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Evaluating academic literacy teaching at a South African university: A case study of an academic literacy programme

Abstract

The official demise of apartheid in 1994 meant that historically white universities became accessible to students from disadvantaged backgrounds. The poor English education received by these students at high school, however, made it difficult for them to read, write and think in English for academic purposes, an additional language to most of them. 20 years into democracy, this challenge still persists. South African universities have responded to this challenge by introducing academic English programmes to help the students bridge the English gap between high school and university. Most of these programmes require the funding provided by the Department of Higher Education and Training in the form of Teaching and Learning grants. Are the foundational and technical designs of these programmes focused on the teaching of academic literacy as it is conceptualized in the context of higher education in South Africa today? Are the teaching and learning methodologies employed in these programmes consistent with current trends in the teaching of English as a second language? Are these programmes managed and structured in a way that promotes the achievement of the very purpose for which they were formed? This paper presents a case study of an academic literacy programme offered at a South African university, whose aim was to generate answers to the questions raised above. The findings of the study reveal that the programme had shortcomings and that it needed to be redeveloped to ensure that it met students' generic academic literacy needs.

Keywords: academic literacy, concep   tual design, assessment practices, management, structure

1.   Introduction

Academic literacy teaching has become a priority to all South African universities in the post-apartheid period. This is a result of the general perception of low academic literacy skills among the majority of first year students by academics at these institutions. In the main, academic literacy programmes are aimed at helping these students boost their ability to read, write and think in English so that their ability to handle the demands of higher education is enhanced and their chances of ultimate success at university is ensured. It is important therefore that these programmes are qualitatively investigated for the validity of what they purport to teach. Indeed, Weideman (2013: 20) has rightly argued that like a language test, "as a technical artifact, a language course undoubtedly has to be effective or valid, consistent, differentiated, appealing, theoretically defensible, yield meaningful results, be accessible, efficient, accountable, and so forth…." This is particularly crucial in view of the fact that inevitably, universities spend substantial sums of money on academic literacy programmatic resources such as teachers, learning materials and general administration. These institutions hope to get value for the money they spend on these programmes by way of improved student graduation rates that should ultimately generate government subsidies for them. Otherwise, the financial sustainability of these universities will be threatened. The long-term financial value of academic literacy teaching notwithstanding, however, academic literacy programmes are rarely evaluated and reviewed for their compliance with sound academic literacy curricular, instructional and managerial practices.

In view of this, the present study was undertaken to provide a critical review of the Academic Literacy Programme (ALP) offered at the Central University of Technology (CUT) in Bloemfontein, South Africa. The ultimate aim was to determine the need for its improvement and raise awareness regarding the importance of such an appraisal. From the time of its introduction, the course had specifically purported to teach generic academic reading and writing in English to promote student success. To this end, the work-book for the course contained exercises that were purportedly aimed at developing these two skills.

2.   Methodology

The case study approach was used to accomplish the aims of this study. A case study is "a method used to study an individual or an institution in a unique setting or situation in as intense and as detailed a manner as possible" (Salkind, 2006: 205). In the words of Salkind (2006: 205), "it is the quality of the uniqueness" of a case under study that sets it "apart from others" and makes it a subject for investigation. Researchers (e.g. Duff, 2007; Van Lier, 2005) have, according to Dörnyei (2007), provided adequate evidence of the high influence the case study method has had in applied linguistics and second language research. In these fields, participants in case studies have included, among others, infants, children in monolingual and bilingual homes/schools, minority students and adults learning an additional language or losing an existing language (Dörnyei,

2007). Some of the issues dealt with in these studies include child language acquisition, bilingualism, language loss, pragmatic development, fossilization, biculturalism and language socialization (Dörnyei, 2007). Although case studies mainly focus on people, they can also be used to investigate families, schools, gangs, social organizations, programmes or communities (Salkind, 2006; Dörnyei, 2007). "In fact, almost anything can serve as a case as long as it constitutes a single entity with clearly defined boundaries" (Dörnyei, 2007: 151). For the purpose of the present case study, the focus was on the extent to which the academic literacy programme at CUT was in accord with sound academic literacy development practices with regard to its conceptual design, teaching and learning methodologies, text selection procedures, assessment and managerial structure. The findings regarding all these dimensions are systematically presented in the sections below.

