

**THE ROLE OF ACADEMIC LITERACY COURSES IN STUDENTS’
DISCIPLINARY KNOWLEDGE-BUILDING: A CASE STUDY OF A NAMIBIAN
UNIVERSITY**

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LINUS VAAKOHAMBO NEKONDO

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Supervisor:

Prof. Sioux McKenna

ABSTRACT

This doctoral study investigated the role of academic literacy courses in shaping students' disciplinary knowledge within the context of a Namibian university. Motivated by concerns surrounding persistently high attrition rates in higher education institutions globally, the research challenges the prevailing tendency to attribute poor student performance solely to individual factors, thus neglecting systemic issues whereby the higher education sector is absolved of responsibility. This absolution is often on the premise that the university has provided adequate support, such as through academic literacy courses, to equip students for success. However, despite the provision of such courses, high attrition rates persist.

The study was guided by the following questions:

1. How is 'academic literacy' conceptualised in the UNAM English for Academic Purposes course curriculum?

This question is further divided into two sub-questions: (a) How do the academics who teach the UNAM EAP course conceptualise 'academic literacy'? and (b) How is knowledge structured in course documents and assessments?

2. How do academics who teach other courses conceptualise UNAM's EAP course and its relationship to the literacy practices expected in their courses?
3. How do students experience the EAP course at UNAM, and how do they understand the relationship between the content and activities of the EAP course and the academic literacy demands of their other courses?

Data collection involved individual interviews with both English for Academic Purposes (EAP) lecturers and discipline-specific lecturers across three UNAM campuses, the Faculty of Education, Faculty of Engineering and Faculty of Health Sciences. Additionally, focus group interviews were conducted with students from these same campuses.

To ensure robustness, triangulation of interview data was achieved by complementing it with document analysis of EAP course materials and mainstream course documents. The goal was to identify instances of code-matches (where academic literacy practices align with the expectations of the disciplines) or code-clashes (where discrepancies emerge).

The findings illuminated prevailing perceptions of academic literacy as a set of skills encompassing reading, writing, and related competencies. Implicit in this understanding was that these presumed academic skills are universally applicable across academic contexts and can be taught with equal effectiveness to students regardless of their chosen discipline.

An analysis using Legitimation Code Theory (LCT) revealed that such conceptualisation of academic literacy as practices that are neutral and generic across the academy indicates weaker epistemic relations (ER-), and weaker social relations (SR-). That is, the understanding of academic literacy that dominated in the data legitimated neither specialist knowledge nor any specific disposition in the knower. This results in what is known in LCT as a relativist code.

Moreover, the study identified a distinct emphasis on generic, skill-based instruction in the EAP course documents. The relativist code identified in the analysis of the interviews with EAP lecturers, and echoing concerns raised in academic literacy literature about add-on courses, was starkly evident in the EAP course content. A code-clash emerged between the skills and genres taught in the EAP course and those required for success in mainstream courses. Three focus areas of the EAP course, essay writing, report writing, and referencing, were analysed in some depth to ascertain the nature of the code-clash.

The thesis presents a comprehensive examination of a specific course and its reflection of prevalent generic common-sense approaches observed in various contexts. While the study centred on UNAM's EAP course, its aim was not to critique a particular course or colleagues. Rather, many findings resonate with issues identified in academic literacy research globally, underscoring persistent challenges associated with generic approaches that often fall short of enhancing epistemic access.

The study concludes that there is an urgent need to assess the efficacy of academic literacy courses in fostering students' disciplinary knowledge-building at grassroot level i.e. at the level of HEIs or disciplines. Such an assessment should consider not only the complexities of acquisition of academic literacy but also the broader global elements with transboundary influences, such as neoliberalism, massification, and the globalisation of higher education. This comprehensive examination contributes to ongoing discussions regarding the enabling of epistemic access and epistemic justice within higher education contexts.

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DEDICATION

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	i
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iii
DEDICATION	v
TABLE OF FIGURES	x
TABLE OF TABLES	xi
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS	xii
CHAPTER 1: BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY	1
1.1 Introduction	1
1.2 Global perspectives on student success	2
1.3 Education history in Africa	4
1.3.1 The pre-colonial education in Africa	4
1.3.2 The colonial education in Africa	6
1.3.3 Post-colonial education in Africa	9
1.4 Education in Namibia: An overview	12
1.4.1 Namibian education under the German rule	13
1.4.2 Namibian education under the South African Administration	14
1.4.3 Namibia's post-colonial education	16
1.4.4 Higher Education in Namibia	20
1.5 The Language Centre	26
1.6 The EAP course	27
1.7 Outline of the chapters in the thesis	29
CHAPTER 2: CONTEXTUAL FRAMEWORK	32
2.1 Introduction	32
2.2 Massification	33
2.3 Globalisation and internationalisation of higher education	37
2.4 Neoliberalism in higher education	41
2.5 Global forces and the commercialisation of English	45
2.6 Conclusion	48
CHAPTER 3: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK	50
3.1 Introduction	50
3.2 The broader concept of literacy	50
3.3 Autonomous model to defining literacy	52

3.4	Ideological model of literacy	53
3.5	The notion of academic literacy	58
3.5.1	The study skills perspective	59
3.5.2	The academic socialisation perspective	60
3.5.3	The Academic Literacies perspective	60
3.6	Academic literacy courses	61
3.6.1	Generic development courses	63
3.6.2	Discipline-specific academic literacy courses	65
3.7	Blindness to institutional culture and disciplinary norms.....	66
3.8	Conclusion	68
CHAPTER 4: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK.....		70
4.1	Introduction.....	70
4.2	Legitimation Code Theory	70
4.2.1	Bernstein's pedagogic discourse theory.....	71
4.2.2	Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital	74
4.3	LCT as the theoretical lenses	75
4.3.1	LCT - Specialization	76
4.3.2	LCT - Semantics	79
4.4	Conclusion	81
CHAPTER 5: RESEARCH DESIGN.....		82
5.1	Introduction.....	82
5.2	Case study	82
5.3	Research site	84
5.4	Data collection methods and tools	85
5.4.1	Document analysis	85
5.4.2	Individual interviews	86
5.4.2.1	EAP lecturers' interviews	86
5.4.2.2	Discipline specific lecturers' interviews.....	87
5.4.3	Focus group interviews	88
5.5	Data analysis	89
5.5.1	Storage of data and index coding.....	90
5.5.2	Ethical considerations including positionality	92
5.6	Conclusion	95

CHAPTER 6: CONCEPTUALISATIONS OF ACADEMIC LITERACY	96
6.1 Introduction.....	96
6.1.1 Academic literacy as generic skills.....	97
6.1.2 Academic literacy as generic academic communication	103
6.1.3 Academic literacy as emerging from varied academic domains	107
6.2 Conclusion	111
CHAPTER 7: THE EAP COURSE	112
7.1 Introduction.....	112
7.2 The Study Guide: A Blueprint for EAP Learning	113
7.2.1 Reports as a generic genre	118
7.2.2 Essays as a generic genre.....	124
7.2.3 Alignment on referencing	128
7.3 Disparities between EAP and other courses	135
7.4 Participants' perceptions of the UNAM's EAP course.....	137
7.4.1 Instrumentalist approaches to teaching and learning EAP	138
7.4.2 Dismissal of the EAP course.....	140
7.5 Conclusion	143
CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSION	145
8.1 Introduction.....	145
8.2 Summary of Key Findings	147
8.2.1 Perception of academic practices as generic.....	147
8.2.2 The add-on nature of the EAP Course	148
8.2.3 EAP course as a relativist code.....	150
8.2.4 Code-clashes between the EAP course content and expectations of other courses	153
8.3 A few concluding thoughts	154
8.4 Future Research	157
8.5 Conclusion	158
REFERENCES	159
APPENDICES	189
APPENDIX 1: ETHICAL CLEARANCE DOCUMENTS.....	189
Appendix 1a: Provisional Ethical Approval: Rhodes University.....	189
Appendix 1b: Permission Request Letter to UNAM	190
Appendix 1c: UNAM Ethical Clearance.....	192

Appendix 1d: Full Ethical Approval: Rhodes University	193
APPENDIX 2: PARTICIPANTS' INFORMED CONSENT	194
Appendix 2a: Lecturers' informed consent declaration	194
Appendix 2b: Students' informed consent declaration	196
APPENDIX 3: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS	198
Appendix 3a: EAP Lecturers' interview questions	198
APPENDIX 3b: Disciplinary lecturers' interview questions	199
APPENDIX 3c: Student questions' interview questions	200
APPENDIX 4: FORMAT FOR THE LAB REPORT	201

TABLE OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Namibia's formal education structure	18
Figure 2: Map of Namibia showing spread of campuses (taken from UNAM Brochure, 2024a)	21
Figure 3: The LCT specialization plane.....	78
Figure 4: The LCT semantic plane	80
Figure 5: A heuristic illustration of Specialization coding of "Generic Skills" conceptualisation.....	101
Figure 6: Heuristic illustration of Specialization coding of "Generic Skills" and "Generic Academic Skills" conceptualisations	106
Figure 7: A heuristic illustration of Specialization coding of three conceptualisations of Academic Literacy	111
Figure 8: Excerpt from EAP Course Guide Unit 1 Page 8	116
Figure 9: Scientific report assessment in the Introduction to Biology module.....	120
Figure 10: UNAM's intolerance for plagiarism.....	130

TABLE OF TABLES

Table 1: Findings on the completion of the Bachelor of Education at one of the UNAM Campuses	3
Table 2: The University of Namibia Campuses (taken from UNAM Website, 2024)	22
Table 3: Entry requirements at Namibian HEIs.....	25
Table 4: Summary of the departments per campus that participated in the study	85
Table 5: Index coding used for participants.....	90
Table 6: Lab report requirements in the Electronics Engineering module	119
Table 7: Assessment task on Unit 7	127

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ACS:	Academic Communication Skills
AL:	Academic Literacy
AW:	Academic Writing
CAE:	Cambridge Assessment English
EAP:	English for Academic Purposes
ELE:	English Language Education
ELT:	English Language Teaching
ER:	epistemic relations
ERAS:	Ethical Review Application System
ESP:	English for Specific Purposes
HEIs:	Higher Education Institutions
HP:	Hifikepunye Pohamba (campus)
IELTS:	International English Language Testing System
IMF:	International Monetary Fund
IUM:	International University of Management
JEDS:	José Eduardo Dos Santos (campus)
LCT:	Legitimation Code Theory
LoLT:	Language of Learning and Teaching
MBESC:	Ministry of Basic Education, Sports and Culture
MEC:	Ministry of Education and Culture
MoI:	Medium of Instruction
NLS:	New Literacy Studies
NPM:	New Public Management
NSFAF:	Namibia Students' Financial Assistance Fund
NUST:	Namibia University of Science and Technology
PoN:	Polytechnic of Namibia
SR:	social relations
TOEFL:	Test of English as a Foreign Language
UN:	United Nations
UNAM:	University of Namibia
UNESCO:	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNIN:	United Nations Institute for Namibia
WW1:	World War One
SD:	semantic density
SG:	semantic gravity

CHAPTER 1: BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

1.1 Introduction

Originating in the Global North, academic literacy courses have been adopted by many countries in the Global South, including Namibia (Boughey & McKenna, 2021; Julius et al., 2023). Despite the widespread implementation of such courses, high attrition rates persist in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) worldwide. This raises questions regarding the efficacy of these courses, specifically in terms of what, in their aim of supporting student learning, they legitimise compared to what is required for legitimacy in other mainstream courses.

This study investigates the role of academic literacy courses in fostering students' disciplinary knowledge-building, with a particular focus on the English for Academic Purposes (EAP) course at the University of Namibia (UNAM). It is important to clarify from the outset that this study does not serve as a critique of UNAM's EAP course or its instructors. Instead, it uses this course as a case study to explore a broader global issue: how are universities ensuring that students' access to higher education translates into academic success? This investigation aims to contribute to the ongoing discussions about students' acquisition of academic literacy practices by examining how these courses can enhance students' epistemological access to mainstream courses.

While the EAP course, as its name suggests, focuses on the use of English in the academy, and the academic literacy literature takes a fundamentally different focus, as I discuss in detail in Chapter Three, the shared intentions across student development initiatives are to smooth the transition into university and to contribute to student success. This study thus reflects on the introduction of the EAP course to achieve these shared intentions.

This chapter begins with an overview of the high attrition rates in universities globally, establishing the necessity for this study. It then focuses on the African context, highlighting how colonial legacies, particularly the use of languages such as English at the cost of indigenous languages, continue to impede students' epistemological access. Subsequently, it provides an overview of the Namibian education system, with a specific emphasis on the study's context, the EAP course at UNAM. The chapter concludes with an outline of the structure of this thesis.

1.2 Global perspectives on student success

Education systems worldwide face multiple challenges, one of which is the disproportion between the number of learners enrolling at any level and the learners completing in the stipulated time (Butler, 2013; Evans & Mendez Acosta, 2021). The situation is particularly acute in Africa (Mutimani, 2016; Essop, 2020), which is the context of this study. Kuepie et al. (2015), analysing data from twelve sub-Saharan countries, show that attendance at school is low and completion is even lower. A 2012 UNESCO report shows that only 42% of those children who start schooling will complete primary level study, and many do not even enroll at all. And “only four out of every 100 children in Africa enrolled in primary education are expected to enter any post-school institution, compared to 36 out of 100 in Latin America and 14 out of 100 in South and West Asia” (Musau, 2018).

Sadly, those who beat the odds and manage to excel through formal schooling and thereby gain admission to Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), often experience challenges particularly in their first year(s). Described as “an increasing influx of first-year students on the one hand, and poor retention rates on the other” (van Schalkwyk, 2008, p. ii), statistics show that in the South African context of the 120 000 students who enrolled in institutions of higher learning in 2005, 36 000 (36%) dropped out in their first year of study (Letseka & Maile, 2008). Detailed figures in that context are shared for the University of Cape Town (UCT) by Tswanya (2017) indicating that during the 2016 academic year, 2871 out of 29 200 students (10%) across all faculties and academic levels did not make it to the next level. Given that UCT is one of the most selective universities in South Africa, this is a daunting statistic, and one that has increased year on year (Tswanya, 2017).

In the Namibian context, Chad asserted that in 2019 the “drop-out rates among university students in Namibia who give up their studies within 12 months have gone up for the fourth year in a row” (unpaged). His argument was based on the statistics from the University of Namibia (UNAM) where of the 9840 first-year students at UNAM in 2017, only 6404 (65%) passed, 1825 (19%) failed while 1611 (16%) had discontinued their studies after registration and did not sit exams. That translates into 35% of the 2017 intake which did not continue into their second level of study in 2018. With regards to the Namibian University of Science and Technology (NUST), in the academic years 2016/2017, 26% of students did not proceed to the next level, unlike in 2013/2014 where only 17 percent of students did not make it (Chad, 2019). Further worrying statistics on the completion rates at UNAM are provided by Hako and

Shikongo (2019) whose findings on the completion of the Bachelor of Education (B. Ed) at one of the UNAM's campuses are provided in the table below as adapted from Hako and Shikongo (2019, p. 40).

<i>Degree Completion of Students Who Began Their B.Ed. Studies in 2011, 2012, and 2013</i>			
Admittance Date – Expected Graduation Date	Total # Admitted	Number/Percent Who Graduated on Time	Number/Percent Who Did Not Graduate on Time
2011 – 2015	299	192/64.2%	107/35.8%
2012 – 2016	315	203/64.4%	112/35.6%
2013 – 2017	402	359/89.3%	43/10.7%

Table 1: Findings on the completion of the Bachelor of Education at one of the UNAM Campuses

Being a worldwide phenomenon, there is a vast array of literature on the presumed causes of poor progression of learners from primary education to tertiary education and low success rates within higher education worldwide. Those include education systems of Nigeria (Okoedion , 2019; Olatunji et al., 2016; Osaikhiuwu, 2014), South Africa (South Africa, Council on Higher Education (CHE), 2020; Adetiba, 2019), Hong Kong (Cheung & Kan, 2002), Australia (De Zoysa & Rudkin, 2007), the United States of America (Maksy & Zheng, 2008), Iran (Ettehad et al., 2023), Singapore (Ang et al., 2019), to mention but a few.

The findings of studies about poor student success rates in higher education can be crudely divided into two bodies with one group focusing on explanations for academic success within the students themselves, and hence associating poor academic achievement to students'¹ backgrounds, whereas the other body of research tends to place explanations for academic success on the education systems with regards to curriculum design, the educators' pedagogic and assessment practices to mention but a few. A more detailed account of the bodies of research is provided in the next chapter, but it is worth mentioning here that the aforementioned bodies of research are not distinct and opposing camps, for studies often overlap and one researcher might draw on both ends of such accounts.

¹ The words 'learners' and 'students' are typically used interchangeably in the literature to refer to any person enrolled in an education system. However, in this study their usage differs with 'learners' referring to those that are in formal schooling whereas 'students' is used to refer to those that are in higher education.

Additionally, it is worth noting that this study does not take the position that student success or failure emerges from any simple list of discrete factors, but rather from the complex interplay of causal factors or mechanisms that can be explicit or implicit. This idea of the emergence of a phenomenon such as student success or failure is grappled with in Chapter Three, where I discuss the realist underpinnings of this study. The most nuanced accounts of student success and failure are able to bring together both ends of the continuum of explanations to develop a more sophisticated explanation for this complex social phenomenon to the benefit of both students and institutions which is an integral part of this study.

