that this could be done in two ways. The first way is that all lecturers of various subjects should teach students the appropriate way of writing essays in their respective fields. The other one is that EAP lecturers should teach essay writing requirements of different disciplines. Students also suggested that lecturers should familiarize students with discipline specific writing styles through model essays in order to avoid the confusion that is brought by the use of general essays. The students’ need for discipline specific instruction in essay writing is illustrated by the following comments:

“Lecturers should give exhaustive guidelines on their expectations from students to avoid irrelevance in essays.”

“Lecturers of all subjects should teach the students how to specifically write (sic) essays in their field of study.”

“Each and every member of staff of a particular discipline should have a model answer on which students should be acquainted (sic) with. The using of the general essays creates confusion.”

“It seems each and every lecture (sic) needs his/personal structures of writing essays. For this reason, I suggest each lecture (sic) should type us a format of an essay he wants. What convinces my psychology lecture (sic) is not what my LAN lecturer wants.”

#### **4.2.4.3 Time spent on essay writing instruction**

An increase in the amount of time that lecturers should spend on teaching essay writing was another solution that students proposed. 16% of the comments were about the need to increase the number of hours spent on teaching essay writing, as well as increasing the frequency of essay writing both for assessment and practice. As illustrated below, the students suggested that frequent essay writing would help them improve their essay writing skills. They also indicated that increasing the number of hours allotted to LAN (the EAP course), would assist them to gain more essay writing skills.

“In my opinion I think the best support would be having regular lessons on essay writings so that students shouldn’t forget some of the rules on writing essays.”

“If we were given essays (sic) writing frequently and not only on exams.”

“I think having more hours of LAN lectures would assist me because LAN is needed everywhere hence I think by learning more in LAN classes I can be able to acquire more skills.”

#### **4.2.4.4 Timing of essay writing instruction**

From Figure 10 we can also observe that 10% of the comments relate to the timing of essay writing instruction. Some students attributed certain essay writing problems to the fact that most aspects of essay writing were taught when students had already submitted essays in other disciplines. Hence, students proposed restructuring the sequence of topics taught in the EAP course. For instance, they want essay writing to be taught first before anything else (see Section 1.1 for the chronology of the EAP curriculum). In particular, they want to be taught referencing, paraphrasing, bibliography writing, and essay writing styles before they are given any essay writing assignments in the EAP course or other courses. Some students even suggested that they should be given essay writing assignments in the second semester of the first year after acquiring all essay writing basics. The following comments illustrate these views:

“The LAN lecturer should teach things like referencing, paraphrasing, quoting, essay writing, the very first weeks of the semester. To be precise before writing any assignment.”

“Timing for teaching essay writing should be prior to before (sic) other department (sic) have started giving essay questions.”

“One of the things that would help me overcome some of my essay writing problems would be the restructuring of the order in which lecturers lecture on certain topics. For example, the first lesson in LAN, in my opinion, was supposed to be ‘Academic Referencing’, which was not the case, so even when I wrote my last essay, I had to ask those students in other years to teach me how to do it, because the said topic had not been taught.”

#### **4.2.4.5 Availability of resources for essay writing**

Students also showed concern about the scarcity of resources needed to write essays in the various disciplines. From Figure 10 we can see that 23% of the comments relate to the availability of resources. For instance, students would like to have easy access to various, relevant, and up to date resources such as books and internet sources so that they



are able to do their work in time. These resources should be both on the subject matter of their essays and on how to write essays. In addition, students suggested the need for lecturers to check the availability of prescribed texts on reading lists prior to recommending them to students. Below are some of the comments on the need for availability of resources.

“If only relevant materials i.e. books, journals etc. could be accessed without much difficulty, things could have been better.”

“The problem could be overcome (sic) by having relevant books (sufficient) in the library and access to other information sources other than books.”

“Lecturers should cross check the availability of essay reading lists beforehand.”

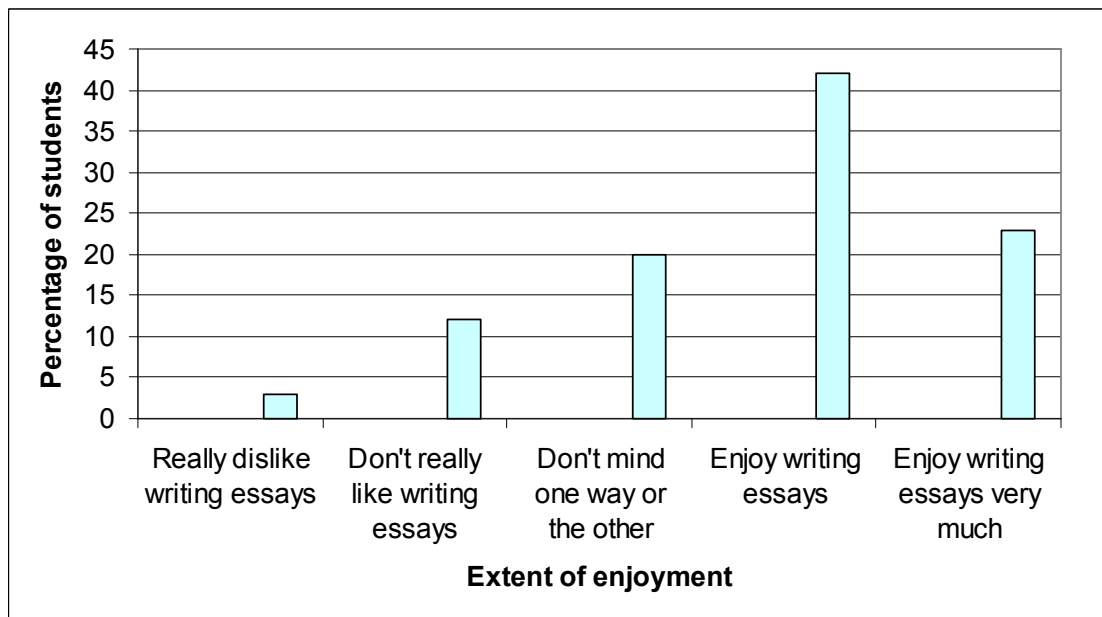
“Presence of updated books.”

#### **4.2.5 Students’ perception of essay writing**

In order to investigate the students’ perception of essay writing, the survey examined affective elements such as their enjoyment of, and confidence in, essay writing, as well as whether or not essay writing facilitates their understanding of subject matter.

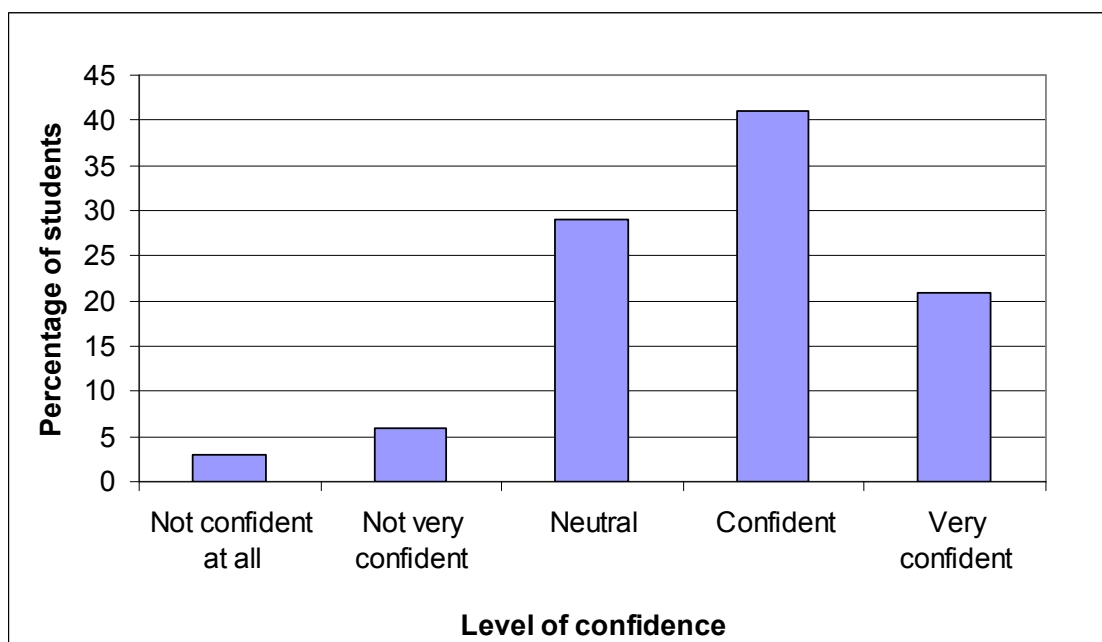
##### **4.2.5.1 Students’ enjoyment of essay writing and confidence in essay writing**

To identify the extent of their enjoyment of writing essays, the participants were asked to evaluate their enjoyment of essay writing on a five point scale ranging from 1 (‘I really dislike writing essays’) to 5 (‘I enjoy writing essays very much’). Their evaluation is illustrated in Figure 11.



**Figure 11: Students' evaluation of essay writing enjoyment**

From Figure 11, we can observe that most of the respondents seem to have enjoyed essay writing.