## 3.	The conceptual design of the academic literacy programme at CUT

The Central University of Technology in Bloemfontein, South Africa, introduced its ALP in April 2007. This decision was taken after a standardized test of academic literacy known as the Placement Test in English for Educational Purposes (PTEEP) had been administered to a total of 408 first year students at the university and had revealed that the levels of academic literacy among these students were too low to help them succeed at university study. The descriptive statistics from the PTEEP for this group of test takers are shown in Table 1 below:

Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation of the scores from the PTEEP for first year students at CUT in 2007 (N=408).

Variable	M	SD	Max	Min
PTEEP	39.1	12.4	73.4	8.5

The PTEEP has since been discontinued and replaced by the recently introduced Academic Literacy (AL) test of the National Benchmark Tests (NBTs). Like the AL test of the NBTs, the PTEEP was designed and developed by the Alternative Admissions Research Project (AARP) of the University of Cape Town on the basis of the same construct that underpins the current AL test of NBTs. This construct has been described by Cliff and Yeld (2006: 20) as being constituted by the test taker's ability to do the following:

- negotiate meaning at word, sentence, paragraph and whole-text level;

- understand discourse and argument structure and the text "signals" that underlie this structure;

- extrapolate and draw inferences beyond what has been stated in text;

- separate essential from non-essential and super-ordinate from sub-ordinate information;

- understand and interpret visually encoded information, such as graphs, diagrams and flow-charts;

- understand and manipulate numerical information;

- understand the importance and authority of own voice;

- understand and encode the metaphorical, non-literal and idiomatic bases of language; and

- negotiate and analyse text genre.

A close look at this construct shows evidence of its grounding in Bachman (1990) and Bachman and Palmer's (1996) model of language ability. Bachman (1990) and Bachman and Palmer (1996) view language ability as being constituted by a complex interaction of the language user's topical knowledge, language knowledge, personal characteristics and the characteristics of the language use situation. As Bachman and Palmer (1996: 61-62) rightly point out, in real-life language use, the interaction of these factors translates into,

> the creation or interpretation of intended meanings in discourse by an individual, or … the dynamic and interactive negotiation of intended meanings between two or more individuals in a particular situation.

The interaction of the factors that Bachman and Palmer (1996) have identified to constitute language ability are, naturally, the essence of the reading, writing and thinking abilities that students typically need to succeed at university. The Bachman and Palmer (1996) construct of language ability is captured in **Figure 1** below.
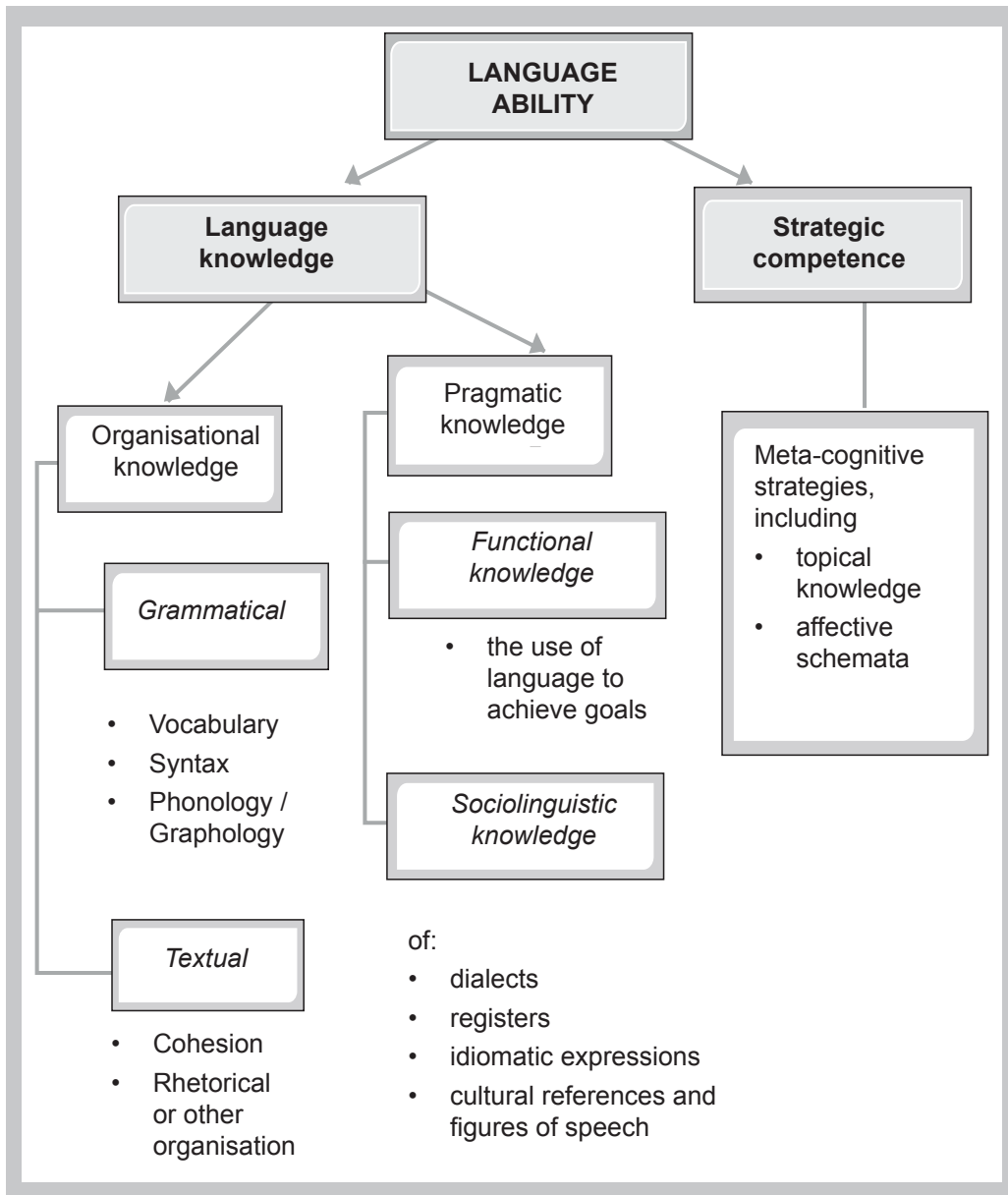
Figure 1: The Bachman and Palmer construct of language ability (Van Dyk & Weideman, 2004: 143)