In this thesis I draw on such literature and an analysis of the data I collected to make sense of attempts at improving student success through the introduction of academic literacy courses in Namibian universities. But first, I need to provide a more detailed context for the study and so for the rest of this chapter, I consider the national higher education picture of Namibia, but I begin with a brief consideration of higher education across the continent.

1.3 Education history in Africa

The sad state of affairs for education progression and completion in Africa has its foundation in its colonisation by European powers between 1800 and the 1960s (Ocheni & Nwankwo, 2012). While various stages of colonisation, particularly in Northern Africa, by the Greeks, Phoenicians and Romans occurred from about 500BC, most of the continent was independent for hundreds of years before the so-called ‘scramble for Africa’ that happened in the late 1800s (Woldegiorgis & Doeverspeck, 2013). In 1652, the Dutch East India company formed a settlement in Cape Town in what later became South Africa. From that point onwards, the colonisation of the continent was rapid and often ruthless. One key aspect that was critical in bringing about and laying the foundation for colonialism in Africa was education in general and Western education in particular (Makuvaza & Shizha, 2017).

1.3.1 The pre-colonial education in Africa

History indicated that before colonialism, Africans had an indigenous form of education aimed at inculcating survival skills in individuals and community connection between groups of people (Alemu, 2018; Josua et al., 2022; Mosweunyane, 2013). The survival skills included communication, farming, and harnessing skills on how to design tools for agricultural activities and hunting (Mosweunyane, 2013; Emeagwali, 2006). For communication, individuals and groups of people were taught the usage of motifs and symbols and the choice of words and

gestures to convey messages in accordance with the context and audience (Mosweunyane, 2013).

Such education took place in the context of family, community, clan and cultural group and did not have a formal curriculum or physical structures such as classrooms, but was rather based on learning by doing, on the needs of the community and it was transmitted orally and through observation, imitation and participation (Abraham, 2020; Woolman, 2001). There were also no designated educators in communities but the duty to teach others lay with the elders in the community, the grandparents, parents, aunts and uncles in the homes, and the elder siblings to teach the younger ones. Children were taught the values and ethos in preparation for adulthood in order to fit and function in a wider society.

From the cradle until the age of five, the child received no direct education, the methods of nursing and handling the child were based on certain fundamental primitive philosophies of education. He had to be carefully watched, observed, and cared for so that bad habits and influences could not operate. It was believed that if early training were ignored, the child would grow to be maladjusted, and thus become a tribal misfit, a useless personality to himself and to the tribe to which he belonged (Nkrumah, 1941, p. 89).

Woldegiorgis and Doevenspeck, (2013) describe precolonial education as a form whereby learning was embedded in the cultural setting of the time and the task of the production and dissemination of knowledge was never through formally established institutions. So doing did not only preserve the African indigenous cultures, but it further built cooperation and collaboration in African communities and promoted the perfection of knowledge and skills before being transmitted to posterity (Mosweunyane, 2013; Vanqa, 1995). Generally, the indigenous education was hailed for “building various African civilisation, transferring cultural identity and maintaining a coherent way of life in the continent” (Woldegiorgis & Doevenspeck, 2013, p. 36) because they were products of the societal dynamics aimed at addressing the African societal needs in line with African philosophies and ideologies and knowledge systems (Ajayi et al. 1996).

Despite its preservation role of the African culture, the indigenous African knowledge systems and forms of education were disrupted after the European powers arrived in the continent and thereby introduced the colonial education.

1.3.2 The colonial education in Africa

Western norms, values, so-called ‘civilisation’ and education systems were introduced across the continent as it was colonised for its mineral, land resources and as a source of labour. Indigenous populations were subjugated, and the introduction of western culture and education was oppressive, that is, it was introduced to the detriment of the African cultures, norms and values, which were discarded and ignored. In essence, everything African was deemed pagan and in need of change in the name of western civilisation. Such state of affairs is better summarised by Woldegiorgis and Doevenspeck (2013) who assert that, the arrival of the European powers resulted in the disruption, destruction and to some extent the disappearance of the indigenous African knowledge systems indicating that,

... the educational evolution of Africa had been disconnected from its historical past and new exogenous models of institutions, which were not along the African roots, were imposed through colonization (p. 36).

The same sentiments are echoed by Mosweunyane (2013), who shares that,

the infiltration of Western forces during colonialism facilitated the obtrusion of western knowledge systems into African societies, which undermined the essentiality of African indigenous knowledge systems and destroyed the zeal in Africans to modernise and ameliorate their systems. The infiltration of Western knowledge systems served to re-direct development of the African continent by emphasising its making in the image of Europe and North America (pp. 50-51).

Literature has indicated that the reaction of Africans to the introduction of the European education system in Africa was not easy as this was perceived to be a threat to the indigenous culture, religion and institutions. For instance, Assié-Lumumba (2006) asserts that, “The reaction of Africans in general, when European education was first introduced, was characterised by the overwhelming rejection by leaders and the general population” (p. 30). Equally, Lulat (2003) shares that there was resistance by Africans to be disconnected from their past ways of doing things as was seemingly a requirement for joining the European way of life.

This was part of what prompted various colonial masters in Africa to introduce higher education as a tool to produce the elite required for colonial administration. As a result, the colonial masters in many African countries managed to create ‘*new African elites*’ (Abrokwa, 2017; Woldegiorgis & Doevenspeck, 2013), who were either sent to study in colonisers’ home countries or offered the coloniser’s education curriculum in their own homeland. Such individuals then assumed better positions in the society because having a European educational

background has been described as “the most important avenue toward upwards mobility in the socio-economic and political ladder, and an instrument for self-determination” (Woldegiorgis & Doeverspeck, 2013, p. 37). The creation of ‘African elites’ and their evident assumption of better positions within the colonial administrations resulted in more people starting to aspire for European education – particularly higher education.

The high demand for higher education (which was a privilege for the elite) resulted in stringent measures put in place to limit access and being limited to a few individuals. Such measures included limiting natives of the Sub-Saharan countries to studying in established HEIs within their borders only; having African based universities patterned against Western Universities, subjecting students to harsh testing for admission; and having unrealistic grading of examination pegged to individual’s acts whereby the docile and obedient were passed while critiques were failed (see Abrokwa, 2017). Formal education, from school through to higher education, was thus an essential tool of colonisation whereby those who did not participate could be marginalised as ‘uneducated’ and those who did participate could be shaped into the obedient colonised in exchange for more status and resources in society.

Other than controlling or limiting access to education, the colonial masters also imposed their languages to serve as the official language of the colonised countries. The language of the coloniser was the language of learning and teaching (LoLT) in the schools and universities established by the colonisers to further strengthen their power. The hegemony of the coloniser’s language across the worlds of education and business was another key means of controlling the population and positioning the coloniser as superior.

Giving an example of the imposition of English in Kenya, Wa Thiong’o (2005) shares how learners were forced to speak English in the school grounds through a school policy which barred the use of *Gikuyu*, the learners’ home language. Thus, whoever was caught speaking *Gikuyu* in the vicinity of the school was subjected to humiliating experiences:

... after the declaration of a state of emergency over Kenya in 1952 ... English became more than a language: it was *the* language, and all the others had to bow before it in deference. Thus one of the most humiliating experiences was to be caught speaking *Gikuyu* in the vicinity of the school. The culprit was given corporal punishment – three to five strokes of the cane on bare buttocks – or was made to carry a metal plate around the neck with inscription such as I AM STUPID or I AM A DONKEY. Sometimes the culprits were fined money they could hardly afford....

Wa Thiong’o, 2005, p. 11

So doing deprived many natives of access to education because they were either afraid to be humiliated or subjected to monetary fines they could not pay. This led to a process of self-exclusion. In essence, colonial education in Africa can be summarised as “education for subordination, exploitation, the creation of mental confusion and the development of underdevelopment” (Rodney 1989, p. 264). The result of such education may have included access to some kinds of powerful knowledge, but it also undeniably resulted in deleterious effects including self-degradation and the positioning of the coloniser as superior.

The combination of measures put in place to limit access to education for the native African inhabitants resulted in the deprivation of the experienced workforce for the continent. That can be traced on the bleak picture of the number of Africans that either held professional positions or that obtained professional qualifications particularly up to the 1960s which marked the independence of the continent (albeit with South Africa remaining under settler colonial control for another thirty years). Statistics indicate that less than one-quarter of all professional civil service posts were held by Africans at the time of independence in the British colonies; and only three percent of high school age students received secondary education at independence (Yakaboski & Nolan, 2011). Zambia had only 100 university graduates and 1000 secondary school graduates in 1961; and the university of East Africa which served Tanzania, Kenya and Uganda turned out a total of only 99 graduates for a combined population of 23 million in 1960 (Woldegiorgis & Doeverspeck, 2013; Teferra & Altbach, 2004). Further details by Abrokwa (2017) and Teferra and Altbach (2004) indicate that the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) attained its independence in 1960 without a single engineer, doctor or lawyer that was not from a colonial power.

It is worth sharing here that, while a lot of literature on higher education in Africa is more focused on the ‘European model universities’ introduced through colonisation, the concept of higher education is not new in Africa. History has indicated that there had been “indigenous precolonial higher education institutions rooted in the African cultural and intellectual soil and climate” (Alemu, 2018, p. 220). Those include the Ethiopian Higher Church Education in Ethiopia founded in the 4th century, The Al-Azhar University in Cairo founded in 970AD, the Ez-Zitouna University in Tunisia founded in 732AD and the University of Qarawiyyin (or Al-Karaouine) in Morocco founded in 859 (Alemu, 2018; Woldegiorgis & Doeverspeck, 2013; Lulat, 2005).

Nevertheless, and despite this rich history of indigenous education in Africa from childhood through to adulthood prior to the besiege of the continent by Western powers, it had been (and continues to be) difficult for Africa to claim powerful knowledge or to be a player on the global arena (Mosweunyane, 2013). This is because “the evidence that is available is often not accepted by the developed world or deliberately distorted” (Mosweunyane, 2013, p. 51) and Western formal education did not consider cultural transmission as part of the educative process (Boateng, 1985).

1.3.3 Post-colonial education in Africa

After the colonial masters were forced to withdraw from governing African countries starting in 1960, most African leaders were faced with the mammoth task of addressing social injustices that has been built into social systems after decades of colonialism. A great focus was placed on the provision of education as it is indicated that “at the dawn of independence, incoming African leaders were quick to prioritise education on their development agendas” (Musau, 2018, unpagged) in attempt to lift the continent out of abject poverty. There was a flurry of policies and institutions put in place across several African countries to bring about numerous educational reforms to address social, political, and economic needs (Ojiambo, 2018).

In an attempt to widen what Morrow (2007) calls *formal access*, African governments started to increase their budgets for education in order to build more schools and classrooms as well as to post teachers even in the farthest corners where education was previously inaccessible. Many governments further introduced free primary and secondary education in an attempt to address the challenges of families’ socio-economic status as a barrier to education access. So doing drastically improved access to elementary education in the continent as Musau (2018) shares that at the early primary school level, Africa enjoys a participation rate of above 80% on average, “with the continent recording some of the biggest increases in elementary school enrolment globally in the last few decades” (unpagged).

Equally, post-colonial Africa has witnessed the proliferation of HEIs. Described as an “explosive growth” (Zezeza, 2021, unpagged), statistics to that effect indicate that “in 2018, there were 1,682 universities in Africa, up from 784 in 2000 and 294 in 1980” (Zezeza, 2021, unpagged).

Despite the exponential growth in response to the demand for access to formal education and HEIs in the post-colonial Africa, it has been argued that the continent still lags behind in terms

of the completion rates both in formal schooling and post-school education. While the challenges can be attributed to various issues, central in this study is the fact that “the remnants of ‘western civilization’ continue to devour development in Africa [because] African education systems are influenced by hegemonic ideal of the European education systems” (Abraham, 2020, p. 42). Attributing Africa’s current educational troubles to colonialism, Ocheni and Nwankwo (2012, p. 51) contest the claim that the colonisers ‘brought education to Africa’ and argue that such arguments “appear to be true on the surface level or superficially, but if it is subjected to critical analysis, it will reveal the hollowness or emptiness of colonial education which is partially responsible for the present African underdevelopment”. Such scholars do not only critique the absencing of education practices prior to colonisation, but also argue that education needs to be understood as part and parcel of the colonial agenda. Formal education during colonialism served to position colonial powers and ways of being as superior and sought to erase indigenous knowledges and ways of being.

The desire for education post-independence from colonial powers has thus been accompanied by critiques of what forms of education students are accessing and whether these forms serve a post-independence Global South agenda or continue to reinforce global divides and social inequalities.

Importantly, questions have been asked about whether the rapid increases in numbers of universities and enrolments at these universities, that is successes in widening access, have resulted in increased access to powerful knowledge that reflects the student’s context.

That in essence underscores how widening access to education is not an indication that everyone prospers as success rates and graduation rates have generally not grown at the same rate as enrolments have. As Maniram and Maistry indicate: “physical access alone is not sufficient, as increased enrolments have historically not translated into equivalent student throughput” (2018, p. 306). We should celebrate successes in physical access across the continent post-independence, including in Namibia, the site of this study. But we should be cautious of stopping at such successes and reflect on the extent to which success in widening physical access has been met with equal successes in two other areas: epistemological access and epistemic justice.

Epistemological access, a term coined by Morrow (2007), is to do with access to powerful knowledge. It is not enough to be admitted into the academy, the student deserves access to the

goods offered by the academy. Epistemological access has to do with “access to disciplinary knowledge and the ways of knowing within a discipline” (Maniram & Maistry, 2018, p. 306). Knowledge in the academy should be more than information, which is readily available in this age of the internet. It should include powerful ways of thinking that enable a transformative relationship to knowledge that changes the student’s understanding of the world and of their role within it (Ashwin 2020). Wheelahan (2010) in her book, *Why Knowledge Matters*, argues that powerful knowledge is knowledge that can be abstracted from the specific context within which it is created or used to enable understandings in new contexts. To enjoy epistemological access thus entails more than access to information, data or facts, and instead entails attaining access to the principles underpinning that information, data or facts. While physical access is not enough and epistemological access is essential, many argue that this epistemological access needs to be with epistemic justice (Fricker, 2007).

Fricker (2007) coined the term ‘epistemic justice’ to argue that we need to reflect on who is served by certain forms of knowledge and whose knowledge is excluded. She argues that some people’s experiences of the world are excluded from formal education settings in what she calls ‘testimonial injustice’. When lived experiences, practices, norms, values and ways of being are rendered invisible in the academy, this is an injustice. Many have argued that epistemic injustice was at the heart of colonial education (Abrokwa, 2017; Woldegiorgis & Doeverspeck, 2013). Fricker also reflects on another form of epistemic injustice, which she calls hermeneutic injustice, which is where the structures of society, in particular educational structures exclude certain people from powerful forms of knowledge about themselves or the world. Fricker indicates this is “when a gap in collective interpretive resources puts someone at an unfair disadvantage when it comes to making sense of their social experiences” (Fricker 2007, p. 1).

The concepts of epistemological access and epistemic justice enable us to understand that a higher education needs to be more than just mere education (Ashwin 2020). Students need to be able to take on the knowledge of their fields and make this knowledge their own.

As indicated earlier, the study aims to understand the role that academic literacy courses play in students’ disciplinary knowledge-building. These courses are courses specifically aimed at improving student success. I now provide a brief overview of the history of Namibian education in order to provide the specific study context and reflect on the ways in which the deliberations offered thus far relate to Namibia broadly.

1.4 Education in Namibia: An overview

In Namibia, like her sister countries in Africa, education traditionally took place continuously and informally whereby the teaching of distinctive ways of doing things was “an integral part of everyday life rather than a specialist activity carried out in particular buildings” (Harber, 1993, p. 416). In pre-colonial Namibia, “knowledge, skills, values and roles were learned from parents and other adults by, for example, conversation, imitation, stories, games, song and ceremonies” (Harber, 1993, p. 416). Of note were the more formal aspects of education such as initiation rites, which would be separated by gender and age group; content included issues such as how to talk to elders, what is expected in marriage, respect for land and for cattle and so on. These lessons were offered by elders established as knowledgeable. The ‘graduation’ took the form of a ceremony at the end of the initiation process to celebrate the achievement.

Such education, both informal and formal, was largely disrupted from the 1800s (earlier in some cases) when the missionaries entered Africa and introduced Western education (Katzao, 1999). In Namibia², the first missionaries of the Wesleyan Society entered in 1805, followed by the Rhenish Missionary Society in 1842, and the Finnish Missionary society in 1870 (Amukugo, 1993, Julius, 2020; Kandumbu, 2005). Other missionary groups, including the Anglican and the Catholic missionaries, also made their way into Namibia (Amukugo, 1993). The different missionary societies established their own schools among various Namibian ethnic groups to advance their own agendas (Prill, 2012), with the integral idea of establishing schools in order to supplement the work of Christianisation to give a rudimentary education to catechists and, equally importantly, “to change cultural patterns that were considered to be pagan” (Katzao, 1999, p. 20).

Central to the provision of education by the missionaries was language (Amukugo, 1993). Thus, different languages were used by different missionaries with Cape Dutch having been used by the Rhenish missionaries and English being used by The Anglican and Catholic Missionaries (Julius, 2020; Amukugo, 1993). The Finnish missionaries on the other hand adopted the local indigenous languages and adopted them as the medium of instruction (Amukugo, 1993; Julius, 2020; Katzao, 1999). That decision was followed by the translation of the bible into the local indigenous languages, the compilation of dictionaries, as well as the development of textbooks as teaching and learning materials, primarily aimed at spreading

² The country of Namibia did not exist as a state at this time. Rather it was a vast land occupied by numerous nomadic tribes, mainly the Herero and Nama people

Christianity (Katzao, 1999). Giving prominence to the indigenous languages by the Finnish missionaries is better captured by Abraham (2020) who shares that “Many missionaries saw the local languages as an important instrument for direct contact with the converts and potential converts. They learned the languages in order to translate the bible and other religious text and to produce instruction materials” (p. 41).