**Figure 12: Students' self-evaluation of confidence in essay writing**

With regard to confidence in essay writing, students were asked to assess their confidence on a scale of 1 ('not confident at all') to 5 ('very confident'). Results as shown in figure 12 above appear to suggest that many students perceived their level of confidence as high. However, there was a considerable number of students who expressed neutrality.

#### **4.2.5.2 Students' understanding of subject matter through essay writing**

Students were asked to rate how essay writing helped them understand the content of their essays on the following three point scale: (1) not at all, (2) somewhat/to some extent, and (3) absolutely yes. There was general agreement that essay writing played an important role in the mastery of subject matter.

As mentioned in Section 4.2, cross-tabulations and chi-square analyses were done to examine the relationships among various variables. In Sections 4.2.5.3, 4.2.5.4, and 4.2.5.5, relationships that are statistically significant are presented.

#### **4.2.5.3 Demographic variables and the relationship between essay writing enjoyment, understanding of content, number of drafts, and elicitation of help when revising**

Tables 1 to 5 present the findings of chi-square analyses of the relationship of various essay writing aspects with demographic characteristics of the respondents.

##### ***Faculty with understanding of content, number of drafts, and elicitation of help when revising***

Table 1 below shows that there is a statistically significant difference in the frequency distribution of humanities and social science students with regard to their level of understanding of content ( $p < .05$ ). It appears that more students in social science totally agreed that they acquired understanding of content through essay writing than those in the humanities.

**Table 1: Distribution of students by faculty and understanding of content through essay writing**

Faculty	Understanding of content		Total
	Somewhat/to some extent	Absolutely yes	
Humanities	56 (60%)	38 (40%)	94 (100%)
Social science	41 (42%)	57 (58%)	98 (100%)
Total	97 (51%)	95 (49%)	192 (100%)

$$\chi^2(1, N = 192) = 6.039, p = .014$$

The results in Table 2 also indicate that the number of drafts varied significantly ( $p < .05$ ) with the faculties to which students belonged. Although in both faculties the number of students who did 3-4 drafts decreased compared to those who did 1-2 drafts, the decrease is very noticeable in the social science faculty. Thus, more students in the humanities did 3-4 drafts than those in the social science.

**Table 2: Distribution of students by faculty and number of drafts made in last essay**

Faculty	Number of drafts		Total
	1-2	3-4	
Humanities	42 (51%)	40 (49%)	82 (100%)
Social science	65 (68%)	30 (32%)	95 (100%)
Total	107 (60%)	70 (40%)	177 (100%)

$$\chi^2(1, N = 177) = 5.447, p = .020$$

Results in Table 3 further reveal that the number of students who obtained help when revising their essay varied significantly ( $p < .5$ ) between the two faculties. It can be seen that more students in the humanities sought feedback than those in the social science faculty.

**Table 3: Relationship between faculty and number of students who sought help when revising last essay**

Faculty	Help from others		Total
	No	Yes	
Humanities	40 (41%)	58 (59%)	98 (100%)
Social science	64 (63%)	37 (37%)	101 (100%)
Total	104 (52%)	95 (48%)	199 (100%)

$\chi^2(1, N = 199) = 10.138, p = .001$

***Gender with essay writing enjoyment and elicitation of help when revising***

The gender of the participants appears to be in a statistically significant relationship ( $p < .05$ ) with essay writing enjoyment. Results in Table 4 seem to indicate that more male students enjoyed essay writing to a greater extent than female students.

**Table 4: Distribution of students by gender and enjoyment of essay writing**

Gender	Enjoy essay writing			Total
	I don't mind one way or the other	I enjoy writing essays	I enjoy writing essays very much	
Male	21 (20%)	51 (48%)	35 (33%)	107 (100%)
Female	18 (33%)	28 (51%)	9 (16%)	55 (100%)
Total	39 (24%)	79 (49%)	44 (27%)	162 (100%)

$\chi^2(2, N = 162) = 6.242, p = .044$

**Table 5: Number of male and female students who sought help when revising last essay**

Gender	Help from others		Total
	No	Yes	
Male	75 (58%)	55 (42%)	130 (100%)
Female	29 (43%)	39 (57%)	68 (100%)
Total	104 (53%)	94 (47%)	198 (100%)

$$\chi^2(1, N = 198) = 4.053, p = .044$$

Table 5 also shows a statistically significant relationship ( $p < .05$ ) between gender and the process of obtaining feedback when revising. The results suggest that more female students sought feedback from others when revising their essay than male students.

#### **4.2.5.4 Relationships between essay writing enjoyment, confidence, elicitation of help when revising, and understanding of content**

##### ***Enjoyment of and confidence in essay writing***

Chi-squared tests revealed that enjoyment of essay writing varied significantly ( $p < .05$ ) with confidence in essay writing. Results are presented in Table 6. However, it should be noted that the results do not include two categories which registered expected frequencies of less than 5. Scores of these categories were computed as missing data when running the chi-square tests [see Agresti and Wackerly (1977) for elimination of categories in cross-tabulation tables].

**Table 6: Students' confidence in essay writing and enjoyment of essay writing**

Confidence in essay writing	Enjoy writing essays			Total
	I don't mind one way or the other	I enjoy writing essays	I enjoy writing essays very much	
Neutral	19 (43%)	21 (48%)	4 (9%)	44 (100%)
Confident	13 (18%)	51 (70%)	9 (12%)	73 (100%)
Very confident	4 (10%)	6 (15%)	29 (74%)	39 (100%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>36 (23%)</b>	<b>78 (50%)</b>	<b>42 (27%)</b>	<b>156 (100%)</b>

$\chi^2(4, N = 156) = 70.082, p = .000$

The results suggest that students who felt very confident tended to enjoy writing essays to a greater extent than the majority of those who indicated that they were confident. This begs the questions, does confidence boost enjoyment or does enjoyment boost confidence?

***Understanding of content, enjoyment, confidence, and elicitation of help when revising***

Chi-square results revealed that the extent of students' understanding of subject matter through essay writing seems to vary with students' level of enjoyment of and confidence in essay writing, and elicitation of help when revising. Tables 7 to 9 show the results.

**Table 7: Students' understanding of content through essay writing and enjoyment of essay writing**

Understanding of content through essay writing	Enjoy writing essays			Total
	I don't mind one way or the other	I enjoy writing essays	I enjoy writing essays very much	
Somewhat/to some extent	23 (29%)	44 (55%)	13 (16%)	80 (100%)
Absolutely yes	16 (20%)	36 (44%)	30 (37%)	82 (100%)
Total	39 (24%)	80 (49%)	43 (27%)	162 (100%)

$\chi^2(2, N = 162) = 8.754, p = .013$

**Table 8: Students' understanding of content through essay writing and confidence in essay writing**

Understanding of content through essay writing	Confidence in essay writing			Total
	Neutral	Confident	Very confident	
Somewhat/to some extent	31 (36%)	41 (48%)	13 (15%)	85 (100%)
Absolutely yes	24 (27%)	37 (42%)	28 (31%)	89 (100%)
Total	55 (32%)	78 (45%)	41 (24%)	174 (100%)

$\chi^2(2, N = 174) = 6.495, p = .039$



**Table 9: Distribution of students by understanding of content through essay writing and help from others to revise last essay**

Understanding of content	Help from others		Total
	No	Yes	
Somewhat/to some extent	40 (42%)	56 (58%)	96 (100%)
Absolutely yes	58 (61%)	37 (39%)	95 (100%)
Total	98 (51%)	93 (49%)	191 (100%)

$$\chi^2(1, N = 191) = 7.183, p = .007$$

In Table 7, we can see that there is a statistically significant relationship between students' level of agreement on the extent of understanding of subject matter through essay writing and their enjoyment of writing essays ( $p < .05$ ). That is, students who agreed absolutely that essay writing helped them attain understanding of content tended to enjoy essay writing fully unlike those who felt that essay writing facilitated their understanding of subject matter to a certain degree. Similar results can be observed from Table 8 on the comparison of students' understanding of content through essay writing and their confidence in essay writing. Increase in students' understanding of subject matter seems to have a statistically significant positive impact on their essay writing confidence ( $p < .05$ ).

From Table 9, it can be observed that level of understanding of content through essay writing is in a statistically significant relationship ( $p < .05$ ) with seeking feedback when revising. The results indicate that more students who felt that essay writing facilitated their understanding of content to a certain extent tended to seek feedback than those who absolutely agreed to an improvement in their understanding of subject matter.

Overall, the results presented in Tables 7 and 8 seem to suggest a close link among the three variables, namely, essay writing enjoyment, confidence in essay writing, and level of agreement as to how essay writing facilitates understanding of content. Thus, it appears that full confidence in one's ability to write essays is positively related to total liking of essay writing, as well as absolute agreement that essay writing facilitates

understanding of content. In contrast, partial agreement that essay writing helps in understanding subject matter appears to be in a significant relationship with lesser levels of confidence in and enjoyment of writing essays.