The Bachman and Palmer (1996) model captures what Weideman (2003) and Van Dyk and Weideman (2004) have described as an 'open' as opposed to a 'restrictive' and outdated view of language ability. In the words of Van Dyk and Weideman (2004: 139), a restrictive view of language "limits it to a combination of sound, form, and meaning, or, in

technical linguistic terms, phonological, morphological, syntactic and semantic elements" while an open view "maintains that language is not only expressive, but communicative, intended to mediate and negotiate human interaction." These two views of language are shown in **Table 2** below:

Table 2:   Two perspectives on language ability

Restrictive	Open
Language is composed of elements: • Sound • Form, grammar • Meaning	Language is a social instrument to: • mediate • negotiate human interaction • in specific contexts
Main function: expression	*Main function: communication*
Language learning = mastery of structure	*Language learning = becoming competent in communication*
Focus: language	*Focus: process of using language*

(Van Dyk & Weideman, 2004: 5)

In line with the Bachman and Palmer (1996) model and from the perspective of writing, Blanton (1994: 228) has, in like fashion, argued that the kind of language-related skills that second language students need to function at university involve the ability to interact with texts:

> Whatever else we do with L2 students to prepare them for the academic mainstream, we must foster the behaviour of 'talking' to texts, talking and writing about them, linking them to other texts, connecting them to their' own lives and experience, and then using their experience to illuminate the text and the text to illuminate their experiences.

Blanton (1994) has further argued that not only do university students need to master the grammar and vocabulary of the medium of instruction involved in order for them to succeed in their studies, they also need to be able to do the following:

1. Interpret texts in the light of their own experience and their own experience in the light of texts;

2. Agree or disagree with texts in the light of that experience ;

3. Link texts to each other;

4. Synthesize texts, and use their synthesis to build new assertions;

5. Extrapolate from texts;

6. Create their own texts, doing any or all of the above;

7. Talk and write about texts doing any or all of the above;

8. Do numbers 6 and 7 in such a way as to meet the expectations of the audience.

(Blanton 1994: 226)

As pointed out earlier, since its introduction, the ALP had specifically purported to teach reading and writing in English for academic purposes. This skills-based approach to academic language teaching has been discredited (Van Dyk & Weideman 2004), based on the grounds that it detracts from the communicative, interactional and open view of language espoused by the Bachman and Palmer (1996) model of language ability presented earlier and that it promotes an outdated view of language. Weideman (2013: 11) has argued, for example, that "our conceptualizations of academic literacy have altered, in that we now much more readily accept a skills-neutral rather than a skills-based definition". As he (Weideman 2013: 3) further argues, "We no longer stick to the behaviourist belief, so ably embodied in the audio-lingual method and its conventional predecessors , that listening, speaking , reading and writing are separate or even separable language 'skills'."