It is worth sharing that the gravity of the Finnish missionaries’ choice of local indigenous languages can even be felt to date especially in the Oshiwambo languages where only the Oshindonga and Oshikwanyama dialects were developed by the missionaries. To date, it is the same dialects of the Oshiwambo language group which have significant literatures, and which are taught as school subjects for the Oshiwambo speakers in the formal schooling (Harlech-Jones, 1990). The missionaries’ education system was interrupted in 1884 when Germany occupied and colonised Namibia, (then German South West Africa) until 1915 (UNIN, 1984).

1.4.1 Namibian education under the German rule

When Germany occupied Namibia, German became the official language and the medium of instruction in education (MoI). According to the UNIN (1984), German as the MoI was not practically reinforced for most people in the country because the planning and organising of education then was not meant for African children but rather for white children only. To some extent, German officials operated in disguised fashion by operating under a smokescreen of philanthropy, while amassing enormous wealth to the detriment of the local indigenous people.

In the German South West Africa, the gravity of the German unholiness came to the fore when chiefs of various ethnic groups were put under pressure to sign so-called ‘*Protection Treaties*’ that offered no protection but rather found indigenous people being cheated out of their land (Baer, 2017). The expropriation of land and cattle through the *Protection Treaties* led to the resistance of the German colonial rule by the Herero and the Nama with the Herero having waged war with Germans in January 1904 with some successes (Baer, 2017). However, their victory was short lived because Germans strategised and imported more soldiers, which led to the staging of the *Battle of Waterberg* on 11 August 1904 – which Germany won by driving the Hereros away from the water point towards the Omaheke plain sands to die from hunger and thirst, with the few water sources available being poisoned by the Germans. The battle that was ordered by General Trotha carried with it an extermination order whereby indiscriminate shooting of men, women and children of Herero origin was called for.

Following the Herero defeat, the Nama under the command of Captain Hendrik Witbooi waged war at the beginning of October 1904 – the war which raged on until 1907 (Baer, 2017). As an aftermath of the Herero and Nama uprisings, the Germans subjected the survivors to harsh and inhumane treatment. Those include being held in “large concentration camps where forced labour, inadequate food and shelter, and diseases resulted yet in more deaths” (Baer, 2017, p. 10). The end result was a huge reduction in the Herero and Nama population as indicated that “80 percent of the Herero people and 50 percent of the Nama perished” (Baer, 2017, p. 10). To be exact, Harber (1993) shares that “the Herero population ... were reduced from some 60 to 80 000 to some 16 000 and of these 14 000 were in German concentration camps. By 1911, the Nama population was down from 15 to 20 000 in 1892 to 9800” (p. 415). Germany’s actions have come to be termed the first genocide of the twentieth century (Baer, 2017).

While the discussion above depicts the brutality of the war, those indigenous people who were not killed or physically attacked also experienced brutality in German South West Africa, the cruelty of the racist policies and allocations of resources overshadowed the whole country. For instance, the land appropriated from the Herero remains in the hands of the Germans in the post-colonial Namibia. Communities were deprived of their livelihood in ways that continue to this day and thereby limits their participation in the global market, particularly of beef exportation which is a lucrative business in current day Namibia. Equally so, the remnants of such atrocities have their tentacles spread across various spheres amongst which is education.

According to Julius (2020), Germany’s scant focus on education of the natives weakened the dominance of the German language in Namibia especially amongst black communities because “different missionary societies maintained their respective medium of instructions that they had implemented before the Germans arrived in Namibia” (p. 2). Such a state of affairs remained in place until Germany was defeated in the First World War (WW1) and South Africa took control of the administration of Namibia (and changed the name of the country to South West Africa (dropping the ‘German’) from 1915 until its independence on 21st March 1990 (Harber, 1993; Miškařík, 2019).

1.4.2 Namibian education under the South African Administration

According to Eckl (2008), the German South West Africa was handed to South Africa in accordance with “Article 119 of the Peace Treaty of Versailles whereby the League of Nations mandated ‘His Britannic Majesty for and on behalf of the Union of South Africa’ with the

administration of the territory” (p. 36). During the South African administration, three major changes were effected in the education system in Namibia.

- There would be an expansion of provision of black education so that by 1988 80% of black children would have a basic four years of primary education;
- Black education was to be moved from the missionaries to the state, partly because the churches could no longer be trusted to transmit apartheid ideologies correctly; and
- Education beyond the lower primary level was to be severely restricted [with] only 20% would go on to higher primary school and only one secondary school would be provided for each ethnic group

Harber (1993, p. 418)

Such changes were effected to the detriment of the native Namibian people. As early as 1921, the education for white people between the ages of seven and 17 years was made compulsory (Harber, 1993), and the number of primary schools was controlled and kept at minimal with only two primary schools built for Africans between 1915 and 1940 in the central region of Namibia, with no state school built in the Northern part of Namibia where the majority of the natives lived (Harber, 1993).

Copying the apartheid legislation in neighbouring South Africa, the South African administrators of the country introduced the Bantu Education Act of 1953. This act had as its aim “to foster and to inculcate a passive acceptance of racial inferiority among Black people, while accommodating the myth of White superiority” (Kandumbu, 2005, p. 11). The Bantu Education system can be described as having specific goals at different stages that cemented the apartheid ideology:

... the Bantu education curriculum was geared to achieve the following objectives: Standard Two for literacy, Standard Six for a better class of labourer, Standard Eight for training teachers, nurses, and police; and Standard Ten for those who are to proceed to university (Tjitendero, 1984, p. 14).

In line with the Bantu Education system in South Africa, education for the indigenous population was understood in instrumentalist ways as providing a set of skills for people to take up their ‘rightful position’ in society. In 1958, the Van Zyl commission came into being to further reinforce apartheid ideology, including advocacy for the “racial superiority of whites” (Harber, 1993, p. 418) whereby black learners were taught about their need for the guidance of the superior white culture.

To reach its racist objectives, education was administered along the racial lines with different systems for white people, black people and coloureds (mixed race people) (Shilongo 2004, Harber, 1993). The funding of education was also unequal with whites' education paid for by the state while the education of black students relied heavily on fees paid for by the families. Statistics on education funding in 1981 indicates that "per capita expenditure on black pupils was 232 Rands, 300 Rands for 'coloureds' and 1210 Rands for whites" (Harber, 1993, p. 418). The black child's education was further strained by a combination of factors including poverty, large classes, lack of resources, hostility of the curriculum, and poorly qualified teachers (Darling-Hammond, 1998). Thus, by 1988 statistics indicate that one in three black pupils did not finish their first year of schooling while 70% of those who reached their final year of primary education did not go on to secondary school (Harber, 1993).

Pre-independence education in Namibia can be summarised as having been a privilege for the select few, provided along the basis of race, and provided along stringent selection measures to determine who proceeded further and how far, as well as to ensure that only a very small proportion reached the highest levels of education (Ministry of Education and Culture (MEC), 1993). This is depicted in the book *Towards Education for All* (MEC, 1993, p. 5) which indicated that,

In practice, prior to our independence our schools had to make a dual selection. First, they separated people on the basis of race. Then, within each group created by that segregation, there was a further selection of the few who would reach the higher levels of the separate education systems. The uneven allocation of resources ensured that a larger percentage of White than of Black children would be selected for further education. And the segregation of the society ensured that with very few exceptions the Black elite remained inferior to the White elite in terms of its education, jobs, authority, influence, and incomes. For Black women the situation was even worse.

Such a situation ravaged the country until it gained its independence and acquired autonomy in the running of its affairs.

1.4.3 Namibia's post-colonial education

Namibia gained its independence³ on 21 March 1990. While that was worth celebrating because it marked the end of the apartheid brutality, it also marked the beginning of a need for

³ Independence is used here to mean political independence, that is, the exchanging of power between African countries and the colonial masters. Literature indicates that this is not enough to ensure equity and freedom. This is at least in part because most of the education systems have continued to be grounded in western epistemologies propagating western value systems while ignoring indigenous ways of knowing (Hapanyengwi-Chemhuru & Makuvaza, 2017, p. 89).

the new government to embark on serious education reforms to address and redress the injustices and inequalities left by South Africa's imposition of apartheid segregation policies (Julius, 2020; Iiping & Kasanda, 2013). The "new state inherited an education system skewed by the distortions of the colonial and apartheid systems. Children of the majority communities were severely under-represented, especially in the higher grades" (Coombe, 1993 p. 61).

As a result, the government of an independent Namibia deemed it fit and urgent to widen access to education particularly for black people from primary schools up to university with a view that "expanding access to education increases productivity and economic growth" (MEC, 1993, p. 3). In that vein, four educational goals, access, equity, quality and democracy (MEC, 1993), were set as the pillars of post-apartheid Namibian education. Additionally, education has been considered a fundamental human right of each and every citizen, as per Article 20 of the Namibian constitution (1990, p. 14) which states that:

All persons shall have the right to education;

Primary education shall be compulsory and the State shall provide reasonable facilities to render effective this right for every resident within Namibia, by establishing and maintaining State schools at which primary education will be provided free of charge.

Making primary education compulsory and declaring the provision of education for all citizens in Namibia is in line with the World Declaration on Education for All and Framework for Action as signed in Jomtien, Thailand in March 1990, and to which Namibia was a signatory.

While education for all expands access to education by increasing the number of schools and the learners enrolled, the need went beyond that. In its earnest sense, education for all means developing new ways to think about the education system in ways that undo apartheid ideologies. This included a reconsideration of the admission criteria (previously referred to as 'readiness'), the purpose of assessment and the one-sided view of blaming learners when they perform poorly as it is indicated that "when education is designed to select an ever smaller elite, failure refers to individual students. Those who have low marks, or even those who have higher marks but who were not selected to proceed, have failed" (MEC, 1993, p. 7).

To date the Namibia's formal education comprises two sectors: Basic Education and Higher Education. The Basic Education comprises the Junior Primary Phase (Pre-Primary to Grade 3), Senior Primary (grades 4-7), Junior Secondary (Grades 8 – 9), and Senior Secondary (Grades

10-12) (MBESC, 2016). The structure is depicted in the figure below as adapted from Julius (2020, p. 5).

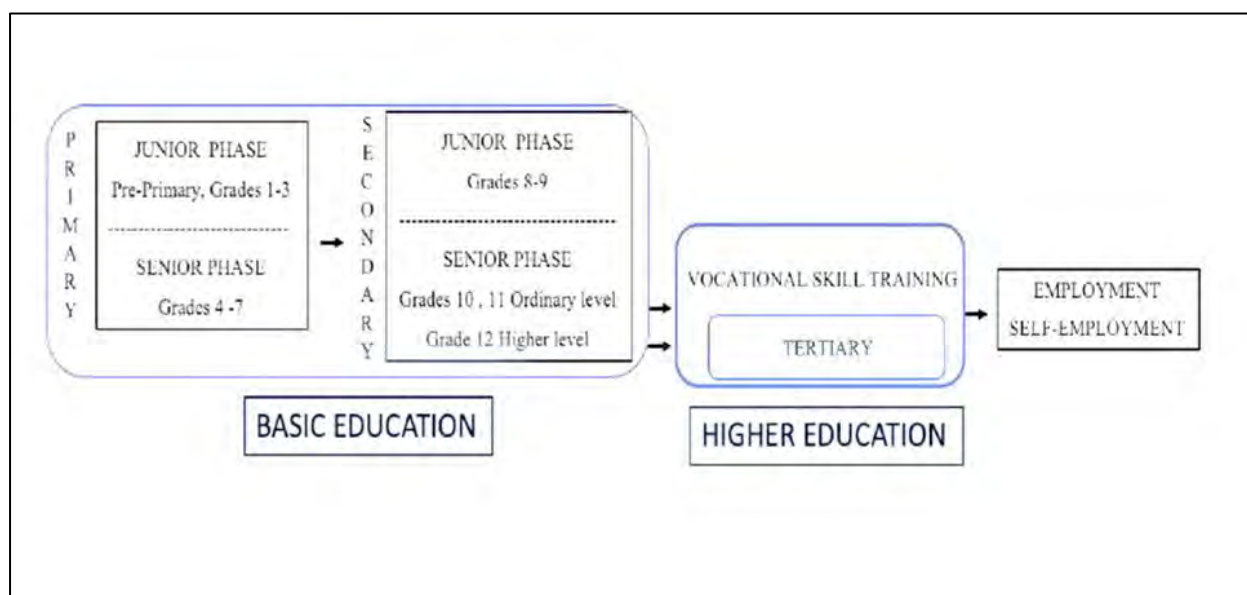


Figure 1: Namibia's formal education structure

It is worth sharing here that unlike in the apartheid era where learners had to pay fees for school, which denied a lot of black learners access to education, provision of formal education in independent Namibia is for free. Starting in 2012, free universal primary education for all Namibian children in government schools from grades 0 -7 was rolled out. That was followed by the second phase which is free secondary education for public schools from 2016, thus making the entire basic education free in public schools in Namibia (Julius, 2020; MBESC, 2016).

Alongside widening access and decolonising the education system, the choice of language has also been revisited in an independent Namibia. Central was the need to do away with the colonial languages, particularly Afrikaans which was the official language under South African rule prior to independence. As Jansen (1995, p. 48) puts it, there was an urgent need to “institutionalise a language policy which could unify Namibians across the ethnic and racial divides enforced by the extension of apartheid ... and to adopt a language policy which would facilitate mobility among Namibians within the country and across international borders”. As a result, English a foreign language, was declared the official language. This is enshrined in Article 3 of the Namibian constitution that “The official language of Namibia shall be English”.

The choice of English as the only official language in an independent Namibia was received with mixed feelings. Some saw it as a move away from the colonial forces which demanded the use of German and then Afrikaans as official languages. Proponents believe it undid the apartheid ideologies because “if Afrikaans was the language of oppression, then English was the language of resistance” (Frydman, 2011, p. 183). Similarly, English was considered to have met most of the criteria in the selection items (see Maho, 1998), including “unity, acceptability, feasibility, pan Africanism and wider communication” (Ausiku, 2010, p. 2). Thus, choosing it rather than a local language was believed to cause unity because “choosing one local language over another could be seen as being based on tribal preference and might lead to further linguistic and ethnic divisiveness, rather than unity” (Julius, 2020, p. 4).

Opponents on the other hand believed that choosing English, a foreign language, as the sole official language suppressed local indigenous languages, which numbered 36 at the time of independence (Maho, 1998). Significantly, English had never been used much in the country, in business, schools or social settings. At independence, only 0.8% of the population spoke English (Brock-Utne & Holmarsdottir, 2001). The idea of English allowing for linguistic unity was thus rejected by many because the vast majority of Namibians had no historical ties with English and most people could not speak it at all (Maho 1998).

The choice of English as the official language cascaded into the provision of education. In the policy document titled *The language policy for schools in Namibia*, (Ministry of Basic Education, Sport and Culture [MBESC], 2003), it is indicated that mother tongue languages (also known as home languages) are to be used as medium of instruction (MoI) from Grade 0 to Grade 3. Grade 4 is a transitional Grade in which English is phased in as a language of learning and teaching (LoLT). That means from Grade 4 onwards, the LoLT is expected to be English. English has also become a compulsory passing subject, which “in terms of policy regulation, learners must pass in order to be promoted to the next grade, or, for Grade 12 learners, to institutions of higher learning” (Nekondo, 2017, p. 4).

With the English requirements in place, access to HEIs becomes even more of a challenge in an independent Namibia because different institutions put in place minimum requirements that are not uniform. Alongside issues of English proficiency, the costs of higher education are an enormous issue in access and retention.

1.4.4 Higher Education in Namibia

Namibia has three higher education institutions, namely: the University of Namibia, The Namibia University of Science and Technology and the International University of Management. While this study takes place in the University of Namibia, and I start with a discussion of this institution, below I also provide a brief overview of the other two institutions to paint a picture of the sector as a whole.

The University of Namibia (UNAM)

This is a public university and the largest national institution of higher learning in the country. The university was established by an Act of Parliament on 31 August 1992, as recommended by a Commission on Higher Education (UNAM, n.d. unpaged). Described as a ‘traditional university’ (Julius, 2020), the university offers undergraduate and postgraduate programmes tailored “to develop the requisite national human resources for the country through quality teaching, research, consultancy and community service” (UNAM, 2016, p. iii). At inception, (i.e. in 1992) UNAM had an enrolment of 3639 students and a staff complement of 313 personnel comprising 60 academic staff and 253 administrative staff (UNAM, 2023). Such figures grew exponentially, for in 2018 the enrolment figures of students were 28 217 while the staff complement was 2492, comprising of 1540 academic staff and 952 administrative staff (UNAM, 2023), while in 2020 a total of 30 307 students were enrolled (UNAM, 2023). UNAM is thus a diverse institution with a population of more than 30 000 students from 41 countries and all continents (UNAM, n.d).

UNAM has four faculties: (1) Agriculture, Engineering and Natural Sciences; (2) Commerce, Management and Law; (3) Education and Human Sciences; (4) Health Sciences and Veterinary Medicine. Within these four faculties are a total of 17 schools. There are twelve campuses spread across the entire country, with the most northern campus being 1220 kms away from the most southern campus.