#### **4.2.5.5 Relationships between elicitation of help when revising, number of drafts, and enjoyment of essay writing**

Chi-square results indicated a statistically significant relationship between elicitation of help when revising and number of drafts produced as well as essay writing enjoyment. Table 10 below shows that number of drafts that students produced varied significantly ( $p < .05$ ) with whether or not participants elicited others' help when revising. More students who obtained help appear to have produced more drafts (3-4) than those who did not.

**Table 10: Number of drafts made in last essay and help from others to revise last essay**

Number of drafts	Help from others		Total
	No	Yes	
1 – 2	67 (63%)	39 (37%)	106 (100%)
3 - 4	29 (41%)	41 (59%)	70 (100%)
Total	96 (55%)	80 (45%)	176 (100%)

$$\chi^2(1, N = 176) = 8.065, p = .005$$

Table 11 below shows that the process of obtaining feedback had impact on students' enjoyment of essay writing.

**Table 11: Help from others to revise last essay and enjoyment of essay writing**

Help from others	Enjoy essay writing			Total
	I don't mind one way or the other	I enjoy writing essays	I enjoy writing essays very much	
No	23 (28%)	32 (39%)	27 (33%)	82 (100%)
Yes	16 (20%)	47 (59%)	17 (21%)	80 (100%)
Total	39 (24%)	79 (49%)	44 (27%)	162 (100%)

$\chi^2(2, N = 162) = 6.354, p = .042$

It can be seen that there is a statistically significant variation ( $p < .05$ ) in the degree of enjoyment of essay writing depending on whether or not students sought feedback when revising their essay. Thus, the results provide an impression that students who obtained help when revising did not enjoy essay writing to a greater extent than those who did not ask for feedback.

In order to understand better the students' views, the study obtained EAP instructors' thoughts on the issues raised in the students' responses. Section 4.3 provides the EAP instructors' responses.

### **4.3 Results from EAP instructors' questionnaire**

Through an open-ended questionnaire, EAP instructors were asked to provide the challenges which they face, as well as their views on what can be done to improve the teaching of the EAP course. Their responses were coded and the identified major themes are presented in the following sections (see Section 3.7 for details on coding). As mentioned earlier, this section is a brief summary of the EAP instructors' responses.

#### **4.3.1 EAP instructors' views on the teaching challenges which they face and ways of improving EAP instruction**

The following challenges were identified:

- Lack of sufficient teaching and learning materials

- Large number of students in EAP classes
- Students' negative attitude towards the EAP course
- Students' limited English proficiency

#### **4.3.1.1 Lack of sufficient teaching and learning materials**

All four respondents identified scarcity of teaching and learning materials such as textbooks, computers, and projectors as a challenge. Lack of sufficient resources is attributed to financial difficulties experienced by the university. Below is an illustration of some of their views.

“Insufficient teaching resources, e.g. textbooks for students to practice certain skills with; lack of modern technology – there is no use of Computer Assisted Language Learning (C.A.L.L.) which is very vital to teaching LAN; and projectors.”

“Lack of teaching and learning materials mainly books due to financial problems.”

“The books we are using are so archaic and worn out and have to rely on the internet for new information.”

The instructors feel that there is need for sufficient and up to date resources if the teaching of the EAP course is to be improved. This could be achieved if Chancellor College found other means of obtaining funding to buy the required resources rather than relying on donations.

“The College should lobby govt to help it buy books and not wait for donations.”

“A need to have an increase and update in the teaching resources.”

#### **4.3.1.2 Large number of students in EAP classes**

Large number of students in EAP classes is another challenge that was cited by the four instructors. Their comments suggest that large class sizes hinder individual student participation in class activities and prevent the instructors from employing the learner centred approach of teaching. According to the instructors, it also becomes difficult to mark class exercises. Below is an illustration of their thoughts on the problems caused by large class sizes.

“Extremely large enrolment that prevent learner centred teaching e.g. 164 students without the help of tutors.”

“Large classes whereby one can’t give an equal chance for students to participate and also difficulty to mark regular class exercises.”

In order to have an ideal student-staff ratio, the instructors suggest an increase in the number of staff members. They also suggest the need to have tutors and demonstrators who can supervise and tutor students. This may enable the instructors to provide students with feedback on their work as well as give out regular work for practice. The instructors’ proposed solutions are reflected in the following comments:

“Staffing levels in the dept need to be increased to suit the number of students.”

“Finances permitting we can also utilise MA students in the English and Education departments to act as tutors.”

“Have many members of staff so you can split groups to less than 25 each. This way you can give sufficient practise and feedback.”

#### **4.3.1.3 Students’ negative attitude towards the EAP class**

Three respondents identified students’ negative attitude towards the EAP class as a challenge. As illustrated below, the students’ behaviour is attributed to their lack of awareness of the importance of the course, as well as the compulsory nature of the

course. As the following comments indicate, students' unfavourable attitude towards the EAP course has a negative impact on the instructors' enthusiasm to teach.

“Lack of motivation by the students- they sometimes show boredom, in the end it erodes the lecturer's enthusiasm to teach. The need of LAN is not realised early enough.”

“Most students think that the LAN course is a waste of time ... as such they do not put much effort; they don't work as hard as they do with the other courses. It is hard for the teacher to work as hard.”

The instructors feel that the students' negative attitude can be addressed by making students aware of the significance of the EAP course at an early stage. Students' interest in the course may also be increased by offering EAP lessons that meet their specific course requirements. Instructors in other departments could also help by emphasizing the language component in their marking criteria, unlike the current situation where many of them think it is not their responsibility to consider the language of the students. This would facilitate students' understanding of the significance of the EAP course. The following quotations illustrate these views:

“All lecturers from other departments should include a language component in their marking scheme to help students understand the importance of the subject. Currently there are many lecturers from other departments who think that it is not their responsibility to mark the language of their students. Of course the complication is that those that are willing may also be incompetent in the English language.”

“The importance of LAN should be made more clear by making the lessons relevant to the students' respective courses. One of which is for LAN to collaborate with lecturers of other courses so that students' needs are met.”

#### **4.3.1.4 Students' insufficient English proficiency**

One instructor identified students' lack of mastery of English, such as inadequate grammar and vocabulary skills, as a challenge. However, it is felt that it is not the responsibility of university instructors to teach students mechanical skills such as the use of punctuation marks. This view is reflected in this remark:

“Poor English Language background of students. Most of them have very poor competence in grammar and vocabulary. ...I think I don't have to teach university students the use of a full stop and capital letter etc.”

In order to alleviate this problem, it was suggested that the standard of university entrance examinations should be raised, especially by increasing the passing mark of English language. This would ensure that only students with high levels of English proficiency are admitted to university. The establishment of remedial classes for poor performing students was also recommended.

#### **4.4 Summary of findings**

With regard to essay writing strategies, the results seem to suggest that:

- the majority of students used less than six source materials, and books were the most frequently used.
- the majority of students planned their essay prior to drafting, and many students used a rearranged plan (rearranged notes into an ordered sequence) rather than an evolving plan (which is continually modified during the writing process).
- most of the students considered their lecturers as the audience of their work, although some students also regarded themselves as an audience as well as wider general audience.
- although many students did 1-2 drafts, more students in the humanities faculty did 3-4 drafts than those in the social science; and students who obtained feedback when revising appear to have produced more drafts (3-4) than those who did not.

- the majority of students revised their essays, and most of them regarded correcting spelling mistakes, checking essay readability, and improving organization of ideas as very important when revising.
- almost half of the students elicited feedback from others when revising, and the feedback was mainly sought from first year students and students in other years rather than asking for help from lecturers.
- more female students sought feedback when revising than male students; and more students from the humanities faculty elicited feedback than those in the social science.
- students who obtained feedback when revising seem to have enjoyed essay writing to a lesser extent than those who did not ask for feedback.

The results also indicate that some essay writing aspects were frequently cited as very challenging during the writing process. These include obtaining sufficient and relevant information, paraphrasing or summarizing information from source texts, and using appropriate academic writing style. Some aspects such as revising/editing, writing conclusions, and referencing and writing bibliographies were perceived as the least challenging.

Students proposed the following solutions to their essay writing challenges:

- timely essay writing instruction
- availability of resources for essay writing
- increased amount of time spent on essay writing instruction
- discipline specific instruction in essay writing
- emphasis on the proper use of source texts
- instruction in the organization and structuring of academic essays



In terms of the students' perception of essay writing, the findings indicate that:

- male students felt that they enjoyed essay writing to a greater extent than female students.
- more social science students totally agreed that essay writing helped them understand content of their essays than humanities students.
- students who felt essay writing helped them understand content to some degree tended to elicit feedback more than those who absolutely agreed to developing an understanding of content through essay writing.
- full confidence in their own ability to write essays was positively related to total liking of essay writing, as well as complete agreement that essay writing facilitates understanding of subject matter; while partial agreement to understanding content through essay writing appears to be significantly related to lesser levels of confidence in and enjoyment of essay writing.