The major flaw of the course revealed by this study with regard to its conceptual design, however, was that it failed - from the point of view of reading and writing at least – to adequately capture the construct of academic literacy underpinning the PTEEP. It was evident that the course was mainly designed on the basis of the intuitions of those who conceptualized it and largely failed to address the academic literacy needs of the students as encapsulated in the construct of the PTEEP, the needs analysis instrument that was used to justify its introduction in the first place. Research in the field of TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) has shown how misleading, even native speaker intuitions, can be in ESL (English as a Second Language) instruction and by extension, course design and development. While their competence in their native language is unquestionable, native speakers of English are hardly equally competent in describing exactly what they do when they use their own language. Wolfson (1989: 38) captures this inadequacy of native speaker intuitions very well with regard to their inability to describe the sociolinguistic rules which they can apply naturally so well in language use without being conscious about it:

> Knowing themselves to be competent users of their language(s), most people, including language teachers, make the assumption that they know exactly what they do and do not say in a given situation. In fact, speakers do have strong

and well-informed ideas about what they should say, but this is not all the same as knowing what they do say. Speech norms, or community ideals concerning appropriate speech behavior, cannot be equated with speech use which is the behavior itself.

Thus, whether it is driven by native or non-native speakers, ESL course design should therefore be a principled exercise that must always be premised on a construct determined by the language needs of the targeted students and not the intuitions of those who carry it out. As pointed out before, at CUT, the decision to start an academic literacy programme was taken on the basis of the low scores revealed by the PTEEP prior to its introduction. Logically, the technical design of the course should have therefore been based on the same construct underpinning this test. Indeed, Patterson and Weideman (2013: 107) have argued that "constructs of academic literacy are used for both test and course design" and that such constructs "necessarily depend on definitions that assume that academic discourse is typically different from other kinds of discourse". The present study revealed, however, that this was not the case. It was evident that the course still needed to be aligned with the construct of academic literacy underpinning the measurement instrument that was used to provide information on the academic literacy needs of the students. It is in the context of this kind of finding that Weideman (2013: 15) has argued that whether the current "illuminating ways of assessing the ability to handle academic discourse have had the desired salutary effect on course design for academic literacy interventions is a question that we never ask. Have our more recent conceptualizations of academic literacy that have now been embedded in testing, had a positive effect on course design?" Academic literacy curricula development and needs analysis in the form of academic literacy testing should therefore naturally be iterative processes because the former is a form of intervention aimed at dealing with a challenge that was diagnosed through the latter.

4.   Text selection for the academic literacy programme at CUT

A critical principle underpinning ESL curriculum development and instruction is the need to select text materials that are appropriate for the level of the students at whom a course is aimed. ESL reading materials that are appropriately difficult "complement students' intellectual levels" and impacts "their motivation to read and engage with texts" (Grabe & Stoller, 2001: 190). Some of the sources of difficulty in such texts include "assumed background knowledge, cultural assumptions, demanding topics, grammatical complexity, length of texts, new conceptual knowledge, organization, unusual formatting and vocabulary" (Grabe & Stoller, 2001: 190). ESL reading materials should also be interesting and related to each other "to simulate the demands of academic courses" (Grabe & Stoller, 2001: 190).

With regard to the selection of texts for the ALP, this study found that the texts used for reading development were selected based on the intuitions of the course designer and were consequently not consistent with the reading proficiency levels of the students for

whom the programme was introduced. The Flesch Kincade Grade Level of a sample of these passages is shown in Figure 2 below. Admittedly, in the post-apartheid period, CUT and other South African university are accessible to a lot of students whose reading ability is very low. A Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level of 8.3 is, however, probably too low for teaching reading to students hoping to make it at university study in ESL.
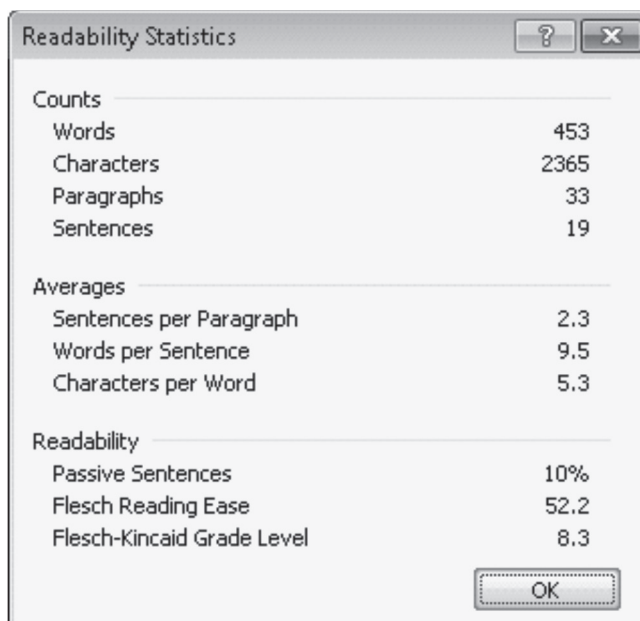