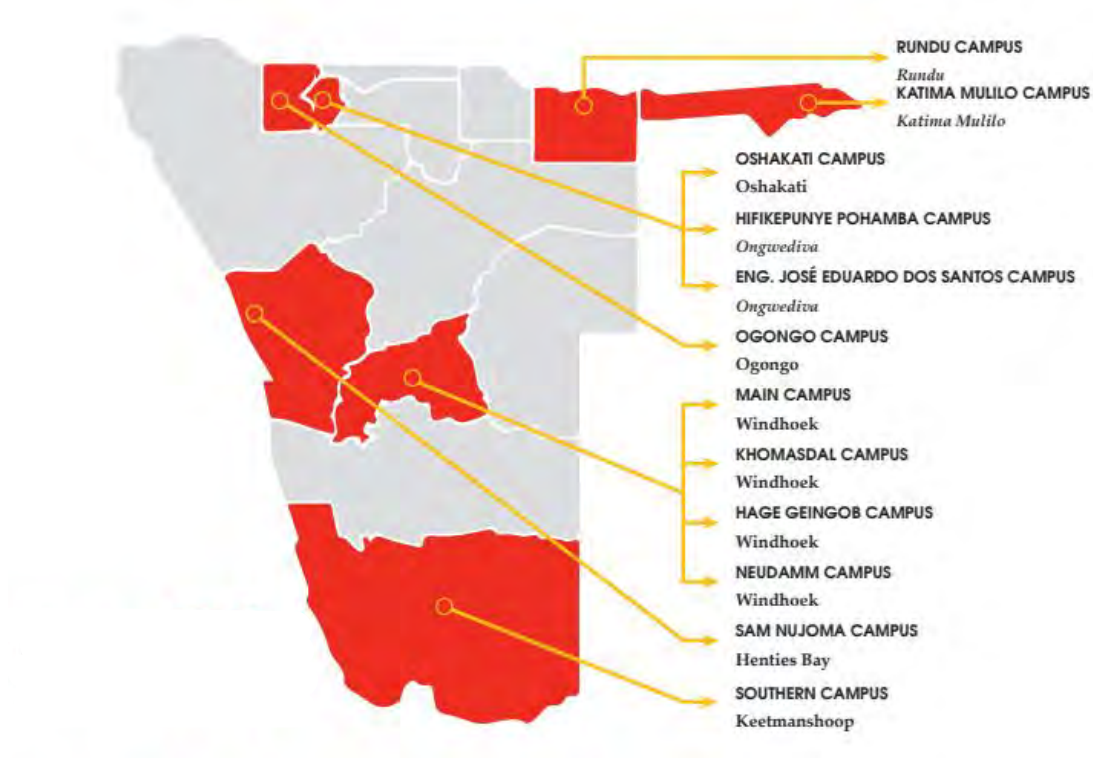


Figure 2: Map of Namibia showing spread of campuses (taken from UNAM Brochure, 2024a)

The programmes offered at its twelve campuses that are spread across the country are better summarised in the table below.

CAMPUS	LOCATION	REGION	FACULTY
Windhoek (Main) Campus	Windhoek	Khomas	Faculty of Agriculture, Engineering and Natural Sciences Faculty of Commerce, Management and Law Faculty of Education and Human Sciences Faculty of Health Sciences and Veterinary Medicine
Hage Geingob Campus	Windhoek	Khomas	Faculty of Health Sciences and Veterinary Medicine
Khomasdal Campus	Windhoek	Khomas	Faculty of Education and Human Sciences
Neudamm Campus	Windhoek	Khomas	Faculty of Health Sciences and Veterinary Medicine Faculty of Agriculture, Engineering and Natural Sciences
Oshakati Campus	Oshakati	Oshana	Faculty of Health Sciences and Veterinary Medicine Faculty of Agriculture, Engineering and Natural Sciences

			Faculty of Education and Human Sciences
Hifikepunye Pohamba Campus	Ongwediva	Oshana	Faculty of Education and Human Sciences Faculty of Agriculture, Engineering and Natural Sciences
José Eduardo dos Santos Campus	Ongwediva	Oshana	Faculty of Agriculture, Engineering and Natural Sciences
Ogongo Campus	Ogongo	Omusati	Faculty of Agriculture, Engineering and Natural Sciences Faculty of Health Sciences and Veterinary Medicine
Rundu Campus	Rundu	Kavango East	Faculty of Commerce, Management and Law Faculty of Education and Human Sciences Faculty of Health Sciences and Veterinary Medicine
Katima Mulilo Campus	Katima Mulilo	Zambezi	Faculty of Education and Human Sciences Faculty of Agriculture, Engineering and Natural Sciences
Southern Campus	Keetmanshoop	Karas	Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences
Sam Nujoma Campus	Henties Bay	Erongo	Faculty of Agriculture, Engineering and Natural Sciences Faculty of Commerce, Management and Law Faculty of Education and Human Sciences Faculty of Health Sciences and Veterinary Medicine.

Table 2: The University of Namibia Campuses (taken from UNAM Website, 2024)

To gain entry, faculties have minimum requirements that are points based on school subjects. However, the national minimum admission requirements are 25 points in five subjects including passing English with a D or better symbol. In the case that a prospective student does not meet the minimum criteria based on Grade 12 results, provision can also be made to admit students through a mature age entry – which is described as “an alternative admission route for prospective students not in possession of a Grade 12 Certificate or for those with a Grade 12 Certificate who does not fulfil the minimum admission criteria based on Grade 12” (UNAM, 2021, unpagged). The minimum age for such entrance is 25 years old on the admission year sought, as well as having proof of at least five years relevant work experience relating to the

proposed study programme. Furthermore, students must sit the mature age entry test which tests their English proficiency, their general knowledge, their numeric abilities, as well as some faculty specific knowledge (UNAM, 2024a).

Namibia University of Science and Technology (NUST)

This public university was established in 1996 as a Polytechnic of Namibia (PoN) through Act No. 33 of 1994. As the PoN, the mandate of the institution was to offer vocational, engineering, management and ICT programmes (Julius, 2020). In 2016 (i.e. 20 years later), the PoN was given university status and was renamed to the Namibia University of Science and Technology (NUST, 2021). This change echoed changes in the South African higher education system whereby Technikons became Universities of Technology, which in turn echoed changes in the English higher education system whereby Polytechnics became universities.

NUST has as its mission “to promote national competitiveness by providing multiple opportunities for excellent education, applied research, innovation and service” (NUST, 2021, unpagged). At inception, NUST like UNAM had a low enrolment rate with 2500 students enrolled in 1995/1996. Such figures grew to 9 301 in 2008 and 12 647 in 2021. The university has six faculties: (1) Management Sciences; (2) Human Sciences; (3) Engineering; (4) Health and Applied Sciences; (5) Computing and Informatics; and (6) Natural Resources and Spatial Sciences (NUST, 2021) and has two campuses, one in Windhoek (Khomas region) and one in Eenhana (Ohangwena region). The basic requirement for entrance to undergraduate degree programmes at NUST is a Grade 12 (NSSC), with a pass in five subjects and a minimum combined score of 25 points and a minimum of a D symbol in English language.

In its “spirit of lifelong learning and redress of past disadvantage” (NUST, 2021, unpagged), the university also puts in place admission via mature age entry scheme for those that do not meet normal admission requirements. The NUST requirements for mature age entry are 23 years of age on the year admission is sought, three years relevant experience, as well as passing the NUST language proficiency test in English (NUST, 2021).

The International University of Management (IUM)

This is a privately owned university founded in 1994 as a non-degree awarding body, and it obtained university status in 2002. IUM has as its mission “... to train innovative specialists for public and private sectors for Namibia and other countries in the world, and to train

dedicated knowledge workers who will provide leadership at national and international levels” (IUM, n.d., unpagged). The university offers a combination of professional, ICT and vocational qualifications and has six faculties: (1) Information and System Development; (2) Strategic Management; (3) Business Administration; (4) Tourism, Travel, Hospitality and Event Management; (4) Educational Administration and Management; (7) Humanity, HIV/AIDS and Sustainable Development. From 2015, IUM has further embarked on training teachers and nurses, and thereby launched the Department of Education and the Department of Nursing respectively (Julius, 2020). To date, IUM has campuses in Windhoek (Khomas Region), Ongwediva (Oshana Region), Walvis Bay (Erongo Region), Nkurenkuru (Kavango West Region) and Swakopmund (Erongo Region).

Due to its varied programmes, the minimum admission requirements at IUM differ. These range from a minimum of 18 points in five subjects and a minimum of a D symbol in English for stand-alone courses to a minimum of 25 points in five subjects with a minimum of a D symbol in English for the degree programmes (IUM, 2021; Julius, 2020).

IUM’s student enrolment is also on the increase. In 2018 the student population was 9 351, but grew to 10 155 in 2019, which marked the milestone as it was the first time the student population passed the 10 000 mark (IUM Annual report, 2019). Equally, the number of courses offered increased from 32 qualification in 2015 to 63 qualifications by the end of 2019 (IUM, 2019, pp. 5-6).

The minimum requirements for the HEIs in Namibia are summarised in the Table 3 as adapted from Julius (2020, p. 15).

Institution	Qualification	Entry Requirements/points from Grade 12	Performance in (NSSC/H) English language examination
UNAM	Degree	25	C /Grade 4 or better
NUST	Degree	25	D/Grade 4 or better
IUM	Degree	25	D/Grade 4 or better
	Degree – through stand-alone programmes	20	D
	Degree – through preparatory programmes	18	D

Table 3: Entry requirements at Namibian HEIs

Should a student qualify for admission there are registration fees to be paid. As of 2024, the registration fees for UNAM are N\$2575.00 for Namibian students and N\$6075.00 for students from the rest of SADC⁴ and for non-SADC students (UNAM, 2024b), N\$ 1910 for NUST (NUST, 2024) and N\$2100 for IUM (IUM, 2024). The registration fee is compulsory especially for first year students in order to be entered into the system and secure the admission letter. In addition to the registration fees, students have also to pay tuition fees. The fees are usually determined by the number of modules/subjects a student has each academic year/semester. The number of modules each student registers for depends on the performance of each student, with some first-year students likely to be exempted from core English modules based on their symbol in English. As for the subsequent years/semesters, the number of modules is determined by the performance in the previous year/semester whereby any subject failed must be reregistered for; thereby increasing the costs and the number of modules.

Once registered, students may then apply for funding from the Namibia Students' Financial Assistance Fund (NSFAF), which is a government fund established in terms of Act, No. 26 of 2000 with the aim to provide financial assistance to students in order “to enable them to study

⁴ SADC is the Southern African Development Community, a regional economic agreement between 16 countries: Angola, Botswana, Comoros, Democratic Republic of Congo, Eswatini, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Seychelles, South Africa, United Republic of Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe

or to do research; and ... to facilitate the training of students in prescribed courses or fields of study at approved tertiary institutions” (NSFAF, n.d, unpaged). NSFAF has funded 122 335 undergraduate students and 4 243 postgraduate students between 2010 and 2024 academic years (NSFAF, n.d, unpaged). The award covers tuition and non-tuition costs. The non-tuition costs are mostly to cater for students’ accommodation/hostel fees for those that are accommodated in the university hostels, in UNAM since IUM and NUST do not have hostels. In the case a student is not accommodated in the hostel, they reserve the right to claim their non-tuition fees from the institution as a refund. The money is paid into the student’s bank accounts and used to pay for accommodation elsewhere or for anything they deem fit – since NSFAF does not have control over that money once it is paid to the institution.

Despite the high figures, applying to NSFAF is not a guarantee that a student will secure funding because a lot of factors, including parental income, must be considered. Alike, securing funding comes with terms and conditions, one of which is that the loan/grant will be suspended in case of failure/unsatisfactory results in any academic year. An academic record must be submitted each year for the loan/grant renewal. Considering the worrying throughput and retention rates in the Namibian sector, one can understand that securing funding is no guarantee of success as climbing the academic ladder in Namibia is not an easy process. There are indications that withdrawal of funding by sponsors has been a major factor forcing students to drop out of HEIs (Chokwe, 2013; Jurecic, 2006). In all instances, and regardless of the cause of dropping out, the end result is a disproportion between the number of students enrolling and the number of students completing (White & Lowenthal, 2011).

As indicated earlier, the study aims to understand what role is played by courses aimed at improving student success. Around the world, such courses are variously called *Language and Communication* courses, *English for Academic Purposes* courses and *Academic Literacy* courses, as I discuss in the next chapter. At UNAM, these courses are offered by a unit known as the Language Centre.

1.5 The Language Centre

The Language Centre was established in 1992 for “language learning, teaching and research” (UNAM, n.d), and its key focus is “to upgrade university students’ competence in English and to provide regular service courses to students in all faculties” (UNAM, n.d. unpaged). According to Uys (2016), the Language Centre was created “with the ultimate purpose ... to

increase student retention at UNAM” (p. 19). The centre is an independent service unit not affiliated to any faculty (Chamberlain, 1994) and is not found in all the UNAM campuses. For instance, the UNAM Oshakati Campus and UNAM JEDS campuses share the lecturers from the Language Centre, whose duty stations are at the Oshakati Campus.

At the moment the Language Centre offers a variety of language courses at undergraduate and postgraduate levels (Willemse, 2013) including *Academic Writing for Postgraduate Students*, *English for Academic Purposes*, *English Communication and Study Skills*, *English for General Communications* and *English for Certificate Purposes* (UNAM, n.d). The Language Centre does not have a placement test or any other tests such as IELTS, and students are placed into different course levels based on their high school leaving scores of English (Hamakali, 2016; Uys, 2016). One course, however, the *English for Academic Purposes* course is compulsory for all undergraduate students regardless of the symbol they scored in English at school and regardless of their chosen study programme in UNAM (Willemse, 2013). Below is a description of the *English for Academic Purposes* course.

1.6 The EAP course

The EAP course at UNAM, with the course code ULEA3519, is a compulsory semester-long course for students in all the university’s faculties (see Table 1). The course guide specifies the following as its aims:

- Focus on academic reading, writing, listening and oral presentation skills for academic purposes.
- Empower students with the skills necessary to produce a referenced and researched essay written in formal academic style in the context of the university studies.
- Empower students with oral presentations, reading and listening skills.

(EAP Course Outline, 2023, unpagged)

The course guide further specifies that:

Upon completion of the module students will be able to:

- Demonstrate understanding of language print
- Practice effective writing skills
- Demonstrate official and basic academic speaking

- Demonstrate academic study skills

The following are then listed as the “Course Content:

- Academic Listening, Comprehension and Note Taking
- Basic Academic Skills
- Academic Reading & Vocabulary
- Functional Situations in Academic Writing
- Selecting and Synthesising
- Applied Writing
- APA Reference
- Avoiding Plagiarism
- Introduction to other types of referencing
- Extensive and intensive reading
- Semantic relations
- Academic Paragraph Writing
- Academic Speaking

(EAP Course Outline, 2023, unpagged)

This study analyses the EAP course to make sense of how it is structured and understood and thereby to reflect on how the course is conceptualised and implemented – and the extent to which this can enable student success.

The study was guided by the following questions:

1. How is ‘academic literacy’ conceptualised in the UNAM English for Academic Purposes course curriculum?

This question is further divided into two sub-questions: (a) How do the academics who teach the UNAM EAP course conceptualise ‘academic literacy’? and (b) How is knowledge structured in course documents and assessments?

2. How do academics who teach other courses conceptualise UNAM's EAP course and its relationship to the literacy practices expected in their courses?
3. How do students experience the EAP course at UNAM, and how do they understand the relationship between the content and activities of the EAP course and the academic literacy demands of their other courses?

While there is a substantial body of research on academic literacy type courses, which I review in the next chapter, much of it fails to critically examine what is legitimated within these courses or to compare what is being legitimated within such courses to what is called for in mainstream courses. Existing literature predominantly focuses on students' backgrounds or the pedagogical approaches of lecturers of such courses (Clarence & McKenna, 2017). This narrow focus presents an incomplete picture, addressing only one aspect - either student attributes or educator practices - without integrating both perspectives or their implications for the actual course content. This study attempts to address this by including lecturers' pedagogical choices, students' perceptions and experiences, and the course curriculum to understand the course and its potential impact more comprehensively. This attends to the need to examine the interplay between these elements and their collective influence on educational outcomes.

Additionally, there is a lack of focus on knowledge itself as a subject of study, leading to what Maton (2014) describes as 'knowledge blindness'. This oversight results in insufficient scrutiny of the content and structure of courses and how they align with or diverge from the requirements of mainstream courses. While there is some valuable research on such courses, which I share in the next chapter, they rarely reflect on what kinds of knowledge are legitimated in the courses.

This study addresses these gaps by focusing on the role of such courses through the application of Legitimation Code Theory (LCT) as the analytical framework to the specific example of the EAP course at UNAM. By foregrounding knowledge, this research aims to identify the dominant codes within the EAP course and determine how these codes align with or conflict with those in mainstream courses. The findings of this study are crucial for understanding the role of academic literacy type courses in students' disciplinary knowledge-building and their implications for academic success, particularly in light of the high attrition rates in HEIs.

1.7 Outline of the chapters in the thesis

This chapter, *background of the study*, set the stage by providing the background of the study. It outlined the macro context of high attrition rates, even amidst the introduction of academic literacy type courses. The chapter elaborated on the hegemonic power of Western educational positions through the country's colonial history, particularly in regards language, and the continued impact of colonialism on African Higher Education Institutions (HEIs).