The results show that EAP instructors identified lack of sufficient teaching and learning materials, large number of students in EAP classes, and students' negative attitude towards the EAP course, as challenges that they face when teaching the course. Solutions to these challenges include the following:

- Chancellor College needs to find means of obtaining funding to acquire the necessary resources
- increase in number of staff members and employ tutors
- students should be made aware of the significance of the EAP course at an early stage

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **DISCUSSION**

#### **5.1 Introduction**

This chapter presents a detailed discussion of the findings described in chapter four. Each of the four research questions posed in chapter one will be discussed in relation to the findings and previous relevant literature. The first section (Section 5.2) discusses students' writing behaviour in terms of the strategies that they used when writing their essays. The challenges that the students faced during the writing process and their proposed solutions are discussed in Section 5.3. Possible contributing factors to the students' perception of essay writing are presented in the third section. The final section is a brief summary of the chapter.

#### **5.2 Essay writing strategies**

The first research question examined several writing strategies that students employed when writing their last essay. The findings concerning the students' strategies are discussed in Sections 5.2.1 to 5.2.4.

##### **5.2.1 Source information use**

In terms of number of sources used, results show that the majority of students used less than six source materials, and that books were the most frequently used (see Figure 3). Although the number and type of source texts used may have depended on the nature of assigned writing tasks, several other reasons could also account for this behaviour. The most plausible reason could be scarcity or unavailability of resources. It is possible that due to this problem, which was mentioned by both students and EAP instructors; many students had no choice but to use fewer source materials, as well as relying a great deal on books.

Another reason could be lack of easy access to computers. These are not freely available at Chancellor College for the large number of students. In addition, access to these

computers is not free of charge. Thus, insufficient computer access and costly charges usually limit students' access to online resources. However, even if students had easy access to internet, they would not be able to use such resources as electronic journals since Chancellor College does not subscribe to these resources. This may mean that students use outdated text materials since, as also indicated by students and instructors, most of the books which are available are not recent editions.

Lack of awareness of the importance of referring to a good number and various types of source materials when writing an academic paper, may also account for this behaviour. Related to lack of awareness could be students' overdependence on the few text materials prescribed by their instructors, and lack of desire to search for other texts beside the prescribed ones. However, this is not surprising considering that during the first year of university education many students are not yet familiar with the use of source texts in their writing (see Section 2.4.1.5). This may be attributed to the fact that at secondary school, students are not usually required to incorporate source texts in their writing.

Finally, it is possible that the students did not have enough time to consult many source materials. For instance, students might have delayed writing their essay until the date of submission was close, thus failing to do thorough research of their topic. This claim supports Fukao and Fujii's (2001) observation that students' lack of time management has a negative impact on the quality of their work in terms of number of source text material used.

### **5.2.2 Revision**

The results indicate that the majority of students revised their work and that many of them regarded correcting spelling mistakes, checking essay readability, and improving organization of ideas as very important when revising (see Section 4.2.2.5). Three possibilities may account for the students' primary concern with these aspects. Firstly, students may not have been aware that there are several levels at which revision occurs (see Section 2.4.1.1). Thus, they may have conceptualized the process of revising as mainly involving correcting spelling errors. This may have stemmed from students' confusion between the processes of editing and revision. It is also possible that students

focused on correcting spelling errors since it is easier to identify and rectify spelling errors as they are more noticeable. This claim seems to agree with Yasuda's (2005) observation that there is a relationship between students' conception of revising and their particular revision acts.

Finally, it is possible that students considered checking essay readability as an important aspect of revision due to their instructors' emphasis on this aspect when teaching writing. Although the concept of readability was not defined in the questionnaire, there is a possibility that some students perceived the concept as referring to the legibility of their writing. This may be the case because, as mentioned earlier, students do not usually have easy access to computers; as a result, many of them do not present their work in typed form. Hence, handwriting which can be easily read may have been the focus of some students when revising, probably to avoid being penalized by their instructors who usually demand legible handwriting.

However, it is interesting that 59% of the students did not consider 'improving content' as one of the very important reasons for revising their essay. A possible explanation for this could be students' reluctance to introduce changes in the content of their essay which often requires more time and effort. This finding appears to be consistent with that of Mahfoudhi (2003) and Kamimura (2000) who, in their studies, observed that students focused more on making changes to grammar, spelling, and capitalization, than on making substantial changes to their drafts. Another reason could be that students find it difficult to refine the content due to lack of English proficiency as it is the second language of most students. Students' inadequate command of English was also indicated by one instructor.

The results also indicate that although most students reported that they revised their work, half of them did not elicit help from others when revising. Several reasons could explain why this was the case. It could be that the students' lack of awareness of the benefits of peer or teacher feedback on revising prevented them from involving fellow students or lecturers during the revision process (see also Min, 2006; Krause, 2001; Berg, 1999; and Jacobs et al. 1998 on the impact of peer feedback on the quality of students' revising

process). It is also possible that some students were afraid that fellow students would 'steal' their ideas and score more highly in the assignment at their expense. In addition, some students may have been afraid that fellow students would copy their work and they might be penalized by their lecturers for submitting the same work. This behaviour may arise out of students' over concern with grades and the competitive nature of academic writing typical at the undergraduate level. Lack of time to have their work read, commented on, and make appropriate changes before the submission date, may have also prevented some students from eliciting feedback when revising.

However, for those who sought help when revising their work, it is interesting to see that very few students involved their instructors. On the surface, this appears to be in sharp contrast to what Miao et al. (2006) and Paulus (1999) found in their studies, that many students prefer teacher feedback than peer feedback. Nevertheless, it is possible that many students would have liked to receive feedback from their instructors, but several reasons may have prevented them from doing so. These reasons include the unavailability of teacher feedback due to instructors' lack of time and unwillingness to provide feedback because of large class sizes. Failure to provide students with feedback due to large class sizes was alluded to as one of the challenges that the instructors experience when teaching the EAP course.

Another reason could be students' fear of having their work evaluated by the instructors. As observed by Lee (2001), Johanson (2001), and Cheng et al. (1999), fear of negative criticisms from instructors may have a negative impact on students' writing process. In addition, lack of rapport between the students and their instructors may have also made them anxious about approaching the instructors for feedback.

These reasons may have encouraged the students to obtain feedback from their peers even though some of them might have been aware that dependence on peer feedback may be risky (Miao et al. 2006; Zhang, 1995), considering that students at Chancellor College are not trained peer reviewers and that the vast majority of students are second language speakers. As also observed by Krause (2001) and Jacobs et al. (1998), some of the

students may have preferred peer feedback because of the emotional support which comes with it.

#### **5.2.2.1 Variations in the students' extent of obtaining feedback when revising**

Results indicate significant relationships between the process of obtaining feedback when revising and the gender of students, the two faculties, and students' level of understanding of subject matter through essay writing.

In terms of gender, it was established that more female students sought feedback than male students. Although it is quite difficult to determine the possible explanation for this tendency, two possibilities can be suggested. The difference in this behaviour could be due to the male students' wish to preserve their self-image by not letting their peers identify their writing flaws. As Zhang (1995) has observed, some students do not seek feedback from peers because they fear being ridiculed for their poor writing proficiency. It could also be that the male students were very sceptical about the reliability and validity of peer feedback.

Secondly, since a self-completion questionnaire was used to obtain the students' essay writing strategies, it is possible that some of the male students' responses do not reflect their real views. That is, they may have offered impressionistic responses in order to show that they are familiar with the revision process. This seems to confirm Petrić and Czár (2003) and Torrance et al.'s (1999) argument that responses to a self-completion questionnaire may not reveal what participants actually do, but rather their self-perception of what they think they do or what they should be doing.

The results also show that humanities students elicited feedback more than those in the social science faculty. In the absence of information on the nature of the students' essays and the elicited feedback, it is difficult to establish the precise cause of this variation. However, students' level of understanding of subject matter may have been the contributing factor. This is evident from the findings which seem to suggest that more students who felt that essay writing facilitated their understanding of content to some degree tended to elicit feedback than those who absolutely agreed to developing an understanding of content through essay writing. Thus, in the former case, the students

might have thought that feedback would increase their understanding, whereas in the latter, students may have perceived no need to increase their understanding. This could be the reason why students in the humanities sought feedback more than those in the social science faculty, in view of the fact that more social science students absolutely agreed to developing an understanding of content through essay writing in contrast to the humanities students.

### **5.2.3 Audience**

Results seem to suggest that unlike what is reported in the findings of previous studies (for example, Krause, 2001; and Cava, 1999), most of the students in this study displayed awareness of the audience of their essay (see Section 4.2.2.3). Apart from their lecturers and themselves, some students considered a hypothetical audience. This is evident in their responses which indicate that they had a wider general audience. These findings seem to emphasize the claim that audience refers to a variety of representations which can be real or imagined (Wong, 2005; Zainuddin and Moore, 2003; Vandenberg, 1995; Long, 1990).

However, since the concept of audience is not emphasized in EAP writing classes at Chancellor College, it is difficult to know if students were aware of what it means to consider one's audience at different stages of writing. Students' lack of knowledge of the expectations of their lecturers and discipline specific styles of writing (see Section 4.2.4.1) also makes it hard to imagine how they manage to take care of their audience's needs.