Figure 2:   Readability statistics for most reading texts in the ALP course book

Whether these texts were interesting to the students is debatable. This is the case because the word 'interesting' is relative and depends on individual students' backgrounds. A finding that relates to this, however, was that these texts were not related to each other regarding topics, tasks and overall themes. For example, the texts for reading development in one unit of the course book focused on topics that were too unrelated to one another to provide scaffolding to the students to help facilitate text comprehension and reading development. Logically, reading comprehension would be eased if students were exposed to several related reading passages in one unit that focus on one overarching topic such as 'innovation' for example.

5.   The teaching and learning methodologies in the academic literacy course at CUT

The current approach to the teaching of the four language skills, i.e. listening, speaking, reading and writing, and by extension, academic literacy skills in ESL follows a pre-,

during-, and post-format. As pointed out earlier, the academic literacy development effort had, since the introduction of the ALP at CUT, mainly focused on the teaching of reading and writing in ESL for academic purposes. For this reason, the review of this course from the point of view of the teaching and learning methodologies in this study focused on these two skills. As its prefix implies, the pre-stage of a reading lesson is aimed at preparing learners for successful reading. In the words of Grabe and Stoller (2001: 191), pre-reading

> ... helps students access background information that can facilitate subsequent reading, provides specific information needed for successful comprehension, stimulates students' interest, sets up student expectations, and models strategies that students can later use on their own.

Some of the activities commonly used for pre-reading include creating a semantic map, studying the layout of a reading passage, skimming for main ideas, scanning for details, matching main ideas with paragraphs, examining visuals, reading selected paragraphs carefully, presenting main ideas, consulting a dictionary, and considering new vocabulary (Stoller, 1994: 1-4; Grabe & Stoller, 2001: 191). The during-reading stage mainly aims at helping students monitor their comprehension while reading (Grabe, 1991; Grabe & Stoller, 2002); thereby enabling them to be aware of miscomprehension when it occurs and to repair it before it accumulates. Specifically, the during-reading stage involves guiding students to help them understand difficult concepts, make sense of complex sentences, consider relationships among ideas in the text and read purposefully and strategically (Grabe & Stoller, 2001: 191). To mention a few, during-reading activities include outlining or summarizing key ideas in a difficult section, determining sources of difficulty and seeking clarification, looking for answers to questions posed during pre-reading and writing down predictions of what will come next (Stoller, 1994: 4; Grabe & Stoller, 2001: 191). Finally, post-reading is meant to assess and consolidate students' overall comprehension of a reading passage. It "typically extends ideas and information from the text while also ensuring that the major ideas and supporting information are well understood" (Grabe & Stoller, 2001: 191). In other words, post reading activities oblige students to apply what they gain from reading beyond a reading passage itself (Grabe & Stoller, 2001). A few possible post-reading activities include completing a graphic organizer based on the text, expanding or changing a semantic map created during pre-reading, ranking the importance of information in the text based on a set of sentences provided and answering questions that demonstrate comprehension of a text (Grabe & Stoller, 2001: 192). A critical post-reading activity is one that obliges students to reflect on the strategies they used to read a passage. Producing strategic readers should be the ultimate aim of all reading classes.

A critical issue in ESL reading development is a successful gain in vocabulary knowledge. Enough research evidence exists in support of the role of vocabulary in reading ability achievement (Grabe & Stoller, 2001). ESL students need to possess a broad vocabulary knowledge base if they are to be fluent in reading (Grabe, 1991; Grabe & Stoller, 2001; 2002). Part of this knowledge is achieved through reading