Additionally, it presented the research questions guiding the study, marking the commencement of this inquiry.

Chapter Two, *the contextual framework*, delves into the larger global structures influencing higher education provision. It emphasises the interplay between macro, meso, and micro mechanisms, which is crucial for understanding the interconnected factors driving changes in education systems. This understanding is essential for a contextual analysis of whether these mechanisms effect positive or negative changes, especially in relation to the English for Academic Purposes course. The focus on conditioning structures at all levels tempers the likelihood of reductive accounts whereby explanations for the status quo are seen to rest with individual educators or students. In other words, this chapter positions the study within a larger understanding of the interplay of global, national and institutional forces.

Chapter Three, *the concept of literacy and academic literacy*, provides a conceptual framework by comprehensively exploring the contested understandings of 'literacy' and 'academic literacy.' It discusses how these terms mean different things to different people in various contexts, impacting the design of academic literacy courses and other courses aimed at enhancing student success. In the context of high attrition rates, this chapter also addresses the blame game whereby students are often positioned as being the 'reason' for low retention and throughput rates, as well as the blame game that at times occurs between mainstream lecturers and academic literacy lecturers, where each expects the other to attend to students' "remedial needs". The notion of literacy as multiple and emerging from a heterogeneity of contexts is further expounded upon.

Chapter Four, *theoretical framework*, explains why Legitimation Code Theory (LCT) is the appropriate theoretical lens for data analysis, particularly for overcoming knowledge-blindness. It also details the specific LCT dimensions used in this study, Specialization and Semantics, and explains their relevance to the study's research questions.

Chapter Five, *the research design*, outlines the research methodology employed to gather and analyse data aimed at answering the research questions. It provides a detailed explanation of the steps taken from data collection to data analysis. Additionally, the chapter discusses ethical considerations and positionality, which are an imperative consideration in ensuring the study's validity and trustworthiness.

Chapter Six, *conceptualisation of academic literacy by participants*, presents the findings on how ‘academic literacy’ is conceptualised by different participants at the University of Namibia (UNAM). It analyses these understandings using Street’s (1984) distinctions between the autonomous model and the ideological model, as well as the LCT dimension of Specialization. The dominant understandings are plotted on the LCT Specialization planes, and their implications for the EAP course under study are discussed.

Chapter Seven, *the EAP course*, provides an analysis of the EAP course based on a document analysis of the study guide and course outline, along with interviews with the EAP lecturers. It also examines documents from mainstream courses to identify code-matches and code-clashes between the EAP course and mainstream courses. The focus on three EAP content areas as examples —reports, essays, and referencing—helps ascertain the role of the EAP course in cumulative knowledge-building in students’ discipline subjects. The chapter also discusses issues of selection, sequencing, and pacing in relation to the EAP course and the implications of this for students' success, given the significant nature and multiplicity of academic literacy practices.

Chapter Eight, *Conclusion*, reiterates the key findings discussed in Chapters 6 and 7. It provides a summary of these findings and discusses their implications for academic literacy teaching in general. The chapter endeavours to link the specific findings from the EAP course back to the larger mechanisms at play as discussed in Chapter Two. The chapter concludes by highlighting the study's contribution to the body of knowledge and suggesting areas for further research.

CHAPTER 2: CONTEXTUAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Introduction

Developing knowledge of the world or any phenomenon within it involves identifying the underlying properties or causal mechanisms that make an object behave the way it does (Bhaskar, 2008). Thus, in this study aimed at ascertaining the role EAP programmes play in students' higher education studies, this chapter is a discussion of some of the bigger global structures which can act as political and economic mechanisms affecting higher education generally and Sub-Saharan Africa in particular. Specifically, the chapter brings in the conversation the influence of bigger global structures on writing practices and academic literacy courses. The discussion of such large-scale mechanisms is important because academic literacy development is often only researched from a national, institutional, or even classroom level. Much of the research on AL practices looks at the nitty gritty specifics of reading and writing without much consideration of how such day-to-day realities are shaped by larger forces. There is, thus, a need to understand practices in our universities in deeply contextual ways that includes the conjunction of such practices with large global forces. The critical realist stance I take in this research entails an understanding of connections between conditioning mechanisms that are large-scale and those which are close-up. While it would be impossible for me to reflect on each and every potential causal mechanism shaping the study phenomenon, I wish to endeavour to build an understanding of the interplay between macro, meso and micro mechanisms. Hence, by outlining some of these big global forces in this chapter, I reflect on what is suggested in the literature as their potential conditioning influence on what happens within the precise context of this study.

The field of higher education is on an unending transformation trajectory. The transformation can be triggered by and continues to be influenced by many drivers in the global economic and political spheres including "Globalisation, Neo-liberalisation, Internationalisation and Entrepreneurship" (Nampota, 2015, p. 5). Such factors can be understood as discrete aspects but can also be understood as a web of interlinked mechanisms that together provide the conditions for changes in education systems. Whether the changes are positive or negative depends on contextual analysis because what works for one country might be problematic in the other.

2.2 Massification

As indicated in the previous chapter, historically access to higher education in Namibia was for the minority colonial/settler white population, and where it was offered to black people, this was as a means of providing instrumentalist education as a set of skills for the workplace, such as for the administration of apartheid structures. In contrast, in many post-colonial countries, education was reformed to expand access especially to higher education because “access to higher education is viewed as an integral element in resolving social and economic inequalities present in the societies” (Hornsby & Osman, 2014, unpagged). This shift from education of an elite few to education of a large diverse portion of the population is a global phenomenon (Trow, 1973, 2007) and is known as massification.

Massification as a noun “denotes mass enrolments in a national system” (Noui, 2020, p. 97), thereby leading to a rapid increase in the student population (Hornsby & Osman, 2014, Scott, 1995). The term was coined by Martin Trow (1973), to indicate the surge in enrolment rates in universities globally in the 20th and 21st century as a result of the democratisation of access to universities. Global statistics on mass enrolments in higher education indicate an exponential increase in the student population from 146 million students in 2006 to more than 218 million students in 2016 and projected to reach more than 265 million students by 2025 (Noui, 2020; Kipchumba, 2019) While it is worth celebrating that many people, inclusive of those from minority groups, have enjoyed access to HE, Noui (2020) asserts that massification of HE also has disadvantages which differ in different contexts.

Trow (1973) points out that massification is about more than an increase in number of enrolments; it is about the diversification of the student and staff body such that the university no longer just serves the privileged elite. Thus, massification of higher education changes the institutions’ landscape as well as the enrolment profile because it brings about diversity in terms of students’ social and geographic origins (Noui, 2020). In Africa, widening access to HEIs serves as one of the means to redress the social inequalities that were brought about and reinforced during the conquering of the continent by Western powers. In essence, with massification comes a diversified student and staff body which means classrooms become heterogeneous as opposed to the homogenous classrooms during apartheid.

A disadvantage, however, is that massification puts a strain on the provision of education and this strain is felt by students, academics, the institutions, and the government. Mass enrolments

into an education system are associated with large classrooms that are often disproportionate to the available physical infrastructure. According to Hornsby and Osman (2014), large classrooms pose a challenge to the quality of teaching and learning, which may further have adverse effects for the education system and the country's socio-economic development. Indicating the pressure that the demand for higher education puts on the African countries' education systems, Khelfaoui (2009), asserts that "from a dozen in the early 1960s, the number of [African] universities has increased by 25 times today, and the number of students has increased in even more significant proportions" (p. 23). He further indicates that this results in "overcrowded facilities, obsolete and inadequate equipment, deteriorating living conditions of students and teachers, emigration of much of the scientific senior staff, leading to a dramatic decrease in the quality of teaching and research in most [African] countries" (Khelfaoui, 2009, p. 23). His sentiments echo an assertion by Mohamedbhai (2008, p. vi) that

... massification in the [African] institutions has occurred without an accompanying increase in resources – financial, physical and human – which has had a direct impact on the physical infrastructure, the quality of teaching and learning, research, quality of life of the students, etc.

The surge in numbers of students accessing HEI worldwide has also a direct bearing on the national and government policies. Those include ensuring that the provision of education conforms to domestic and global demands (Mok & Marginson, 2021). Specifically on the domestic demands, Matengu et al. (2014) mention one of the challenges as including "developing a higher education system that is regionally and ethnically representative, as well as being equitable to all without compromising on quality" (p. 187).

To develop a mass education system that caters for all and is on par with local and global trends it is imperative to understand that massification of education extends beyond the surge in the number of students admitted (Hornsby & Osman, 2014).

Trow's focus on writing about 'massification', in what is now a classic piece on higher education, is not numbers. Rather, his purpose was to point out most forcefully that the challenge in a 'massified' system goes beyond accommodating large classes and managing large universities to include dealing with the diversity that numbers bring (Boughey & McKenna, 2021, p. 8).

As indicated earlier, with massification comes diversity of the student body and classes become heterogeneous. Diversity is a necessary response to homogenous classroom compositions that were rife during apartheid when education was offered along racial and ethnic lines (Shilongo,

2004). But while such heterogeneity is to be welcomed, the complexity of a heterogeneous classroom needs to be understood holistically as there is more than meets the eye.

According to Guri-Rosenblit and Sebkova (2004) “heterogeneous groups of students, composed not only of fresh secondary-school graduates, but also of older applicants of different talents and capacities, ambitions and expectations” (p. 45). The same is true for the Namibian HEIs landscape where students gain admission to universities based on either their Grade 12 performance (inclusive of stipulated minimum symbols in English) or through mature age entry (see Section 1.7.4). Mokoena (2021) asserts that in a heterogeneous classroom there are “students of different cognitive levels, opinionated and shy students, and first, second or elementary level language speakers of the language of teaching and learning” (p. 41). Such differences in classroom compositions have implications for the curriculum and the impacts on teaching and learning should not be ignored. As Goldthorpe (2007, p. 1) puts it, there are “cultural or subcultural influences on children’s educational attainment” that should not be taken for granted.

The cultural aspects with conditioning effects in the attainment of academic success are captured by Pierre Bourdieu’s theory of cultural reproduction. In his views, “there are mechanisms that generate intergenerational inequalities in educational outcomes” (Andersen & Jæger, 2015, p. 177). Cultural capital is defined as one’s “familiarity with the dominant cultural codes inscribed in a society” (Jæger & Møllegaard, 2017, p. 131) that can be “gained mainly through an individual’s initial learning, and is unconsciously influenced by the surroundings” (Bourdieu, 2000 in Huang, 2019, p. 45). Such codes include culturally accepted etiquettes such as how a person has to greet their elders, how food is served at whatever occasion, what tools are important for farming etc. that children mostly learn from their parents and their immediate society. This would include, for example, how reading is approached and when and towards what ends and underpinned by which values.

Alongside the concept of cultural capital, Bourdieu offers the concept of habitus. Habitus is “a concept that expresses ... the way in which individuals become themselves, develop attitudes and dispositions ... and the way in which those individuals engage in practices” (Webb et al, 2002 in Huang, 2019, p. 48). According to Huang (2019), habitus comprises of “the values and dispositions gained from our cultural history that generally stay with us across contexts” (p. 48). Owing to the fact that contexts change, it should be noted that the habitus is not fixed, but can rather incorporate changes within and across different contexts and conditions (Huang,

2019; Schirato & Roberts, 2018). However, the habitus has a significant influence in the way reasoning is applied because it influences knowledge and understanding, with knowledge defined as “the way how people view and understand the world, which is gained via a specific culture that an individual lives in” (Huang, 2019, p. 45).

An understanding of cultural capital and habitus help explain the complexity that heterogeneity brings in classrooms as massification occurs. This has the potential to unravel how reasoning and understanding of students may differ markedly on topics or subjects taught. Students’ ideas, reasoning and perceptions of things depends at least to some extent on their family and community background and is influenced by their surroundings (Huang, 2019; Bourdieu, 2000). A lack of understanding of the implications of cultural capital and habitus may have adverse effects for education.

The educational system is intrinsically biased toward valorizing [particular forms of] cultural capital, and it ascribes positive qualities, such as academic brilliance, onto those who possess it. Compared to those who do not possess [such] cultural capital, children who possess cultural capital are more familiar with ‘the rules of the game’ in the educational system and, as a consequence, they are better equipped to present an impression of academic brilliance to teachers and peers. Returns to cultural capital materialize through better academic performance because children who possess cultural capital appear more talented than they actually are (which leads to better subjective evaluations by teachers and to higher grades) and, moreover, they have better learning environments (because teachers pay more attention to them) (Andersen & Jæger, 2015, p. 179)

In this light, there is an urgent need for the reconsideration of the content to be taught, as well as the need for new pedagogic and assessment practices in massified education systems in which classrooms are heterogeneous. Researchers (such as Clarence, 2021 and Harvey & Williams, 2010) asserts that failure to pay attention to the complex and varied needs of the heterogeneous student body might lead to the education system(s) employing homogenous approaches to heterogeneous challenges, and so doing may make education rewarding for some and alienating for others. While we would like to think that higher education is a meritocracy, where students succeed or fail because of their individual merits and hard work, there is a wealth of research, such as that undertaken by Bourdieu, that repeatedly demonstrates the unequal nature of advantage and disadvantage in relation to what specific cultural capital is valued in the formal education system. As the system massifies, many may find that they do not bring the cultural capital that the system expects and takes for granted.

Massification of education is not a local phenomenon, but rather an issue of global and international influence. Simply put, massification of education influences (and is influenced by) political and economic policies at international or global level. HEIs globally have to conform to such global trends if they are to be competitive and keep up with being a player in the ‘global university league’ (Mintz, 2022; Mok & Marginson, 2021). I now turn to such issues of globalisation and internationalisation.

2.3 Globalisation and internationalisation of higher education

The term globalisation is defined as “the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa” (Giddens, 1990, p. 64). In economic terms, the term globalisation can be defined as “deliberate policies to create a global market system and the reciprocal weakening of national boundaries and local economic systems” (Nordtveit, 2010, p. 322). This study however borrows the definition of globalisation in academic terms from Teichler (2004) who defines it as “the totality of substantial changes in the context and inner life of higher education related to growing interrelationships between different parts of the world whereby national borders are blurred or even seem to vanish” (p. 23). Simply put, globalisation involves the global exportation and importation of services and ideologies which transcend various boundaries and informs various policy decisions.

Internationalisation is also about the cross-border expansion of education whereby students and staff in neighbouring or farther countries exchange in pursuit of knowledge or better living conditions. As globalisation has become a reality, so there has been an increase in mobility of people across the planet, often for the purposes of receiving a higher education or participating in international research projects. Globalisation also often involves HEIs opening satellite branches in countries other than their own. Internationalisation is therefore better defined as, “the totality of substantial changes in the context and inner life of higher education relative to an increasing frequency of border-crossing activities amidst a persistence of national systems (Teichler, 2004, pp. 22-23). Pertaining to education, Knight (2006) defines internationalisation as “the process of integrating an international, intercultural and global dimension into the purpose, function (teaching, research and service) and the delivery of higher education” (p. 18).

In general, internationalisation of education is believed to fulfil five different objectives, namely:

- to improve student preparedness;
- internationalise the curriculum;
- enhance the international profile of the institution;
- strengthen research and knowledge production; and
- diversify faculty and staff

(Nampota, 2015, p. 130).

Globalisation and internationalisation of higher education, as some of the contemporary global mechanisms influencing higher education reforms worldwide, carry with them the ‘Europeanisation’ of the education sphere. With the dominance of universities in the Global North, higher education systems in the rest of the world often create their universities in the image of the Western countries. This is seen to be necessary to be able to compete in the ‘global university league’ (Mok & Marginson, 2021). A major influence on higher education reform on a global level was the Bologna Process (Khelfaoui, 2009).

The Bologna Process was the European reform of higher education initiated in 1998 by France, Italy, Germany and the United Kingdom (Khelfaoui, 2009) and later taken up on a much broader scale. The objectives of the Bologna Process were to:

1. ensure mobility within the European HE space, in order to study or work in this space;
2. increase the international competitiveness of the European HE by attracting the best students and scientists from outside Europe;
3. give Europe the scientific capacity to face the challenges of the contemporary world

(Khelfaoui, 2009, p. 21).

Despite the formation of the Bologna Process to serve European interests, many African countries are said to have taken steps for its adoption or are already in an advanced stage of its implementation (Khelfaoui, 2009, p. 21). Indeed, it has been dubbed the presumed ‘turnkey’ to the new reconfiguration of postcolonial education systems in many countries. In circulation, there are variations of the Bologna Process with educational structures that differ according to regions and their political histories. For example, in the French colonies, the French brand of the Bologna Process reinforced the French qualifications framework of Licence, Master, and Doctorate (LMD) corresponding to three exit levels in three, five and eight years, respectively (Alemu, 2019; Mignanwande & Hounmenou, 2016; Mngo, 2019). The LMD differs from the

structure of Bachelor's, Master's and PhD (BMP) adopted mostly in the Anglophone countries (Alemu, 2019; Eta, 2015; Vuban, 2019), such as Namibia and South Africa.

Varieties of the Bologna Process also include the *Associacao das Universidades de Lingua Portugues* (AULP) (Association of the Portuguese Speaking Universities – APSU) and the Community of Portuguese Speaking Communities (CPLP) (Alemu, 2019; Langa, 2013). The two are advocates for the universities and policymakers in Portuguese speaking African countries to cooperate through the Lusophone Higher Education Area (LHEA) (Videira & Teixeira, 2011). That in essence means the Bologna Process extended beyond European borders thereby making it one of the major influencers of the globalisation and internationalisation of HE.