### **5.2.4 Planning and drafting**

Results in Section 4.2.2.2 indicate that the majority of the respondents produced a written plan prior to writing their essay. Many students used a rearranged plan which involves rearranging prepared notes into an ordered sequence; rather than an evolving plan which is continually modified even when writing is in progress. Several reasons might help to explain why this was the case. Firstly, as also observed by Cava (1999) and Torrance et al. (1999), students may have been reluctant to introduce changes into their plan once writing was underway. This could have been due to time constraints; a result of heavy

workloads or students writing their work when the deadline was close. Secondly, the type of plan that students produced may have been influenced by their conception of writing. For instance, it is possible that students did not know that the writing process is recursive, and thus plans are modified as the content and the formulation of the message are changed (Yuan and Ellis, 2003). Some students may have also thought that essay writing is about rearranging ideas obtained from source texts into an ordered sequence.

It could also be that at this stage of tertiary education, most students are not aware of the benefits of planning both prior to and during the writing process. As previous research on planning (for example, Feng, 2001; and Ellis and Yuan, 2003, 2004) reveals, both types of planning can contribute towards the production of high quality work. For instance, these studies have established that pre-planning helps writers in setting goals for the given task, generating content, and organizing ideas; while on-line planning enables them to monitor what they are writing during the writing process.

The nature of planning that students were engaged in may have affected the number of drafts they produced. Results indicate that slightly over half of the respondents did 1-2 drafts before producing the final version of their essay (see Figure 6). There is a possibility that some of the plans employed such as rearranged, basic, and extended may not have required extensive revision, hence the students did not perceive the need to do more drafts.

However, in view of the demanding nature of composing (Feng, 2001), it would have been expected that as novices in academic writing, more students would report that they produced more drafts. It is possible that time constraints prevented some students from doing more drafts. Apart from demanding more time, multiple drafting also requires a lot of effort on the writer's part; hence, it is possible that some students had negative views about this process.

Results show that more students in the humanities did more drafts than those in the social science faculty; and students who obtained feedback when revising tended to do more drafts than those who did not. One possible explanation for this trend could be that feedback prompted students to do multiple revising and thus more drafts. If this was the



case, then it is not surprising that students in the humanities did more drafts than those in the social science; given that more humanities students elicited feedback when revising than social science students (see Table 3). Thus, it is possible that feedback leads to multiple revising which results in multiple drafting.

### **5.3 Essay writing challenges**

Results on the challenges that students faced during the process of writing their last essay indicate that obtaining relevant or sufficient information was the most frequently cited challenge. This seems to confirm the observation made in previous studies (for example, Ochieng, 2005; Krause, 2001; and Fukao and Fujii, 2001) that searching the library for relevant information is a challenge for many students. However, unlike what is reported in the literature, in the present study this challenge might not entirely be attributable to lack of library research skills considering that first year undergraduates are taught library skills in the first semester (see Section 1.1). Scarcity or unavailability of relevant resources might also account for this problem. This is also reflected in the students' proposed solutions to their writing problems and EAP instructors' responses to the challenges which they face when teaching the EAP course (see Sections 4.2.4.5; 4.3.1.1 respectively).

Other challenges, also identified in the earlier studies (Keck, 2006; Lin, 2005; Stapleton, 2003; Hyland, 2001), such as inability to express ideas clearly or logically, paraphrasing or summarizing information from source texts, and writing well-linked (coherent) paragraphs, may be due to students' inadequate command of English. This is because even though students are required to communicate in English, it is not the first language for the majority. This finding lends support to observations made by Evans and Green (2007), Mahfoudhi (2003), Fukao and Fujii (2001), and Leki and Carson (1997, 1994) that lack of appropriate vocabulary, both general and technical, makes it more difficult for L2 students to communicate ideas appropriately and accurately. Students' lack of adequate command of English was also identified as a challenge by one of the EAP instructors.

Students might have also found paraphrasing or summarizing information from source texts difficult because they are novices in academic writing (see Section 4.2.3). This seems to be in agreement with Pecorari (2003) and Locastro and Masuko's (2002) observation that integration of source texts into their writing is a challenging task for many L2 students and in particular undergraduates. Considering that source text integration skills develop over a longer period of time through essay writing practice, it is difficult to imagine how the students would develop these skills without regular essay writing practice.

As shown in Figure 9, a good number of students also reported finding it difficult to use the required academic writing style. This might have been a challenge because of lack of discipline-specific training in essay writing as evident in the students' proposed solutions to their writing problems and as also observed in previous studies (see Sections 4.2.4.2; 2.4.2.3 respectively). Since these students were new in the university, most of them might not have been familiar with the required academic writing style and the generic requirement of their discipline, which are usually different from that used at secondary school. It is also possible that students were not yet familiar with the generic writing requirements of their disciplines. This is because, despite the claim that the EAP course offered to these students is designed to address language problems of specific subject areas, this is not the case. These students are normally taught general writing skills and are expected to transfer these skills to their respective disciplines.

However, as evident in Section 4.2.4.2, some students seem confused by the conflicting writing requirements across disciplines and those preferred by individual instructors. In agreement with literature, this is because the students are not clear on these requirements which are usually not made explicit enough by both EAP and subject instructors. This confusion may be worse for students who take a course outside their discipline area, as they may lack awareness of the specific writing conventions in the other discipline. The students' confusion seems to fully support Lea and Street's (2000, 1998) argument that although students may acquire general skills of writing, they may still find problems applying this knowledge when writing in different disciplines.

Although, as suggested by some students, this problem may be alleviated by providing students with discipline specific instruction in writing, there are a number of challenges which may prevent this from happening. First, the heterogeneous nature of EAP classes at Chancellor College, whereby students belong to the same faculty but study subjects in different disciplines, may make it difficult to teach the essay writing requirements of each field of study in the same EAP class. It is also difficult for content instructors to teach specific discipline essay writing requirements because they are more concerned about teaching their content rather than appropriate ways of writing in their respective fields. This was alluded to in the EAP instructors' responses that content instructors are reluctant to assess students' use of language, and that even if they were willing to do so, some may not be competent enough in the English language. In addition, as Hyland (2006, 2002a) has argued, content instructors may not be in a better position to teach disciplinary literacy skills as they lack the expertise to teach EAP courses.

From the students' evaluation of their writing challenges, it is interesting that revising was the least challenging to many students taking into consideration that previous studies (such as Min, 2006; Mahfoudhi, 2003; Kamimura, 2000; and Berg, 1999) have found that many students, especially undergraduates, find the process of revising difficult. There is a possibility that in the present study, students perceived the process of revising as mainly involving a final re-reading of their essay to check for and correct surface errors, hence finding the process easier. This is quite evident in their evaluation of importance of reasons for revising their essay, where most students regarded correcting spelling mistakes as very important (see Figure 7). Since in the questionnaire the definition of revising was not provided, it is possible that students confused the process of revising with editing.

Contrary to findings of other studies (for example, Fukao and Fujii, 2001; and Mahalski, 1992) that students found it challenging to cite their references properly, a good number of students in this study did not regard referencing and writing bibliographies difficult. This outcome is inconsistent with the students' suggestion to have more and timely instruction in referencing conventions and writing bibliographies. In their proposed solutions to the writing challenges that they experienced, students indicated the need for

EAP instructors to emphasize referencing and writing bibliographies when teaching; implying that they find these essay writing aspects challenging. This discrepancy may be attributed to students' limited memory (Bryman, 2004). Since they were asked to evaluate various essay writing aspects on a rating scale, some of the students may have failed to recall the exact level of difficulty they experienced with some of these aspects.

Overall, it is possible that the essay writing challenges that these students faced are at least in part due to lack of timely training in essay writing. As shown in their proposed solutions (see Section 4.2.4.4), the students wrote essays before they were taught most of the essay writing techniques (see Section 1.1 for the chronology of the EAP curriculum). In view of lack of proper instruction in essay writing prior to writing their essays, it is not surprising that the students faced these challenges. This is because academic writing is complex (see Section 2.2.1), and without proper training in writing, students, especially if they are not L1 speakers, are likely to encounter difficulties.

As also observed in the previous studies (Ochieng, 2005; Petrić and Czár1, 2003; Fukao and Fujii, 2001; and Gillette, 1994), some of the challenges, such as failure to produce multiple drafts and elicit feedback when revising, may be attributed to students' inability to allow adequate time for the essay writing process. In addition, lack of knowledge in the writing requirements expected in various disciplines and preferred by different instructors may have aggravated the students' writing challenges. This seems to confirm the view that the academic culture of the university contributes to the writing challenges that first year undergraduates encounter, since most students are not fully aware of the nature of academic writing and its demands at the beginning of their university studies (Evans and Green, 2007; Krause, 2001; Barker, 2000). Apart from lack of knowledge of the genres of specific disciplines, some key issues around essay writing such as audience, planning, drafting, and revising are not emphasized in the EAP classes. Thus, students may not be very familiar with these aspects.

The students' challenges appear to emphasize the need for EAP courses to facilitate students' integration into academic discourses during their transition from secondary

school to tertiary education (Ezer and Sivan, 2005; Harklau, 2003; Hyland and Hamp-Lyons, 2002).