extensively (Day & Bamford, 1998). Vocabulary knowledge, however, cannot be achieved solely through reading. "In addition to reading extensively, students benefit from being exposed to new words through explicit instruction, learning how to learn words on their own, familiarizing themselves with their own word-learning processes and becoming word collectors" (Grabe & Stoller, 2001). This means that efforts should be made to promote the explicit teaching of vocabulary (Schmitt, 2008; Eyraud, Giles, Koenig & Stoller, 2000). A myriad of ways are currently known for teaching vocabulary explicitly in the ESL classroom. To mention a few, some of these ways include dealing with meaning, working with collocations, working with grammatical features, analyzing word parts, analyzing register and other language variation and helping students become independent word learners (Zimmerman, 2009). The large bulk of words that students need to learn to become fluent readers means, however, that teachers need to be principled in choosing how many and which words to teach (Grabe & Stoller, 2001). "Key words themselves should be the most important words for a text, the most useful for organizing and working with other vocabulary, and the most likely to be helpful to students beyond the text being read (Grabe & Stoller, 2001: 192)". Alternatively, ESL teachers should use frequency word lists, also known as the Academic Word Lists (AWL), (e.g. Leech, Rayson & Wilson, 2001; Cox head, 2000) that have been compiled from corpora to decide on how many and which words to teach for the purpose of promoting reading ability development (Schmitt, 2008). The AWL is a compilation of the most frequent words in academic texts that any academic language programme should expose its students to.

For the purpose of advancing the aim of this study further, and from the point of view of teaching and learning methodologies, the academic literacy course under study was reviewed and was unfortunately found lacking with regard to the pre-, during-, and post-reading implementation issues dealt with earlier. Firstly, while the course did provide an opportunity for the students to "participate in pre-reading with the facilitator" in all reading lessons, apart from exposing the students to new vocabulary before they read, no other pre-reading activity was built into the reading lessons in the module/ course guide itself. The responsibility for designing and developing such activities was left to the facilitators most (if not all) of whom did not have training in teaching ESL, and were consequently not skilled to create such activities. Secondly, the targeted vocabulary covered in the course was chosen based on the course designers' intuition and not on the basis of any published list of high frequency words in academic texts. Thirdly, the reading lessons did not include during-reading activities, the importance of which was referred to earlier. Finally, the post-reading activities used were also intuition-based and not informed by any principled understanding of what typically goes into this stage of a reading lesson.

Writing for academic purposes is, by its nature, a process whose teaching should ideally follow the planning, gathering information, drafting, revising, editing or proofreading stages. The very process-oriented nature of this type of writing means that writing teachers need to provide learners with guidance for them to engage effectively with this process. In the words of Campbell (1998: 13), writing teachers need to help students

> … experience lots of strategies for thinking about topic areas, getting started on rough ideas, sifting through ideas and beginning to organize them for writing, clustering, mapping, listing, outlining, drafting, rereading, redrafting, cutting and pasting, reworking, revisioning, revising on end, proofreading, editing.

All these activities make the pre-, during- and post-instructional framework very relevant to the teaching of writing as well. The major purpose of pre-writing is to help writing students to plan and gather information for a writing task. Among others, pre-writing focuses on helping students activate background knowledge on a writing topic, brainstorm ideas for the writing task, and pre-teaching them the vocabulary they will need to complete the writing task. Depending on the nature of the writing task, pre-writing might also involve pre-teaching the grammar relevant to the type of text the students are required to write. The during-writing stage affords the students an opportunity to draft and revise a writing assignment. A good example of a during-writing activity involves giving students a writing review sheet (Campbell, 1998) or writing assessment rubric to help them revise each other's written work in pairs or groups with the teacher's assistance. The ultimate aim of this exercise is to help students shift information around so that they learn how to produce cohesive and coherent writing. During-writing activities also afford the students an opportunity to proofread and edit the language in each other's writing. For this purpose, they look for spelling, punctuation, and grammatical errors. Finally, in the post-writing stage, the teacher gives feedback on the students' writing. This feedback mainly focuses on coherence and cohesion in writing and in a cautious and sensitive manner, on the common grammatical mistakes the students make.

While the academic language course under investigation in this paper tried to engage students in pre-writing by having them brainstorm and plan for their writing, it did not incorporate other critically important pre-writing activities that were referred to earlier. Similarly, no activities were built into the course book to engage students in during-writing activities. The during-writing stage is probably the most important in the teaching of writing because it entails a meaningful effort to raise students' awareness that writing is a process. It is the writing learner's understanding and mastery of the principles underpinning this process that ultimately determines the quality of the product of their writing. This study unveiled evidence that the approach to the teaching of writing in the course was more product-based, a practice which often results in writing teachers splashing red ink all over a student's paper and unwittingly instilling a sense of intellectual inadequacy in them. Second language writing research has consistently confirmed that the product-based approach is a very ineffective method of teaching writing and that the degree to which students learn from it is negligible.