The Bologna Process was seen to be preferred by several funding and other institutions which have an international or global influence. These include the African Development Bank, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), UNESCO and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (Knight & Woldegiorgis, 2017; Leher, 2012). In addition, foreign agencies such as the *Agence Universitaire de la Francophonie* (AUF) were used to advocate for the Bologna Process in higher education reforms in West Africa through sponsoring regional seminars (Alemu, 2019).

According to Eta et al. (2018), one of the presumed advantages of the Bologna Process was “to develop university student’s professional abilities and to encourage students’ national, regional and international mobility via transferable credits” (p. 658). As good as it sounds, Halvorsen (2016) warns that with globalisation and internationalisation of HE, there is more than meets the eye. In his view, the recognition of credits for subjects studied in universities elsewhere depends on the benchmarking of the curriculum or course content to elite universities. Calling it the ‘idealised model’, Badat (2010) points out that the model on which many education systems are based draws on universities in the Global North. It is thus such universities that greatly influence the “standardisation, uniformity and disciplinary specialisation” (Halvorsen, 2016, p. 278) of curriculum and courses.

Adoption of global trends by universities in the Global South in an attempt to be ‘on par’ with the Global North risks positioning African HEIs as forever trying to catch up and as dismissing local problems and local solutions (Bamberger & Morris, 2023; Jaime Ndaipa et al., 2022). That can be understood from the historical perspectives of education in Africa whereby the

arrival of the missionaries and colonial masters changed native traditional education (See Section 1.7). The end result was an abandonment of the African way of doing things to adopting and following educational trends from the Global North (Nordtveit, 2010; Mosweunyane, 2013). These included HEIs having adopted institutional structures, content and pedagogy that are strongly influenced by the Global North (Leibowitz, 2017; Nampota, 2015). It also included trends such as quality assurance regimes, national qualifications frameworks, and outcomes-based education/competency-based education (Rappleye & Un, 2018; Nampota, 2015), which are development policies taken on in the developing countries often dictated by the Global North (Williams et al., 2014).

There are many reasons why the Global South replicates higher education trends from the Global North, including the power relations of academic knowledge (and in particular the academic publishing industry). Additionally, funding from the Global North is often tied to requirements that universities in the Global South take on specific approaches (for example, the Structural Adjustment Program of the World Bank had very particular requirements of HE in the Global South, often with disastrous effects) (Brock-Utne, 2008; Nampota, 2015; Williams et al., 2014). Neocolonialism and asymmetries of power are implicated as driving factors. For instance, Ishengoma (2016, p. 152) asserts that,

North–South research collaborations operate within a broader context of neocolonial structures and relationships. The Northern (high-income) countries tend to be former colonial powers that have strong economies and robust institutional structures. Their hegemony over the South remains largely unquestioned. The countries of the South are often former colonies, with weakened economies and embattled institutions. An inability to mobilise internal resources ‘compels’ Southern countries to depend on the North to finance their development agendas, including research and development.

Opponents of globalisation and internationalisation believe that such aspects “might imply many questionable elements such as destroying cultural heritage, diminishing language diversity, reducing variety of academic cultures and structures, quality decline or even supporting imperialist take-overs” (Teichler, 2004, p. 6). In the university context, these global forces are seen to lead to curriculum design in the Global South taking on principles that are incongruent with their contexts. For example, in Cameroon, the License, Master and Doctoral system of the Bologna Process which was scheduled to start in 2007 found many universities not ready to begin. The problem can be attributed to the “stark differences between academic systems of Africa and ... Europe and France” (Alemu, 2019, p. 125). With little to no

consideration of such differences, universities ended up being forced to apply the License, Master and Doctoral structure without proper preparation (Alemu, 2019).

The international standardisation of curriculum can also trigger competition between institutions with regards to attracting better students, better professors and better funding (Al-Haija & Mahamid, 2021; Ota, 2023). So doing has the potential to bring about elitism in universities because a relatively small group of universities become seen as superior, often because of the extent to which they replicate systems and processes of the Global North. Furthermore, such universities seek to co-operate with universities in the Global North specifically in order to improve their positions in the global institutional ranking system (Halvorsen, 2016). Being in competition, those that manage to co-operate with superior universities move up the ranking systems and obtain more prestigious status. The rest are then left out to struggle or languish.

The effects of globalisation and internationalisation on the curriculum are also believed to have fuelled demonstrations and protests particularly in the Global South because many students felt “alienated from their cultural and social roots” (Boughey & McKenna, 2021, p. 7). According to Nordtveit (2010, p. 323) the dichotomy between the Global North and the Global South exacerbates inequalities because the latter is pushed to draw on the discourses of the former. Such mimicry is critiqued from various angles (such as by Bamberger & Morris, 2023; Siltaoja et al., 2019), including that this continues the colonial order in neo-colonial ways, that the imposition of frames from Global North often fail to take Global South contexts into account. At the helm of fuelling the divide between the Global North and the Global South is the ideology of neoliberalism – another global trend to which I now turn.

2.4 Neoliberalism in higher education

The term neoliberalism can be defined as a market-oriented ideology or policy reform aimed at allowing market freedom to the maximum extent possible (Al-Haija & Mahamid, 2021; Becker et al., 2021). The term was coined at a meeting in Paris in 1938 as an ideological position based on complete economic freedom of the market (Brennetot, 2015; Monbiot, 2016). For that to be achieved, neoliberalism advocates for “decreased governmental regulation, privatisation of government-owned enterprises, reduced government spending, and the lowering of barriers to international trade and investment” (Sniegocki, 2008, p. 322). According to Wikan (2015), neoliberalism advocates “the elimination of government-imposed

restrictions on transnational movements of goods, capital and people” (p. 1). The idealised end result of neoliberalism would be a global trade free area with no government control or interference (Al-Haija & Mahamid, 2021; Harmes, 2012; Mintz, 2021).

In the provision of higher education, neoliberalism involves creating a safe haven for academics and students to traverse between HEIs globally with little to no interference by governments. It also involves allowing HEIs autonomy to run their affairs inclusive of seeking ways to expand their revenue base. Those may include admitting international students that can be charged higher fees in comparison to the local students, as well as hiring research experts to generate funds through publications and consultancy work. The admission of students and hiring of experts to increase the revenue base is likely to cause competition which Monbiot (2016) describes as seemingly the defining characteristic of human relations within the neoliberal order. He further stresses that “in a world governed by competition, those who fall behind become defined and self-defined as losers” (Monbiot, 2016, unpagged).

The rapid spread of neoliberalism (like globalisation) is accredited to the usage of “super-power sponsorship” (Olssen & Peters, 2005, p. 314) particularly the IMF, the World Bank, the Maastricht treaty and the World Trade Organisation (Monbiot, 2016). Such institutions with global influence are said to be imposing neoliberalism around the world without democratic consent. Whether implicitly or explicitly, the adoption of neoliberal policies has changed many spheres in the public domain including education and health to mention but some. It is worth noting that education and health are some of the professions that were set up to improve the livelihood of the citizenry and which many would argue are premised on collective care rather than individual competition.

With regards to education, neoliberalism has the potential to change education from a common good to a private good. According to Mintz (2021), the idea of education as a common good draws from the belief that “an educated citizenry is crucial for maintaining a democratic society, and that the collective skills and knowledge of a population benefit all” (p. 83). As a result of such thinking, governments might view education as its responsibility to provide funding and support in order to accommodate and uplift even those that were denied opportunities (Mintz, 2021). Contrary to this conception, however, is the idea of education as a private good, which is based on the assumption that schooling is “... pursued as an investment that will yield a return in the form of future earnings [and] with the profits enjoyed by the individual, rather than the community (Mintz, 2021, pp. 83-84).

The notion of education as a private good has negative consequences for the financing of education, whereby the beneficiaries of an investment have to pay for it other than being funded by the government (Mintz, 2021). A reduction in government subsidies to HEIs (as one aspect of the neoliberal agenda) risks exerting pressure on universities to increasingly seek resources from sources other than the state in order to remain economically viable (Jessop, 2017; Terziev & Bogdanova, 2019; Slaughter & Leslie, 2001). One key financial aspect to keeping HEIs abreast is to charge tuition fees. Calling it ‘academic capitalism’, Slaughter and Rhoades (2004) describe the new neoliberal order in universities as “attach[ing] a price to things that were once free or charge more for items that were once subsidised or provided at a cost” (p. 26).

Charging tuition fees under the neoliberal ideologies means governments have limited interference on how much institutions charge students for the services rendered. That further means, students have to bear the brunt of exorbitant tuition fees that will either lock them out of universities or may make it challenging to complete their studies. In the case where government must provide funding to students, then it should be in a form of loans instead of grants. As indicated in Section 1.11, awarding of study loans come with terms and conditions one of which is the loan/grant is withdrawn when a student fails and repeats a year. For a student to continue with studies after the government loan is put on hold because of failing risks sending out students to find alternatives such as finding a low paying job in order to finance their own studies. It may also include students changing from fulltime to part-time, or taking a gap year due to finances. The end result is likely to be a low throughput rate as those that will complete their studies in a minimum stipulated time will decrease.

According to Mintz (2021), shifts in universities from common to private good focused through, for example, charging of tuition fees, has changed universities from being service providers focused on enhancing the common good to the “student-as-customer phenomenon” (p. 79). The student as a consumer/customer orientation affects professionalism, as Argenti (2000) puts it, treating students as customers makes the university look like a training provider, rather than a university. In a broader sense, neoliberal assumptions and policies have negative implications for access to higher education (Mintz, 2021) because it stratifies the citizenry and privileges the affluent while locking out the low- and middle-income students since “institutions now survive on those who can pay the bills” (Mintz, 2021, p. 84).

Other than charging tuition fees, HEIs are further affected by other structural changes related to neoliberalism. Key is the appointment of vice-chancellors based on entrepreneurial and

managerial terms as opposed to academic terms (Ezieshi & Ukpere, 2024; Kwiek, 2008). It also includes HEIs being controlled by board members scouted from various fields many of whom are concerned with issues of industry and the economy, rather than with planetary sustainability, social justice, and the university as a common good. There is often an attempt to maximise profit by implementing processes from the workplace because public institutions are believed to become more effective and productive if run as businesses, rather than social structures (Boughey & McKenna, 2021). Arguably, the privatisation of HEIs governance further leads to a significant change in focus from the academic role of the university to the administrative roles because with neoliberalism comes a huge need for accountability. As a result, universities become subjected to national quality assurance structures and processes, and the setting of goals and targets to which the staff are held accountable (Boughey & McKenna, 2021). Such continuous monitoring of HEIs arguably emerged through the ideology of New Public Management (NPM) defined as “an approach to making public service organisations more ‘business-like’ (Boughey & McKenna, 2021, p. 6).

Neoliberalisation in education arguably constrains the possibility of universities being critical social institutions and instead positions them as tools of the global economy (Halvorsen, 2016). As a result, there is a likelihood that knowledge production in HEIs is not viewed in terms of solving problems in society but is rather viewed in terms of the production of profit (Halvorsen, 2016). Critiques of neoliberalism in higher education indicate that “it dislocates education by commodifying its intrinsic value and emphasising directly transferable skills and competencies. Nonmonetary values are marginalised and, with them, the nonmonetary ethos that is essential in sustaining a healthy democratic society” (Del Cerro Santamaría, 2020, p. 22). Such a state of affairs is summarised by Torres and Rhoads (2006, p. 32) as follows:

Knowledge is now evaluated with the language of finance, and universities are measured by their efficiency in awarding degrees and certificates. Academic leaders are replaced by managers with business backgrounds, and the university shifts from an educational institution to just another business with a bottom line.

Adopting global trends in running the affairs of HEIs risks adopting such presumed ‘quick fix solutions’ originating from the Global North. Such happenings might have deleterious effects especially in the Global South as it emerges from its history of colonialism and thereby needs research to find possible solutions to its local problems.

One of the many influences of this globalisation of the neoliberal order has been the international uptake of English as the language of research and teaching and learning in universities across the Global South.

2.5 Global forces and the commercialisation of English

It has been argued that globalisation and internationalisation of education as well as the neoliberal shaping of social and economic pressures carry with them “complex relations of power and interests perceived, expressed, and legitimised by providers and receivers of international education” (Le Ha & Barnawi, 2015, p. 548). One of such aspects is the language of international communication which by default tends to be English. According to Gupta (2012), “English is used all over the world, within and between communities” (p. 244), something that is imperative for transnational communication in the world in which the spoken languages are estimated to be in a range of 6000 to 7000 (Gray et al., 2011; Koplenig et al., 2023; Phillipson, 2001).

Citing an example of challenges to communication in the absence of a universal language, Aponte (2018) indicates how a possible meeting organised by a Japanese organisation and attended by Germans and Saudi Arabian would yield no positive results if each one of them were to use their native languages. He thus concludes that, “English as a global language acts as a link between people who possess common interests, but do not share a common language”. (Aponte, 2018, p. 3). The significance of English on a global scale is believed to be promoted and maintained by the facts that “many decisions that affect the entire world’s population are taken in English” (Phillipson, 2001, p. 189). Those include the publication and film industry, internet usage, military cooperation, student/staff exchange as well as securing jobs both locally and internationally. Such industries cannot be localised as they require international/transnational co-operation(s). As a result, to be players and contributors to the global market, many countries reformed (and continue to reform) their education systems especially at tertiary level to privilege the dominant use of English.

Governments have, at varied levels, adopted an English medium instruction policy, imported English medium educational and training products and services, franchised international programmes, offered generous financial support and incentives to overseas institutions to establish branch campuses locally, and undertaken major initiatives worth billions of dollars to reform and internationalize their HE systems.

(Le Ha & Barnawi 2015, p. 548)

As a result, and to be on par with the globalised nations, many developing countries, including Namibia, have adopted English as their official language. Equally so, some developed countries such as Norway (Rindal, 2014) have also adopted English alongside their native languages in order to increase their participation in this globalised world and to afford their citizens an opportunity to contribute as knowledge workers in the global economy.

As good as this sounds, there is much criticism around the adoption of English as a global language, and, perhaps more significantly, its subsequent influence in the provision of education (Pennycook, 2016; Wa Thiong'o, 1993). Central to the argument is that colonialism did not end when nations gained independence, but rather continues through globalisation, and the dominance of English plays a significant part of such neo-colonialism. According to Phillipson (2001), the processes of globalisation “serve to ensure that the role of English is maintained and perpetuated” (p. 190) and English continues to be marketed in the post-colonial world as the language of “international communication and understanding; economic development; national unity” (Phillipson, 2001, p. 190). The canonisation and promotion of English as the global language is however skewed and needs interrogation because “while English opens doors to some, it is simultaneously a barrier to learning, development and employment for others” (Pennycook, 2016, p. 27).

Establishing the link between the spread of English and globalisation, Stainton (2018) asserts that, “in the world of surging globalisation, English is increasingly becoming the dominant medium in every domain of communication within both local and global contexts” (p. 123). This has created a high demand for English language products and services (Singh & Han, 2008), a worldwide insatiable demand for Teachers of English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) (Khamkhien, 2010; Sawalmeh & Dey, 2023) and fuels the commodification of English (Cameron, 2012). Framing that in neoliberal economic terms, it has been indicated that, “today for the English-speaking countries English is the best commodity that can be exported throughout the world” (Tsuda, 2013, 451). A definition of language as a commodity is given by Cameron (2012) who indicates that “it suggests the existence of a market or markets in which languages and language varieties, like other tradable commodities, have an economic exchange value” (p. 352). He further asserts that a key area of activity in which languages have been treated as commercial activities is by foreign language instruction in general and English Language Teaching in particular (Cameron, 2012).

With specific reference to the Australian context, researchers (such as Singh & Han, 2008; Singh et al., 2002) indicate that English itself is now a tradable product and service sold in various guises by small-to-medium businesses. The lucrative sale of English language products and services has been indicated to be “integral to the formation of trans-national knowledge workers, the new generation of local/global subjects” (Singh & Han, 2008, p. 206). Thus, by 2014, it was estimated that “250 000 native English speakers worked as English teachers in more than 40 000 schools and language institutes around the world” (Stainton, 2018, p. 123).

The high demand for English fuels a “growing pressure on institutions to introduce English language proficiency benchmarking” (Her, 2007, p. i). These include the introduction of standardised English language tests in HEIs such as the International English Language Testing System exams (IELTS), the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL), and the Cambridge Assessment English (CAE) (Grain et al., 2022). In Namibia, English proficiency requirements become a criterion to upward mobility whether for job placement or academic excellence, as Ferguson (2013) puts it, in the current global economy “without English-language skills, one’s labour mobility and employment prospects are restricted” (p. 35).

Setting minimum requirements for job placement or having promotion requirements pegged to English, has been criticised as risking promoting linguistic discrimination and social inequality (Tsuda, 2013). Tsuda (2013, p. 447) asserts that;

The dominance of English also creates the prejudices and stereotypes which, in turn, creates discrimination against those who do not or cannot speak English. For example, those who cannot speak English fluently are labeled as incompetent, and thus insulted and perceived to be inferior.

One key product in the teaching of English globally is the many English courses on a global scale designed to support ‘English language development’ in universities. These emerged around the world from the 1960s onwards. Known by different names such as English for Academic Purposes (EAP), English for Specific Purposes (ESP), Academic Writing (AW), to mention but a few, such courses are aimed largely at first generation students, immigrants, and students who do not have English as their home language. In the 1990’s such courses started to be offered in universities in South Africa, Australia, New Zealand, and other places. These courses have now also made an entry into the Namibian Higher Education sector in the hope that they might address low throughput rates (Uys, 2016).