#### **5.4 Possible factors influencing students' perception of essay writing**

With the exception of a few, many students seem to have enjoyed essay writing despite experiencing such challenges as unavailability of relevant and adequate resources, lack of proper training in essay writing, and lack of knowledge of their instructors' expectations (see Figure 11). With these challenges, it would have also been expected that students would report experiencing low levels of confidence. Instead, as evident in Figure 12, most students indicated that they were confident or expressed neutrality. Although it is quite difficult to establish the reason for this trend due to insufficient data on this issue, these results might be attributed to central tendency and extremity biases which are common with rating scales of a questionnaire (Cohen et al. 2000; Tashakkori and Teddlie, 1998).

Although few students appear to have an unfavourable attitude towards essay writing, it is still significant to identify some of the factors which may have contributed to this negative attitude. Firstly, it is possible that the negative attitude stems from students' overall dislike of the EAP course. As pointed out by the EAP instructors (see Section 4.3.1.3), many students come to the EAP course with poor attitudes mainly because of the long-standing belief that the course is all about learning English grammar which makes students feel that it is not very significant as they had been taught grammar in secondary school. Since the course is obligatory, many students probably attend the EAP classes just to fulfil the requirement. Thus, as the EAP instructors observed, some students lack motivation to learn since they do not realise sufficiently early the importance of the course for their studies. However, lack of interest in the course may also be due to the students' feeling that the course does not provide them with skills that they will need for their respective jobs after graduating. Since the students are offered general writing skills rather than skills specific to their discipline, some students probably think that the course fails to address their specific academic needs.

Secondly, as also pointed out in the literature (for example, Nampota and Thompson, 2007; Evans and Green, 2007; Harklau, 2003), unfamiliarity with academic writing at university may have contributed to their poor attitude. Considering that the students had just made a transition from secondary school to tertiary education, they may have experienced some writing aspects, such as use of source texts, for the first time. Therefore, it is possible that some students found these aspects difficult to comprehend, and hence disliked essay writing.

Finally, the students' education background may have influenced their negative attitude towards essay writing. At that early stage of tertiary education, most students tend to compare the learning style at university with that of secondary school, and some students tend to get frustrated when they are confronted with wholly new learning situations, such as instructors' ways of teaching writing. Students also get frustrated when they receive grades that they were not expecting, especially considering that at secondary school most of these students were performing excellently (see Section 1.1 for admission requirements of the University of Malawi). The result is that some students lose interest in learning academic writing as well as the writing process during this transition period.

Results indicate that the students differed in their attitude towards essay writing. For instance, more male students enjoyed essay writing to a greater extent than female students (see Table 4). It is difficult to provide possible reasons why this was the case, as this is an area which needs further research. A possible explanation could be that the male students exaggerated their responses due to their wish to present a favourable response.

The nature of students' perception of academic writing is also evident in their evaluation of understanding of subject matter attained through essay writing. Results indicated that students generally agreed that essay writing facilitated their understanding of subject matter. However, in view of unavailability of source texts which could facilitate their understanding of what they are writing about, it is difficult to envisage students learning fully from the essay writing process. As shown in the previous literature (for example, Ellis et al. 2005; Ellis, 2004; Bacha, 2002), the writing process can help students acquire

content knowledge; and through the use of source texts, they can develop such cognitive skills as synthesis, evaluation, and summarizing.

### **5.5 Summary**

Based on the findings of this study, it can be argued that challenges experienced during the writing process may have a big impact on how students view academic writing as well as how they approach writing tasks. Therefore, while some authors like Ching, 2002; Cheng 2002; and Johanson, 2001 have asserted that self-efficacy beliefs affect students' approach to writing; it can also be claimed that writing challenges may also have an effect on students' self-efficacy beliefs and approach to writing.

This study supports the claim that students' lack of knowledge of the nature of academic writing at university due to lack of instruction or instructors' lack of clarity in explaining writing requirements, may be the main contributing factor to the students' essay writing approaches. This may also account for the challenges that students faced during the writing process.

The results of this study emphasise the usefulness of the self-completion questionnaire for investigating students' writing process, especially when used with a large number of participants. In this case, the questionnaire has proved useful in providing insights into general tendencies of the students' writing behaviour.

## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **CONCLUSION**

#### **6.1 Introduction**

This chapter presents pedagogical implications of this study for instructors and Chancellor College as an institution. Implications for research on L2 academic writing are also provided. This is followed by limitations of the present study. The final section presents recommendations for further research.

#### **6.2 Pedagogical implications**

The findings of this study have confirmed that essay writing is challenging to first year undergraduates partly due to lack of thorough and timely training in essay writing. Thus, it would benefit the students if essay writing instruction was better timed, probably at the beginning of the first semester and before students are assigned any essay writing tasks. As suggested by the students, it might help if the EAP course outline was restructured so that several communication skills are taught at the same time. For instance, instead of teaching reading and writing skills separately, these could be combined in order for students to acquire both at the same time and acquire some awareness of different genres. This has the advantage of minimizing the current problem where reading skills are taught in semester one and essay writing in the following semester. It could also facilitate students' understanding that reading from source texts is integral to the writing process.

From the findings of this study, it appears that some students may not be very familiar with some essay writing aspects, namely, peer or teacher feedback and audience. Therefore, it would prove useful to students if these were incorporated into the EAP curriculum. This means, for instance, training students to become peer reviewers and encourage them to elicit both teacher and peer feedback during the essay writing process. This has also the advantage of minimizing negative attitudes that students may have towards asking for feedback from their peers or teachers. At the same time, peer feedback



would complement teacher feedback which is usually not available due to instructors' lack of time or unwillingness to provide feedback. Most instructors' inability or reluctance to provide feedback is partly because of heavy workload, a result of large class sizes. Thus, during the writing process, instructors do not usually have time to attend to students' concerns related to their work and provide them with the needed feedback. Rather, most instructors only offer feedback on the final product. However, this feedback is generally not extensive as the instructors have a large number of papers to mark.

As regards audience, students' familiarity with the concept could be enhanced through providing them with model essays written in different disciplines, so that they become more aware of how other writers take care of the needs of their audience and fulfil generic expectations. However, caution needs to be exercised to make sure that students do not regard the essay models as the only correct way of writing. Students could also be provided with the instructors' assessment criteria, which is not currently the norm, so that they become aware of what is expected of them. In addition, students could be encouraged to involve peers when revising their work. As Richards and Miller (2005) have observed, peer reviewers could act as the students' audience and help them identify areas in their writing which need improvement.

The findings have also confirmed the view that there is a gap between students and their instructors with regard to knowledge of essay writing requirements in various disciplines. Thus, it is not only vital to familiarize students with basic writing skills but also writing skills specific to their disciplines. Nevertheless, bearing in mind the difficulties of teaching discipline specific writing skills in EAP courses (see Section 2.2.2.1), two options could be considered. With the availability of resources and enough teaching personnel, the first option would be to extend the EAP course up to the third year so that discipline specific skills are covered in the second and third years. The other option would be to have smaller classes so that students are taught writing skills specific to their fields of study. In addition, to ensure that students are aware of the instructors' and disciplines' essay writing requirements, they should be provided with assessment criteria for the writing tasks so that they know what exactly is expected from them.

Because in the present study time management problems are inferred from the students' essay writing strategies, it appears that there is need to equip students with time management skills. Since the teaching of time management is not the responsibility of EAP instructors and not in the EAP curriculum, it might help if EAP instructors emphasized the recursive nature of essay writing when teaching. That is, students should be made aware that essay writing is a process with different stages and hence requires enough time.

While acknowledging that Chancellor College, as is the case with other constituent colleges of the University of Malawi, experiences financial difficulties, it is still the responsibility of both the institution and the LAN department to make sure that adequate, relevant, and recent source texts are readily available to students. One possible solution could be for the College to subscribe to some electronic journals and ensure that access to internet is not costly. This could help students to have access to recent information in their respective disciplines. It might also enable students to do their writing tasks more efficiently.

Although the results of this study show that few students had a negative attitude towards essay writing, there is still a need to motivate students so that they can develop interest in essay writing and academic writing in general. This may involve helping students to minimize the frustration that comes with the essay writing process by encouraging them to discuss their challenges with, and seek help from, peers or instructors.

As indicated in the EAP instructors' responses, students also seem to be disinterested in the EAP course. Considering that the unfavourable attitude towards the course may have a negative impact on their learning of academic writing and consequently their writing process, it is important to start addressing this problem. Students should be well informed about the nature of the course and its relevance to their studies before they are misinformed by their peers, especially those in upper years. The long-standing belief among students that the EAP course is about learning such general skills as grammar, which they believe are very familiar with, makes most students think that the course is not very useful to their academic needs. Thus, due to lack of sufficient information about

the course, most first year students are made to believe by their peers that the course is not relevant to their studies. Therefore, making the course more applicable to their specific discipline needs would help students appreciate the significance of the course to their studying of content courses in their respective fields of study. It would also help if discipline lecturers supported the course by emphasizing its significance to their disciplines.

Overall, as one way of addressing some of the challenges that the students face in the process of writing their essays, students should be provided with an avenue of communicating the challenges to their instructors. Appraisal forms could be used. This could also enable students to evaluate what they are taught as well as how the essay writing process is taught. The students' feedback may help instructors to learn what improvement needs to be made in order to facilitate students' learning.