6. Assessment practices used in the academic literacy programme at CUT

A crucial aspect of teaching and learning in an academic literacy programme is the course designer's ability to test the reading, writing and thinking skills targeted by

the curriculum and identified to be lacking at the needs analysis stage. This is very important because of the consequences that testing can have on educational systems, individuals within those systems, and the society at large (Bachman & Palmer, 1996: 96-97). At both basic and higher educational levels, language test performance is often used for student admission and measuring learner achievement. Furthermore, some universities use language test scores for teacher and language programme evaluation (Bachman & Palmer, 1996: 96-97). In view of the seriousness of the consequences of the decisions that can be taken on the basis of language test performance, language test designers and developers need to ensure that they design and develop tests that possess a high degree of reliability and validity.

In language testing, reliability is a term used to denote the consistency of test scores. A reliable test is, for example, one that yields almost the same scores if administered more than once to the same group of test-takers. Also, a test is reliable if its alternate versions yield consistent results from the same group of test takers. In the words of Du Plessis (2012: 31), "test scores may be deemed to be reliable if they remain consistent from one set of tests and tasks to another. Reliability is thus a function of score consistency between different administrations of tests and tasks." The term validity is used to refer to the degree to which a test tests what it purports to test. From the point of view of this definition, a test is valid if it measures what it purports to measure (Van der Walt & Steyn, 2007; 2008). Such a test focuses on "measuring only what it is intended to test and not extraneous or unintended abilities" (Weir, 1993: 19). Viewed this way, validity is an aspect of nothing else but the test involved. Reliability is a necessary but not sufficient condition for validity. A test that is valid should, by necessity, be reliable as well. A test that is reliable is, however, is not necessarily valid.

Three types of validity are particularly relevant to the field of language testing: construct, content, and criterion-related validity. Content validity relates to an evaluation of the extent to which a test constitutes a representative sample of the content that allows an adequate measurement of the construct targeted by the test. Construct validity involves an evaluation of the adequacy and appropriateness of the inferences made on the basis of test results regarding an individual's mastery of a construct (Bachman & Palmer, 1996). Thus, construct validity refers to the degree to which the interpretation of test scores reliably represents a mastery of the abilities the test-designer wishes to measure. Criterion-related validity relates to a judgment of the extent to which test scores can be used as a basis for making inferences about a test-taker's ability on some other measure, also known as a criterion. Thus, a criterion is a standard against which a test score is evaluated. Concurrent and predictive validity are two types of validity that are categorized under criterion-related validity. On the one hand, concurrent validity is an estimation of the degree to which a test score correlates with a score obtained in an equivalent measure or criterion that is administered around the same time. On the other hand, predictive validity refers to an index of the extent to which a test score can predict a test-taker's performance on another measure or criterion that will be administered at a later stage. Thus, concurrent and predictive validity are similar concepts except in so far as the criteria involved in validating a test are administered at different times.

For the purpose of this study, the summative tests given for the ALP in 2010 and 2011 were also investigated and were found wanting with regard to what they were developed to measure. These tests were not designed on the basis of any theory of academic literacy. Technically speaking, the tests lacked validity and by extension, reliability. This had serious implications when one considers the impact the scores of these tests had had on the lives of the students at CUT. For example, since 2009, students are not allowed to graduate before completing the ALP in one of the years of the duration of their studies. Furthermore, since the introduction of the ALP in 2007, the official arrangement has been that students who score 75% in the first semester are exempted from continuing with the course in the second semester. Such students are, on the basis of the scores on the ALP achievement tests, deemed academically literate enough to handle the demands of academic discourse in ESL.

Clearly, the study revealed that CUT was faced with a two-pronged problem that called for the complete overhaul of how academic literacy was understood and taught at the institution. Both the ALP and its tests did not capture the construct of academic literacy as it is conceptualized in the higher education sector in South Africa today. Both the curriculum and the tests used to measure student achievement were the outcome of the intuitions of those who designed and developed them and were not founded on any sensible second language instruction and assessment principles.

7. The Structure and Management of the academic literacy programme at CUT

Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) or Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL), as it is sometimes called, is a multifaceted activity that requires specialized training. TESOL as a profession is premised on the research-based understanding that acquiring a first language and learning an additional language are two activities that are processed differently by the human brain. The obvious implication of this is that teaching the two languages requires two different types of training on the part of those involved. The not so obvious, implication, however, is that just because one speaks a language as their first language or is competent in it, it does not automatically qualify them to teach it especially to those who speak it as a second language. A common misperception and a drawback, it should be pointed out, to ESL teaching especially at South African universities (and often abroad) is that a degree in linguistics or English literature, or English studies or Language Practice qualifies its holder to teach English as a second language.