The adoption of courses and ideologies from the Global North, in particular English language development courses, is, however, criticised as contributing to the process of homogenisation without examining local complexities of cultural appropriation and language use (Phillipson, 2008; Pennycook, 2016; Bruthiaux, 2008). Specifically in the African context, Ngungi wa Thiong'o critiques such mimicry as disastrous to African languages and cultures as if Africans do not have their own identities. In his words,

A new world order that is more than a global dominance of neo-colonial relations policed by a handful of Western nations ... is a disaster for the peoples of the world and their cultures ... The languages of Europe were taught as if they were our own languages, as if Africa had no tongues except those brought there by imperialism, bearing the label MADE IN EUROPE (Wa Thiong'o, 1993, p. xvi).

Pennycook (2016) suggests that the global spread of English and the subsequent demand for the English products and services needs to be understood deeply in terms of power and politics. In his view,

English did not spread globally as if it had a capacity to take over the world without human help. It was pushed by many forces that saw an interest in its promotion and pulled by many who also perceived value in acquiring it. A language only spreads because people learn it, and where learning happens, teaching is often (though not always) involved. So the global spread of English, with its connections to colonial exploitation and the contemporary inequalities fostered by globalisation and neoliberal ideologies ... as well as its relations, for example, to travel, popular culture, technology and religion, cannot be understood outside such global forces (Pennycook, 2016, p. 26).

Given the elevated role of English as a lingua franca originating from the Global North and its pervasive implementation across various spheres in the Global South, including education, it is clear that English functions as a neocolonial force. This neocolonial influence is particularly evident in the exportation of Academic Literacy courses, which underpin the foundation of this study.

2.6 Conclusion

The recent development of academic literacy courses in Namibian universities and elsewhere in Africa needs to be understood within the contextual framework of the larger global forces briefly introduced in this chapter. This addresses Nunan's concern that despite the widespread promulgation of English as the perceived global language "relatively little systematic information has been gathered on its impact on educational policies and practices in educational systems around the world" (Nunan, 2003, p. 589).

It is against that background, that this study looks at the role of academic literacy courses in students' disciplinary knowledge building. In drawing on a critical realist understanding that social phenomena emerge from the interplay of multiple mechanisms, I have here briefly outlined some of the larger forces at play in our universities. While decisions about the development and offering of English language development courses may be understood from the specifics of the Namibian context, critical realism demands that the researcher considers how unseen, powerful macro mechanisms might condition what happens in our classrooms. Pennycook (2016, p. 27) indicates that;

As ELT practitioners, therefore, we cannot simply bury our heads in our classrooms and assume none of this has anything to do with us. Nor can we simply adopt individually oriented access arguments on the basis that any improvement in learners' English will likely bring them benefits.

If we are to fully understand how a phenomenon such as the one under study here emerges, we need to be willing to place it within the meso context of Namibian educational history, outlined in Section 1.7 and the macro context of globalisation and neoliberalism outlined in this chapter, and within the many conceptualisations of literacy and academic literacy as discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 3: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

3.1 Introduction

As shared in Chapter One, there is a disproportion between the enrolment and throughput figures in HEIs. Being a worldwide phenomenon, there is an avalanche of literature on that subject, aimed at turning students' access into success. The findings of studies to that effect can be crudely divided into two bodies with one group focusing on explanations for academic success within the students themselves, and hence associating poor academic achievement with students' backgrounds; whereas the other body of research tends to place explanations for academic success on the education systems with regards to curriculum design, the educators' pedagogic and assessment practices to mention but a few. While detailed explanations will be provided later in this chapter, it is worth highlighting that the two bodies are not two distinct and opposing camps, for studies often overlap and a single researcher might draw on both ends of such accounts.

Whether implicitly or explicitly, the explanations for academic success are influenced by one's view of what it means to be literate and illiterate. Thus, this chapter provides broader and theoretical definitions of the key concepts of literacy and academic literacy. It further explains the theoretical underpinnings informing and influencing the design of academic literacy courses - that is academic preparation interventions aimed at apprenticing and acculturating students into the culture of the university, their new environment. While these courses are typically viewed as preparatory in nature, it is important to acknowledge that, in some cases, academic literacy courses are integrated throughout the curriculum, even at the postgraduate level, to support students as they engage with academic practices. This demonstrates that academic literacy courses can extend beyond initial preparation, offering ongoing support throughout a student's academic journey.

3.2 The broader concept of literacy

The word literacy stems from the Latin term *litteratus* which means "a learned person" (Ridwan et al., 2023, p. 1013). At the time the word was first used, what it meant to be 'learned' primarily meant one who is able to read Latin (Venezky et al., 1990). Literature (such as Furet & Ozouf, 1982; Venezky et al, 1990) indicate that writing was primarily excluded in the definition because it was believed to be difficult as it involved "mastering the process required of parchment and quills" (Venezky, 1990, p. 3). Furet and Ozouf (1982) suggest that writing was

seen to be difficult because it is “a technical exercise, involving instruments, muscular gymnastics, and a knack” (p. 76).

As the world evolves, the definitions, purposes, uses and formats of literacy vary and expand dramatically (Mikulecky, 1990). One key aspect to that effect is indicated to be the spread of vernacular languages, whereby *literate* came to mean “one who could read and write in one’s native language” (Venezky, 1990, p. 3). In that vein, Smit (2010) defines literacy as “the ability to read and write in a language – the opposite being *illiteracy*” (p. 16). Expounding on the notion of defining literacy from the language perspective, O’Toole (2016) asserts that “literacy refers to the capacity to communicate, or perform, in the interconnected ways and for the varied purposes that real-world contexts demand through listening, reading, viewing, writing, and speaking” (p. 183).

On a global scale, there are ‘international definitions’ of literacy within organisations with global influence including the United Nations (UN) and UNESCO (Keefe & Copeland, 2011). A consideration of such definitions is imperative in general and in this study in particular because “literacy is a global, not local or national issue [and] calls to the right to literacy for all peoples come from these groups” (Keefe & Copeland, 2011, p. 93). UNESCO in 1957 initially defined that a person is literate when they “can with understanding both read and write a short simple statement on his (her) everyday life” (UNESCO, 2008, p. 18). Such definition was later improved after the establishment of the Experimental World Literacy Program in 1966 (Keefe & Copeland, 2011), whereby literacy was defined in functional terms as:

A person is functionally literate who can engage in all those activities in which literacy is required for effective functioning of his (her) group and community and also for enabling him (her) to continue to use reading, writing and calculation for his (her) own and the community’s development (UNESCO, 2008, p. 18)

While the definitions shared above paint a picture of the commonly held view of what it means to be literate, they ought to be seen as limiting because their locus with regards to knowing (or the lack thereof) appears to be located in the individual(s) with no emphasis on the role of the society. So doing just covers one element as per the postulation that despite the many definitions of literacy, broadly “literacy tends to be viewed *either* as an individual attribute or a social practice” (Lonsdale & McCurry, 2004, p. 7). These two commonly held views of literacy definition are better explained in the work of Street (1984) who coins two terminologies, the autonomous and ideological models of literacy; the theorisation to which I now turn.

3.3 Autonomous model to defining literacy

Street (2003; 1984) argues that the standard view and dominant understanding or assumption of literacy is autonomous in nature. Under such assumption, literacy is defined in terms of “limited mental operations” (Evans, 2005, p. 2) or attributes inherent in an individual with no consideration for “social structures within which the concepts and philosophies of specific cultures are formed” (Street, 1995, p. 85). Central in defining literacy autonomously is the skills perspective whereby literacy is viewed as a technical and neutral skill that could be understood divested of its context (Bhattacharya, 2011; Education for All Global Monitoring Report, 2006). As a result, “one is either literate or illiterate, and the notion of literacy is a normative and fixed achievement” (Maine et al., 2019, p. 387) whose “mastering ... in one context substantially transfers to other contexts” (Guthrie & Kirsch, 1983, as quoted by Mikulecky, 1990, p. 25).

Treating literacy as a technical skill or mental operation independent of its context has been criticised as misleading and creating false expectations because what it means to be literate or illiterate “is associated with consequences that have no relation to the social situations in which it is embedded” (Evans, 2005, p. 3). According to Searle (2020), the autonomous view is problematic in a sense that “it assumes that there is a defined set of skills which, once learnt at any given time will fit a person for the rest of their lives. Further, should such person have difficulties later, then he or she is to blame” (Searle, 2020, p. 52).

There is, however, literature to the contrary which contests locating literacy in attributes inherent in an individual, for it conceptualises literacy as “an intellectual tool” (Lonsdale & McCurry, 2004, p. 26) and neglects the role that society plays in the presumed mastery or the lack thereof. Expounding on the misconception of defining literacy from the individualistic perspective with no consideration of context, Venezky (1990) posits that there is more to being literate than mere reading and writing skills. Equally, defining literacy without consideration for context fails to capture what are “real differences in what people know and how they behave in certain situations” (Venezky et al., 1990, p. ix). It further risks mislabeling some as literate or illiterate, as captured in the context of the workplace that “it is possible for some individuals to function adequately for years in their jobs without their coworkers learning that they cannot read a daily newspaper” (Venezky, 1990, p. x). Whether such individuals are literate or illiterate cannot be understood in terms of mere reading and writing skills because “what constitutes literacy/illiteracy in the workplace can only be answered through an in-depth

analysis of the context of work” (Venezky et al, 1990, p. x). Equally, Freire (1985 in Veldhoen & Crichton, 2019) asserts that “literacy/illiteracy is situationally different [because] if one functions in a society without writing, being unable to write does not constitute illiteracy” (unpaged).

Problematising the autonomous view of defining literacy in terms of skills or attributes inherent in individuals, Venezky et al. (1990) pose a serious question that cuts across the fabric of society. With an example on trying to understand literacy in terms of adult education, they ask:

Should adult literacy tests look like school reading tests, with multiple-choice questions built around excerpts from stories and short expository articles? Or should such assessment require appropriate responses to everyday literacy tasks, such as determining what benefits an insurance policy provides or how to reset the time on a digital thermostat? (Venezky et al., 1990, p. x).

In an attempt to go beyond the shallow understanding of literacy from the skills and/or language perspective, a number of scholars have expanded the term literacy to include social practices, such as those associated with culture and power (Papen, 2023), as well as the purposes that literacy serves in the everyday lives of people (Smit, 2010; Theodotou, 2017). Thus, to bring the role of context in the conceptualisation of literacy, Street (1984) proposes the *ideological model*.

3.4 Ideological model of literacy

Contrary to the autonomous model, is the *ideological model* which contests the viewing of literacies as a set of decontextualised skills and sees them rather as socially embedded practices (Boughey & McKenna, 2016; Liebel, 2021; Searle, 2020). According to Bertram et al. (2022), “the ‘ideological’ model understands literacy to be ‘socially embedded’ and specific to particular communities and contexts, in which different literary practices will be valued differently” (p. 167). In this perspective, what it means to be literate is defined by what people do in the world and society, and achievement is defined or linked to social and cultural practices. The social or cultural practices are rules emanating from and governing the social groups in existence and thereby enables (or hinders) one to understand the particularities “with which uses of reading and or writing are associated in given contexts” (Street, 1997, p. 50).

Researchers such as Hanemann (2015) argue that being literate extends beyond mere reading or knowledge of the alphabet, script and language or skills, for it also touches on attitudes, dispositions, motivation, as well as on values. Such aspects form up the range of social

practices that people take on to indicate belonging to a particular group and they are neither unitary nor universal. They are rather context-dependent and develop throughout the lifespan of each individual. Equally, they happen both in and out of school, in diverse contexts and life situations, and through formal, non-formal, and informal learning opportunities (Veldhoen & Crichton, 2019; Hanemann, 2015). Hence, any teaching or learning here is viewed in terms of academic socialisation whereby the novices are given access to the ‘ways of being’ in the particular context (Boughey & McKenna, 2016).

Emphasising the importance of social practices in reading texts, Gee (2003) asserts how it is possible for one to read words in a sentence but might fail to make sense of what is meant. In that regard, he provides an example in the context of basketball whereby one says; “*The guard dribbled down court, held up two fingers, and passed to the open man*” (Gee, 2003, p. 29). In order for one to understand what is meant in that sentence, the reader needs to be versant not only with the surface reading of the words, but also to have the background of knowledge of basketball. That, in principle, underscores that meaning making of any communicative aspect in this perspective is dependent on various factors including “the way individuals perceive themselves in relationship to the texts they encounter and on the value they ascribe to those texts in their daily lives” (Boughey, 2002, p. 296). It further substantiates the postulation that “becoming literate is inextricably linked to the specific practices and activities that people are engaged in and that different activities demand different kinds of literacy practices” (Abdulatif et al, 2018, p. 5).

The ideological perspective further emphasises that “any specific way of reading and thinking is, in fact, a way of being in the world, a way of being a certain kind of person, a way of taking on a certain sort of identity” (Gee, 2003, pp. 3-4). Identity formation is defined as “the kind of person one is recognised as ‘being’ at a given time and place” (Gee, 2000, p. 99). Being a communicative act, identity formation is not primarily an issue of language use in terms of the language skills, but it extends to include other aspects that are non-language. Those include “images, symbols, graphs, diagrams, artefacts, and many other visual symbols” (Gee, 2007, p. 13), the aspects that do not have general meanings, but “their meanings are rather specific to particular semiotic domains and particular situations or contexts” (Gee, 2003, p. 24). Simply put, a word or symbol can mean different things to different people or the same person in different places because “we build meanings for words or symbols *on the spot*, so as to make them appropriate for the actual situation” (Gee, 2003, p. 24).

To underscore the significance of the social context and the speaker or writer's identity, Gee (2010) cites an example of a policeman ordering people to move their car. He emphasises that, the fact that the order comes from a police officer does not just trigger an automated response, but rather depends on the context of the speaker's social identity and role. Thus, to avoid misinterpretation or misrepresentation of the order, one has to determine whether the policeman said that in his capacity as a police officer on duty or rather as a helpful citizen giving advice (Gee, 2010). So doing is not a-social, but rather context dependent.

As for 'being' a certain person depending on context, Gee (1990) shares an example of what he terms 'contrasting identities', (see also Boughey, 2000; Gee, 2012; Stevens, 2016) in which he calls for an assumption of him (a Professor) at a biker bar. Upon entering the bar, one should picture him wearing neatly ironed designer jeans, taking out a napkin and wiping off the bar stool and sitting next to a burly, leather-jacket wearing man with many tattoos – whom he asks for a light by saying "May I please have a match for my cigarette?" instead of "Gotta match?" (Stevens, 2016; Gee, 2012). When looked at from the point of being literate in terms of ability to read and write, the Professor's words are grammatically correct, polite enough (formal) and understandable. However, if looked at from the point of identity formation, he may risk being a 'misfit' in that bar because he did not walk the walk and talk the talk of the bikers despite being a Professor, being well versant in the aspects of correct grammar and being a person of stature in the public. That means, the way he sits, places orders and his overall behaviours positions him either as a member or not of the bikers' social group.

In his views on the notion of identity formation within specific contexts, Bourdieu (1977) emphasises on the inclusion of 'appropriateness' in any given context. Appropriateness here comes to mean acquiring and demonstrating the necessary practices associated with any given group. Practices here extends beyond mere choices of language or symbols and images in any given context, to include choices on whether to be seated or standing, looking the person in the eyes or looking to the ground, how one dresses, how they act and many more aspects that one needs to demonstrate in order to be deemed a rightful member of a social group (Bourdieu, 1977; Searle, 2020).

Owing to the vastness of social contexts, the New Literacy Studies (NLS) comes in the picture with an emphasis on the importance of including and respecting diverse social practices. Theorists in the school of NLS indicate that "literacy is not a single, essential thing, with predictable consequences for individual and social development. Instead, there are multiple

literacies that vary with time and place and are embedded in specific cultural practices” (Street, 1997, p. 48). Thus, in NLS ‘literacy’ becomes plural: ‘literacies’ because there are many different social and cultural practices of different social and cultural groups (Lee, 2020; Gee, 2015). Those can be lawyers, gamers, historians, religious groups, and schools for instance, or can extend to larger cultural groups like native Americans, African-Americans, middle class people, and many more (Gee, 2015). The aforementioned groups (and many other more in existence) have different ways of interacting with various texts.

Heath (1983) calls interaction within various social groups ‘*ways with words*’ acknowledging that there are many literacies that are all valid in their contexts of use and none should reign supreme over others. She based her conclusions on her study of three communities (that she names Roadville, Trackton and Maintown) in Piedmont Carolina; in the US. She noted that their ways with words differed strikingly. Her work unravels how there is no universality to literacy, as well as cementing the multiplicity of literacies as indicated that “there are many literacies such as home literacy, school literacy, work literacy, etc. Prioritizing one type of literacy over another is ignoring the impact that social and cultural aspects have on the literacy development” (Lee, 2020, p. 48).

Street (1984) postulates that, literacy is multiple and subject to individual interpretation. Hence, when engaging with texts, variations as influenced by individual’s backgrounds and sociocultural contexts are inevitable. As Gee (2015, p. 36) puts it, “people read and write religious texts differently than legal ones and differently again than biology texts or texts in popular culture like video game strategy guides or fan fiction”. Other than different texts, it is indicated that a single text can be read differently and for different purposes. To that effect, he cites an example of reading the Bible indicating that people “can read the Bible as theology, literature, history, or as a self-help guide” (Gee, 2015, p. 36). The variations in ways of reading different texts or the same texts differently is heavily dependent on the role or identity the reader takes at any given time because being literate is about identity formation.