### **6.3 Implications for research on L2 academic writing**

Context is an important aspect of L2 writing research. This is because the context in which students' writing takes place has impact on research findings. For instance, in the present study, lack of adequate resources, lack of timely essay writing instruction, large EAP classes, and inadequate staffing, are some of the contextual aspects which may have influenced the responses of participants. These are also some of the factors which make the findings of this study differ from the results of similar research conducted elsewhere.

### **6.4 Limitations**

The present study is limited in terms of the timing of the students' completion of the questionnaire. That is, the results reflect students' experience of essay writing before they had instruction in essay writing. Thus, their essay writing challenges, strategies employed when writing essays, and their perceptions of the essay writing process might have been affected by this lack of instruction in essay writing. Therefore, the conclusions drawn from this study reflect only their academic writing experience at a particular point in time; in this case, towards the end of the first semester.

Since the study involved students from humanities and social science faculties, it means that the study is also limited by the conclusions drawn from the findings, which reflect

views of students in the two faculties. Therefore, although the findings may be generalized to the entire first year undergraduates population at Chancellor College and similar colleges, the results may only be pertinent to the students under consideration.

Finally, the findings are limited by the inherent limitations of the self-completion questionnaire, which include the possibility of respondents offering responses that they think are desired.

### **6.5 Suggestions for further research**

Since the findings of this study are partly based on students' essay writing experience prior to receiving thorough training in essay writing, it would be interesting to examine student perceptions once they had completed the course. Thus, further research in this area should be conducted towards the end of the academic year.

Although the present study has managed to provide insight into the perceptions of the essay writing process of first year humanities and social science students, further research could also involve students in the science faculty. This would help to obtain a complete picture of first year undergraduates' essay writing behaviour at Chancellor College.

In the present study it has been discovered that more students in the humanities sought feedback when revising their essay than those in the social science faculty; and that more students in social science totally agreed that they acquired understanding of content through essay writing than those in the humanities. Additional research is needed to gain a deeper understanding of these differences. This may require employing other data collection instruments such as in-depth interviews.

The study has also established the need for research on L2 undergraduates' academic writing to take into consideration students' academic background. This may facilitate a better understanding of their writing behaviour. It may also provide explanations for students' attitudes towards academic writing in general and the challenges they face.

This study has provided an overview of first year undergraduates' perspectives on the essay writing process at a Malawian university. The findings suggest a lack of dialogue between the students and their EAP lecturers as well as discipline lecturers. This is

evident, for instance, in students' lack of awareness of the nature of the writing demands of their instructors and disciplines; students' desire to have timely essay writing instruction; and their instructors' concerns about students' negative attitude towards the EAP course. Further research should consider exploring ways in which dialogue can be facilitated between these parties.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix 1

# Participant Information Sheet



(Student)

**Date Information Sheet Produced:** 19 March 2007

**Project Title:** The perceptions of a group of first year undergraduate Malawian students of the essay writing process.

#### **An Invitation**

I am Chimwemwe Patricia Kalikokha, a student at Auckland University of Technology (New Zealand). The study that I am doing is in partial fulfilment of my Master degree in Applied Language Studies. I am interested in finding out how first year undergraduates at Chancellor College write their academic essay. In particular, I am interested in finding out essay writing difficulties that first year students face, what students think are the solutions to their essay writing difficulties, students' way of understanding essay writing, and strategies that students use when writing essays, as well as their EAP (LAN) lecturers' views on these issues.

This study will give you an opportunity to express the essay writing problems that you face. Knowledge of the problems that you face will enable Language and Communication (LAN) lecturers to consider these problems when teaching essay writing and find other ways of helping you overcome your writing problems. Your answers on how you write your essays will also help your LAN lecturers to think carefully about

whether or not what they teach first year undergraduates help them to deal with essay writing demands at university level. Therefore, you are being requested to take part in the study as your knowledge in essay writing will be of great value to this study. Participation in this study involves answering a questionnaire. However, **participation is entirely voluntary and you will not be disadvantaged in any way for choosing not to answer the questionnaire.**

The questionnaire contains a number of questions related to essay writing in general, and the last essay that you wrote, in particular. After understanding what this study is about, and if you are willing to participate in this study, you are requested to answer the questions in the questionnaire. **Please note that by filling in the questionnaire you are giving consent to take part in the research.**

Be assured that there is no risk to you in taking part in this study, and no cost on your part other than the time (about 30 - 45 minutes) required for you to read the research information, ask questions related to the questionnaire, and complete the questionnaire. You are free to choose not to answer those questions that you do not feel like answering. You are also free to ask a member of staff administering the questionnaire any questions concerning the questionnaire.

If you agree to take part in this study, you need to know that it will not be possible for anyone to identify you in the reporting of the findings. Be assured that no member of staff at Chancellor College will have the right to read your answers. Your answers to the individual questionnaires will be seen only by me, my supervisors and a data entry assistant. I will not know who you are (NOTE: **Please DO NOT write your name on the questionnaire**).

I will send a copy of a summary of major findings of the study to the Department of Language and Communication (LAN). You will be told about the arrival of the report by members of staff (LAN). If you wish to see and comment on the findings of the study, you will be welcome to do so.

If you have any concerns regarding the nature of this study, please notify first either Mr. Kankuzi (Head of LAN Department) or my project supervisor, Pat Strauss. If you have been disturbed by the questionnaire, please notify any member of LAN Department for help. Concerns you have regarding the way the research has been done should be

notified to the Executive Secretary, Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee, Madeline Banda, [madeline.banda@aut.ac.nz](mailto:madeline.banda@aut.ac.nz), (+64) 9 921 9999 ext 8044.

Thank you very much for your time and help in making this study possible.

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Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC) on 15 May 2007 AUTEC reference number 07/39.

## Appendix 2



### PROTOCOL FOR ADMINISTERING STUDENTS' QUESTIONNAIRE

The following are guidelines for administering the questionnaire to students. Please read the guidelines prior to administering the questionnaire.

#### GUIDELINES

1. The questionnaire is to be administered at the beginning of a LAN class. **Please do not administer the questionnaire to the students who are currently registered in LAN courses that you are teaching and for whom you have grading responsibilities.**
2. The researcher (Chimwemwe Patricia Kalikokha) will be introduced to students as a member of Language and Communication Department, studying for a Master degree in Applied Language Studies at Auckland University of Technology (New Zealand)
3. The students will be informed that the researcher is conducting a study, which is a contribution towards her completion of the above mentioned degree
4. The students will then be informed that the researcher would like them to be part of the study
5. At this point, both the research information sheet and questionnaire are to be distributed to all the students
6. The students will be given an opportunity to read both the information sheet and questionnaire, and ask questions related to the questionnaire
7. At this point, **students are to be informed very clearly that participation is entirely voluntary, and that they will not be disadvantaged in any way should they decide not to participate. Students should also be informed that if they feel disturbed by the questionnaire, they can seek help from any member of staff in the LAN Department.** Those willing to participate will be informed to proceed answering the questionnaire.

8. After students have finished answering the questions, all questionnaires (both answered and unanswered) are to be collected and sealed in envelopes in the presence of students (Please do not label the envelopes with course names, such as LAN 140).
9. After all sealed envelopes with the questionnaires have been collected, the envelopes will be sent to the researcher through the safest means to the address provided (5F/2 Wellesley Student Apartments, 8 Mount Street, Auckland, New Zealand).

**Thank you very much for your time and help in making this study possible.**

## Appendix 3



### **The perceptions of a group of first year undergraduate Malawian students of the essay writing process.**

This questionnaire contains a number of multiple choice and short – answer questions. Some questions refer to your last essay, and others refer to essay writing in general. Please read the questions and choose appropriate answers for each question. Some questions ask you to write in the blank spaces, while others ask you to insert a tick or a circle in the appropriate boxes.