Among others, a career in TESOL requires training in linguistics, grammar, methods in ESL reading, writing, listening and speaking instruction, sociolinguistics, language assessment, second language acquisition, computer-assisted language learning, language curriculum design, and language program administration. For the purpose of pursuing the study of the ALP from the point of view of structure and management, the principles governing language programme administration within the field of TESOL

were particularly relevant. Among others, the literature on language programme administration emphasizes a number of roles that are played by a language programme administrator. These are the catalyst for change (Stoller, 1997), strategic planner (Klinghammer, 1997), and decision maker and negotiator (Henry, 1997). The literature further underlines the role of language programme administrators in policy formation at institutions of higher learning (Rawley, 1997), the empowerment of staff (Soppelsa, 1997), dealing with personnel matters (Geddes & Marks, 1997) and programme budget (Staczek, 1997).

To a large extent, the functional efficiency of a language programme depends on where it is located and how it is structured and managed. The importance of this is that it determines the degree of sensitivity towards the specialized nature of TESOL as a field by those involved in the programme. At universities in the United States, language development programmes are located at different sites depending on the circumstances under which they were established (Kaplan, 1997). What is common about all these programmes, however, is that they are managed by directors and deputy-directors who are professionals in applied linguistics and the teaching of English as a second language. Among others, the director and his/her deputy posses full academic, administrative, institutional, political, fiscal, and managerial decision-making powers. These powers are obviously exercised on the basis of the expertise of these managers as ESL professionals and in particular, their training in language programme administration.

In view of its relevance to the success of a language programme, the structure and management of the ALP at CUT was also looked at in this study. At the time of this review, the ALP was housed at Academic Development and Support under the Centre for Teaching and Learning. The programme itself was administered by two coordinators, the distinction between whose positions and job descriptions was unfortunately not as clear as the circumstances dictated. The two coordinators were English teachers by virtue of their training in language studies and TESOL respectively, the second one of whom consistently felt constrained by having to report to two supervisors who had no training in TESOL and who barely understood matters technical to the profession. The distinction/relationship between the positions and responsibilities of the two supervisors themselves was not clear. This confusing reporting hierarchy, coupled with a lack of sensitivity to the technical and specialized nature of the English language teaching profession especially in the highest echelons of the ALP had, in more ways than one, a stifling impact on the possibility to address the weaknesses so far revealed about the programme. Indeed, language programmes such as the ALP are often so marginalized that "It is frequently assumed that any speaker of English can do what we do in class, resulting, at times, in unqualified teachers being assigned to our classroom" (Stoller, 2012: 42).

It is a result of this misperception that purely on the basis of their ability to speak English, non-ESL professionals are often bent on having an uninformed say in what the curriculum of a language programme such the ALP should comprise, how student achievement should be assessed, how the programme itself should be run and where it should be located. In the words of Stoller (2012: 42), "As long as (this kind of) ignorance, lack of

appreciation, or misperceptions about our programs exists, our innovative efforts may be thwarted."

8.   Conclusion

The teaching of academic literacy is without doubt critically important in post-apartheid South Africa. This has become even more important in recent years as more and more students complete their grade 12 exams with good grades on paper but are not necessarily ready to tackle the demands of university education. If academic literacy programmes currently offered by universities are to help these students succeed, it is important that such programmes are thoroughly evaluated to ensure that they are on target regarding what they were established to do. Investigating the currency and efficacy of the teaching methodologies used to promote academic literacy development in such programmes is just as critical. A credible theory of academic literacy informing a programme is of no utility to the affected students and the university involved if the means used to impart it is outdated. Also, ensuring that reliable and valid assessment instruments are used for student placement and achievement in such programmes is crucial. Assessment procedures whose psychometric properties are established should always be used to shine light on the curriculum in order to make it known whether the curriculum is focused on what it was designed to do or not. The findings of this study shows that academic literacy in South Africa falls squarely within the field of Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages and that academic literacy programmes should be run by those who have this expertise.

This will go a long way towards ensuring that technical aspects of academic literacy such as curricula and assessment practices are informed by current principles governing the teaching of English as a second language. That all these were revealed by a case study of the Academic literacy programme offered at CUT does not restrict the importance of the findings of this study to CUT only. Similar programmes at other universities should also be evaluated to determine the extent to which their existence in the current form can be justified. Considerable resources are expended on academic literacy development at South African universities every year. It is important that these resources are continuously accounted for.

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