**PLEASE NOTE:** Filling in this questionnaire means that you are willing to participate in this study.

#### **PERSONAL DETAILS**

1) Age: \_\_\_\_\_

2) Faculty: \_\_\_\_\_

3) Gender: Male  Female

- 4) **What language do you speak at home?** Chichewa
- Chitumbuka
- Chilomwe
- English
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

**Questions (5) to (19) refer to your last essay**

5) **In your last essay, how many sources (e.g. books, journals) did you use?**

- 0
- 1 - 5
- 6 - 10
- 11 -15
- More than 15

6) **In your last essay, if you did use any source (s), what kind of source(s) did you use?**

- Lecture notes
- Other students' essays on a similar topic
- Books
- Journals
- Web/internet resources/ information

Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

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7) **In your last essay, did you make a rough plan before starting to write?**

Yes  No

8) **If your answer to question 7 was yes, what type of plan did you make?**

- A mental plan (i.e. a plan in your head with nothing written down)
- A basic plan (i.e. plan a beginning, middle, end, and main parts)
- An extended plan (i.e. main points written down and numbered for reference to a more detailed text)
- A rearranged plan (i.e. notes prepared and then rearranged into an ordered sequence)
- An evolving plan (i.e. a plan that is continually being modified/changed as you are writing your essay)

Other (please explain) \_\_\_\_\_

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9) **In your last essay, did you have an audience (readers of your essay) in mind when writing?**

Yes  No

10) **If your answer to question 9 was yes, which audience did you have in mind?**

- Yourself
- Your lecturer
- A wider general audience (e.g. students in your class, students in other years)

**Continued on next page...**

Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**11) In your last essay, how many drafts did you do?**

0

1 - 2

3 - 4

More than 5

**12) In your last essay, did you revise (e.g. read your essay to correct spelling/grammar/punctuation mistakes, etc.) before handing in for marking?**

Yes  No

13) If your answer to question 12 was yes, how important were the following when revising your last essay? ‘Very important’ is represented by 1, ‘Quite important’ by 2, and ‘Not important at all’ by 3. Please tick or circle the appropriate number

How important were the following when revising:	Very important 1	Quite important 2	Not important at all 3
1. Correcting spelling/grammar/punctuation Mistakes	1	2	3
2. Making changes in sentence/essay Structure	1	2	3
3. Reducing/increasing word length	1	2	3
4. Removing/adding ideas	1	2	3
5. Improving organization of ideas	1	2	3
6. Improving content/making changes in the content or ideas	1	2	3
7. Improving links between ideas	1	2	3
8. Checking readability of essay	1	2	3

14) Did you have others to help you revise (e.g. read your essay to check spelling/grammar/punctuation mistakes, etc.) your last essay before handing in for marking?

Yes  No

**15) If your answer to question 14 was yes, who else helped you revise your last essay?**

Fellow first year students

Students in other years

Your lecturer(s)

Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

16) To what extent do you think you learnt the following through writing your last essay? ‘Absolutely yes’ is represented by 1, ‘Somewhat/to some extent’ by 2, and ‘Not at all’ by 3. Please tick or circle the appropriate number.

What did you learn through writing your last essay	Absolutely yes  1	Somewhat/to some extent  2	Not at all  3
1. Proper referencing	1	2	3
2. Organizing/structuring ideas	1	2	3
3. Using appropriate academic language	1	2	3
4. Engaging/interacting with content/subject  Matter	1	2	3
5. Develop understanding of content/subject matter	1	2	3

17) To what extent do you consider the following as the purpose of your last essay? ‘Absolutely yes’ is represented by 1, ‘Somewhat/to some extent’ by 2, and ‘Not at all’ by 3. Please tick or circle the appropriate number.

The purpose of your last essay was:	Absolutely yes  1	Somewhat/to some extent  2	Not at all  3
1. To summarize the available literature (information on a particular topic)	1	2	3
2. To summarize the available literature and add your own comments/criticisms	1	2	3
3. To use literature in order to generate your own comments, ideas or response to the topic in general	1	2	3

18) **In your last essay**, how difficult did you find the following? ‘Very difficult’ is represented by 1, ‘Quite difficult’ by 2, and ‘Not difficult at all’ by 3. Please tick or circle the appropriate number

<b>How difficult did you find the following:</b>	<b>Very difficult</b>	<b>Quite difficult</b>	<b>Not difficult at all</b>
	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>
1. Understanding essay question	1	2	3
2. Finding sufficient/relevant information	1	2	3
3. Writing introduction	1	2	3
4. Writing main body	1	2	3
5. Writing conclusion	1	2	3
6. Paraphrasing/ summarizing other authors' ideas	1	2	3
7. Expressing ideas clearly/logically	1	2	3
8. Writing well linked (coherent) Paragraphs	1	2	3
9. Using appropriate academic writing Style	1	2	3
10. Revising	1	2	3
11. Referencing and writing bibliography	1	2	3

**19) What kind of support would help you overcome the essay writing problems that you had when writing your last essay? You have a choice to answer this question in English or Chichewa.**

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**Questions (20) to (23) refer to your essay writing in general**

**20) Do you enjoy writing essays? Please tick or circle the appropriate box.**

I enjoy writing essays very much	I enjoy writing essays	I don't mind one way or the other	I don't really like writing essays	I really dislike writing essays
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**21) How confident are you in essay writing? Please tick or circle the appropriate box.**

Very confident	Confident	Neutral	Not very confident	Not confident at all
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**22) To what extent does essay writing help you understand the content (subject matter) of what you are writing? Please tick or circle the appropriate box.**

Absolutely yes	Somewhat/to some extent	Not at all
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**23) The following are some common mistakes that students make when answering essay questions. Please indicate how serious you think the mistakes are. ‘Very serious’ is represented by 1, ‘Quite serious’ by 2, and ‘Not serious at all’ by 3. Please tick or circle the appropriate number**

<b>Some common mistakes that students make when answering essay questions</b>	<b>Very serious 1</b>	<b>Quite serious 2</b>	<b>Not serious at all 3</b>
1. Plagiarizing (using someone’s ideas without saying so)	1	2	3
2. Improper referencing format	1	2	3
3. Little or no use of references	1	2	3
4. Not sticking to word length	1	2	3
5. Poor essay organization (no introduction, main body, and conclusion)	1	2	3
6. No evidence of research	1	2	3
7. No links between ideas	1	2	3
8. Not developing an argument	1	2	3
9. Unreadable handwriting	1	2	3

**Thank you for your help.**

## Appendix 4

# Participant Information Sheet



**(Instructor)**

**Date Information Sheet Produced:** 26 July 2007

**Project Title:** The perceptions of a group of first year undergraduate Malawian students of the essay writing process.

### **An Invitation**

I am Chimwemwe Patricia Kalikokha, a student at Auckland University of Technology (New Zealand). The study that I am doing is in partial fulfilment of my Master degree in Applied Language Studies. I am also interested in publishing my research in refereed journals. I am interested in investigating the essay writing process of first year undergraduates at Chancellor College. In particular, I am interested in finding out essay writing difficulties that first year students face, what students think are the solutions to their essay writing difficulties, students' way of understanding essay writing, and strategies that students use when writing essays, as well as their EAP lecturers' views on these issues.

As one of the EAP instructors at the College your views will contribute towards understanding of the students' essay writing needs. I will be asking you two open-ended questions related to the teaching of LAN. These questions are mainly based on student responses to a questionnaire on academic writing issues that was administered to them during the first semester. Your views on the challenges that you face in teaching LAN will help Chancellor College administrators to gain insight into the challenges that affect

your teaching of LAN. In addition, your thoughts on what can be done to improve the teaching of LAN will contribute towards helping students acquire such communication skills as writing, effectively. Therefore, you are being requested to take part in the study as your knowledge in the teaching of LAN will be of great value to this study. **However, participation is entirely voluntary and if you decide not to participate you will not be disadvantaged in any way.**

After understanding what this study is about, and if you are willing to participate in this study, you are requested to sign the consent form and respond to the questions at your earliest convenience. However it would be appreciated if you could return your responses within 30 days. It is very difficult to estimate how much time you will spend on answering the questions as this depends on the length of your responses. There is no cost to you other than time.

Although you will not be asked to supply your name or any material that could identify you, please be advised that I may be able to recognize your individual views on issues raised in the questions as there are currently only 4 EAP instructors at the college. However, be assured that I am more interested in identifying trends and themes and not concentrating on individual perspectives. It is of course possible that a third person might recognize certain points of view or concerns that are discussed. However all attempts will be made to keep your identity confidential. You are also assured that the study is not meant to embarrass you in any way or point out your teaching flaws. Your individual responses will be seen only by me and my supervisors. You are, of course, free to choose not to answer any question that you do not wish to answer.

I will send a copy of a summary of major findings of the study to the Department of Language and Communication (LAN). If you wish to see and comment on the findings of the study, you will be welcome to do so.

If you have any concerns regarding the nature of this study, please notify first my project supervisor, Pat Strauss. Concerns you have regarding the way the research has been done should be notified to the Executive Secretary, Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee, Madeline Banda, [madeline.banda@aut.ac.nz](mailto:madeline.banda@aut.ac.nz), (+64) 9 921 9999 ext 8044.

Thank you very much for your time and help in making this study possible.

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Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC) on 15  
May 2007

AUTEC reference number 07/39

## Appendix 5



### CONSENT TO PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH

**Title of Project:** The perceptions of a group of first year undergraduate Malawian students of the essay writing process.

**Project Supervisor:** Dr. Pat Strauss (School of Languages)

**Researcher:** Chimwemwe Patricia Kalikokha

- I have read and understood the information provided about this research project.
- I have had an opportunity to email questions and to have them answered.
- I understand that although I will not attach my name to the responses, my individual views may be recognized by the researcher. It is also possible that I may be associated with trends identified in the lecturer responses.
- I understand that, without being disadvantaged in any way, I may withdraw myself or any information that I have provided, at any time prior to completion of data collection.
- If I withdraw, I understand that all relevant information will be destroyed.
- I agree to take part in this research.

Participant's signature: .....

Participant's name: .....

Project Supervisor Contact Details:

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Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC) on 15  
May 2007

AUTEC reference number 07/39

## Appendix 6



### QUESTIONS FOR EAP INSTRUCTORS

**Please do not provide your name**

**Please answer the questions as fully as you can.**

1. What challenges do you face in teaching LAN?
2. What do you think can be done to improve the teaching of LAN?