Whereas the ideological perspective and its inclusion of social practices in defining literacy provides a rich account that the autonomous model lacks, it is equally contested as being exclusionary if seen in essentialist ways (McKenna, 2010) and “disembedding individuals from their local experiential world” (Bernstein, 1999, p. 158). Central is the view that, the ideological perspective can conceal the issues of asymmetries in power in the society whereby some ‘ways of being’ are legitimated as good or normal (Stevens, 2016) while others are suppressed. That

is better captured by Stevens (2016, p. 212) who asserts that “Discourses can be dangerous because they relate to who has power in society and have ways of valuing what is ‘normal’ or ‘good’ in ways that ‘stack the deck’ in favour of certain ‘kinds of people’” (see also Gee, 2012). Searle (2020) criticises the ideological model and attempts to empower students to access context-specific literacies because it “assists individuals to comply with dominant discourses—whether of governments or industry - rather than challenging the status quo” (p. 62).

The legitimisation of some ways of being and the suppression of others is indicated to be dangerous to the understanding and definition of what it means to be literate or illiterate because it masks issues of culture and power in social practices that are interwoven among all literacy practices (Munger, 2016; Freire & Macedo, 1987). Additionally, it is recognised that there are many contexts in which literacy practices have to be enacted. For instance, Gee (1999) posits that “we are all members of many, a great many, different Discourses, Discourses which often influence each other in positive and negative ways, and which sometimes breed with each other to create new hybrids” (p. 7). Hybridity in the ideological model is, however, not always explicitly recognised because the legitimisation of some ways of being is said to be setting boundaries on who is a member and who is not. On the setting of boundaries, researchers (such as Lillis & Tuck, 2016 and McKenna, 2010) indicate that if one does not fully display the identity associated with the Discourse then they are outsider because one is either in or out, for there is no such a thing as being a less than fully fluent member. Such assertion is further echoed by Chakrabarty (2020) who shares that any “person who is differently or partially literate cannot be a part of the discourse if he is not fluent in it” (p. 3).

Legitimising some ways of being and neglecting others is associated with continuing to widen the social divide. According to Rajabi (2015), it continues to stratify society in a way that those whose practices are legitimated continue to dominate in many if not all aspects of life and particularly in regard upward mobility such as through education and in work. Additionally, legitimising some ways of being and neglecting others is associated with treating literacy as singular and monolithic instead of something that is multiple and fluid (Rajabi, 2015).

Treating literacy as monolithic, generic or universal can be detrimental for provision of education at all levels as it risks making schooling rewarding for those whose cultural practices are legitimised and alienating for others, or seeing the role of the educator concerned with social justice as acculturating students into the status quo. Epistemic injustices can then occur.

That, therefore, calls for a relook into the educational practices embedded in the curriculum documents as per the call that;

If we understand that there is no generic or universal literacy, but rather different kinds or practices of reading and writing, it is crucial that we identify what kinds of literacy practices children need to engage in to learn and be successful at school and university (Abdulatif et al., 2018, p. 6).

Against this background and framing this by the context of HEI, this study aims to ascertain the role the EAP course plays in students' knowledge-building within their disciplinary courses. It holds the premise that, if there are multiple literacy practices in the world, tied to the identity the person takes on in that space and dependent on their understanding of the norms of the context, then this must also be the case within a university. I now turn to the understanding of academic literacy.

3.5 The notion of academic literacy

Academic literacy is among multiple modes of literacy in existence and is specific to the higher education domain (Eybers & Paulet, 2022). Just like literacy, the concept of academic literacy is described as notoriously complex and difficult to define (Olivier, 2016; McKenna, 2004; Bartholomae, 1986) because it can be interpreted differently by different people or groups (Parkinson et al., 2008) and it is, to an extent, subjective (Papashane & Hlalele, 2014). According to Lillis and Scott (2007), there is fluidity and even confusion surrounding the understanding of academic literacy. As for Kern (2000, p. 23), there are different constructs of academic literacy because "literacy is an elastic concept [which] meaning varies according to the disciplinary lens through which one examines it".

In that vein, academic literacy is most broadly defined as "the ability to handle the demands of academic language at tertiary level" (Weideman, 2018, p. iii), or "an embodiment of higher-order language and thinking skills within the academic community" (Li, 2022, p. 1). A community is considered as "a group of people that live under certain rules and constitutions and who work for the achievement of a common goal" (Granados Beltrán, 2009, p. 40). Academic on the other hand refers to "a quality inherent to a scientific, literary, artistic or professional society having public authority" (Granados Beltrán, 2009, p. 40). Put together, an academic community is defined as "a group of professionals and students who work towards the same goal, that is, the academy: the construction of knowledge by means of dialogue and reflection" (Granados Beltrán, 2009, p. 40).

As good as it sounds, developing an academic community comprising of professionals and teachers is indicated to be challenging. Central to these challenges are the different understandings of what it means to be literate (Street, 1984). In some instances, being literate is viewed as a cognitive issue which thereby locates knowing in attributes inherent in individuals. In other cases, being literate is viewed as pertaining to situated social and cultural practices widely shaped by power, structure and ideology (Li, 2022; Lillis & Scott, 2007; Wenger, 1998). Such varied constructs can better be understood from Lea and Street's (2006) work in which they provide three explanatory models to understanding academic literacy, namely: *study skills*, *academic socialisation*, and *academic literacies*.

3.5.1 The study skills perspective

This academic literacy model locates literacy in the attributes inherent in the individuals. According to Lea and Street (2006), the study skills model “sees writing and literacy as primarily an individual and cognitive skill” (p. 227). As a result, under this perspective, the ability to excel academically relies on an individual student's ability to learn and master cognitive-linguistic skills, such as referencing and using specific terminology (Hyland, 2006). Thus, despite an individual student being part of a society both around and within the HEI, society is seen to have little influence over how well a student does because it is not *where* or *what* one studies, but rather *how* one can successfully employ these generic skills to encode and decode academic works.

From a study skills perspective, any teaching “ought to be tailored towards developing students' competence to be able to produce a grammatically sound piece of writing” (Bertram et al., 2022, p. 167; see also Street, 2006) as it focuses on the ‘surface features of language form’ (Lea & Street, 2006). It further holds a presumption that “students can transfer their knowledge of writing and literacy unproblematically from one context to another” (Lea & Street, 2006, p. 227). That, in principle, renders the duty of the institutions in such regard as being to ‘fix’ students' problems (McKenna, 2010; Clarence, 2010; Lea & Street, 2006) particularly language or the grammatical specifics of academic language which is acknowledged to not be the student's “mother tongue” (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1994; Huang, 2013).

3.5.2 The academic socialisation perspective

The academic socialisation understanding emphasises activities that encourage students to become familiar with the disciplinary community they will be part of. According to Farnese et al. (2022), academic socialisation involves “the management of new learning skills and strategies, the acceptance of one’s classmates, the understanding of university norms and policies, and the feeling of alignment with values within the academic context” (p. 1240). So doing is imperative for students’ adjustment into the social system of their university and their integration into the explicit and implicit social norms of the academic context (Farnese et al., 2022; Day & Livingstone, 2003; Weidman et al., 2014). Any lack of integration into the academic norms and values risks positioning students on the periphery where they could feel alienated and possibly get the message that they should dropout or withdraw (Harrison, 2006; Tinto, 1975).

Teaching under this perspective aims to apprentice and acculturate students into the norms and values of their new institution (Hyland, 2006; Jurecic, 2006). This is not seen as an extension of existing skills, but rather socialising novices into thinking, feeling and acting in accordance with the values, ideologies, and traditions of the discourse community (Wingate, 2018; Duff, 2007). Such support is mostly offered by the presumed expert members that work in language or learning development centers within HEIs.

3.5.3 The Academic Literacies perspective

This perspective acknowledges the diverse and multiple literacies found in academic contexts. Thus, literacy here is viewed as “issues of epistemology and identities rather than of skills acquisition or academic socialisation alone” (Lea & Street, 2006, p. 227). Under this perspective, reading and writing are treated as social practices that vary with context, culture and genre (Lea & Street, 2006), and “have an epistemic function and contribute to the construction of identity within the context of higher education” (Marinkovich et al, 2016, p. 97).

According to Kalman et al. (2008), academic literacy practices are embedded in larger social domains such as faculties, and academic departments. Further, such domains have academic literacy events that are governed by individual or collaborative communicative modes (Carstens, 2009), as well as by policies and cultural frameworks embedded in institutional cultures (Eybers & Paulet, 2022; Kalman et al., 2008) and power relationships (McCabe, 2011).

Some of the literacy practices imperative for academic success in many HEIs include, critical thinking, database searching and referencing, use of formal register, and manipulation of a range of academic genres (McWilliams & Allan, 2014). But each of these will vary in subtle and sometimes significant ways across fields and disciplines and institutional contexts. Academic literacy thus includes students having to interpret texts, agreeing or disagreeing with them, linking them to each other, extrapolating data from them, and presenting them in a manner which is appropriate to the audience (Blanton, 1994).

Knowledge of such literacy practices is context specific, and students do not come with it to HEIs. Success in academia, however, rests in part in students being able to take on those literacy practices and being able “to represent themselves in a way demanded and valued by their particular discipline, as well as adopting the values, beliefs and identities embodied by academic discourses” (McCabe, 2011, p. 56). Inability to cope with the demands of the discipline and lack of academic progress have been indicated to be some of the pressures that force a lot of undergraduate students to drop out of their degree programs (Casanova & Pullido, 2022; Calvo et al., 2020).

These three perspectives, study skills, academic socialisation, and academic literacies, have led to very different understandings of how best to bridge the gap between the formal schooling and HEIs expectations. There is general agreement that low retention and throughput rates need attention. However, the varied understandings of the causes of this, and the varied understandings of what it means to be literate in the academy means there is little agreement as to what the university needs to do. One common response around the world has been the introduction of what are sometimes called “Academic literacy courses”.

3.6 Academic literacy courses

Academic development in many HEIs has increasingly been seen as a necessity particularly in contexts, such as Namibia, where English, a foreign language, is the universities’ language of instruction (McCabe, 2011), and university classroom composition comprises of students from different cultural, ethnical and linguistic backgrounds. As a result, many HEIs have introduced courses aimed at familiarising students, particularly first year undergraduate students, into the conventions of writing in an academically appropriate way.

Academic literacy courses gained prominence in diverse contexts such as South Africa as a result of the presumed ‘language issues’ (Boughey & McKenna, 2016), which has been the

common explanation regarding black students' poor progression in higher education in that country. Issues of social differences and unexplored expectations that students bring to institutions and the institutional culture that differs or matches with some students' backgrounds were absented through a focus on the 'language problem'. According to Boughey and McKenna (2016, p. 2) "the difficulty of engaging with complex abstract concepts in a language other than one's home language is presented in the 'language problem' argument as if unrelated to the social groupings of students or staff or the institution within which the language is used".

In an attempt to overcome the language problem, and in response to the high demand for English as a global language necessary for economic ties, a plethora of English courses were put in place (Pennycook, 2000). These courses differed in the detail and emerged from the field of Academic development and the English Language Teaching industry. Some common names for such courses, which indicate their slightly differing focuses include English for Academic Purposes (EAP), English for Specific Purposes (ESP), and Academic Writing (AW), to mention but the few. Such courses are typically offered as semester-long or year-long courses; and can be compulsory or only offered to a certain group of students. Where the course is only for some, attendance is mostly determined by students' performance in English (see McKenna, 2004). These courses are at times known as 'Academic Literacy' courses, though the concept of academic literacy, as discussed earlier, is at odds with the idea of a stand-alone course addressing practices that require an understanding of the context in which such practices are practiced.

It should, however, be noted that, regardless of the name or duration of the course, academic literacy courses' aim remains "to transition students from high school education to the higher education environment where good academic writing is the lifeblood of academic success" (Kangira, 2019, unpagged). Lock and Lockhart (1998) call such "the transition from the kinds of writing that gain [students] acceptance into the university to the kinds of writing that allow them to be successful while at university" (p. 60). Such are acknowledgements that despite students gaining admission to HEIs after they meet the minimum requirements (including a pass in English), what led to success in the schooling system may not be sufficient to navigate the new requirements of the academy.

The design of such courses generally takes two forms: generic and discipline specific.

3.6.1 Generic development courses

These are courses designed mostly to assist first year undergraduate students ‘catch up’ with language skills not acquired in formal schooling (McCabe, 2011). They are comprised of basic study skills and activities that are ‘presumed’ to be common to all disciplines. Lea and Street (1998) describe generic academic literacy courses as drawing from the study skills approach whereby study skills provision is offered through library centres, writing centres, and English language centres. Such centres house specialists in English, who offer EAP mostly to non-native speakers of English or students who have been identified as at risk of failing (Hakim, 2020; Wingate & Tribble, 2012). Common topics within such generic academic literacy courses include “academic writing, presentations, and note taking” (Hakim, 2020, p. 5). Course design under this perspective is said to focus on knowledge of the technicalities of language use in terms of the forms of language as grammar and punctuation (Boughey, 2013). These further often include an emphasis on structural surface errors in terms of “concordances, tenses and the use of passive voice, punctuation, referencing, sentence, paragraph and essay construction” (Clarence, 2010, p. 18).

There is, however, contestation to offering generic academic literacy courses because they are not designed in accordance with the needs of the students learning (Boughey & McKenna, 2016). In essence, generic courses are based on a common core assumption that there is a general academic English whose grammatical and lexical features are found across academic writing (Hakim, 2020; Julius et al., 2023). Researchers such as Hyland (2006) acknowledge that “there are register level features common to academic discourse such as nominalisation, impersonalisation, and lexical density” (in Hakim, 2020, p. 8). However, such features differ markedly across disciplinary genres and contexts in academia thereby rendering the notion of generic academic literacy or academic writing ineffective.

Additionally, most academic literacy courses are offered at language centres or writing units that sit outside the disciplines. So doing has been repeatedly shown to be counterproductive (Lillis & Tuck, 2016) because when literacy practices are outside the disciplines, they become decontextualised and this detaches the content from the students’ needs to succeed within particular fields. This fails to acknowledge that, the norms, values and intentions of different disciplines inform what is to be written because literacy is not unitary but rather multiple. It further fails to acknowledge that the numerous texts in the different disciplines of HEIs require different reading and writing rules and requirements (Gee, 2003).

Thus, generic academic literacy courses can be argued to draw on the autonomous model whereby the academic literacy is understood to require the acquisition of a set of ‘skills’ which are believed to be neutral and generic. Here the practices of the academy are typically seen as a-social, a-cultural and a-historical (Boughey & McKenna, 2016, 2021), resulting in the courses being designed in a ‘one-size-fits-all’ way (Kangira, 2019). These courses are then offered to all students regardless of their specific needs or linguistic backgrounds. According to Jacobs (2013, p. 129), conceptualisation of academic literacy as a skill “sees academic literacies as a description of the lists of atomised things (skills) that students need to be able to do in academia”.

Decontextualised approaches to teaching academic literacy fail to acknowledge that “reading and writing in ways sanctioned by the academy have implications for students at the level of identity” (Boughey & McKenna, 2016, p. 5). Equally, they have implications for curriculum design and lecturers’ pedagogic and assessment practices particularly their conceptualisation of key terminologies including critical reading and academic writing. When coupled with attempts to develop literacy outside disciplines, this can be detrimental as “irrelevant content not grounded in the discipline is demotivating to students and generic skills are not transferred to the disciplines where the skills are necessary” (Butler, 2013, p. 5).

Furthermore, by employing a skills view, generic academic literacy courses have the potential to locate the problem of poor performance in students which absolves the university from responsibility. According to Hakim (2020), “when seen as abstract and decontextualised, students’ difficulties with AL practices are seen as an individual weakness, deficits, and instruction becomes a remedial ‘exercise in repair’” (p. 8). That, in principle, makes the duty of the academic literacy practitioners to be ‘solving or fixing’ students’ problem areas which are mainly language based (Yoo, 2016). Calling it a ‘fix it’ view, Chanock (2007, p. 273), illustrates the danger of teaching literacy practices in decontextualised fashion and blaming students indicating that;

Our centres seem to be regarded as a form of crash repair shop where welding, panel-beating and polishing can be carried out on students’ texts –an idea that makes sense only if you regard the text as a vehicle for the writer’s thoughts, and separable from the thoughts themselves.

There is thus a vast literature (for example, Bertram et al., 2022; Bharuthram & Clarence, 2015; Boughey & McKenna, 2021) that advocates for academic reading and writing to be embedded in disciplines because academic literacy is not a generic practice.

3.6.2 Discipline-specific academic literacy courses

Discipline-specific courses, by contrast, are an attempt to tailor the course to the academic literacy needs of specific academic disciplines and try to support the development of reading and writing in academia as context dependent (Hakim, 2020; Thonus, 2020). The goal, in essence, is that students are oriented “more overtly towards the structure of knowledge in the disciplines from which the norms, values, and textual practices emanate” (Clarence & McKenna, 2017, p. 40). Discipline-specific approaches can range in degree of specificity from a broad field focus such as English for Science and Technology (Parkinson, 2017) to a highly specific disciplinary focus such as English for Clinical Pharmacy (Hyland, 2016).

The success of discipline-specific Academic Literacy courses is highly dependent on the relationship between the academic literacies’ practitioners⁵ and the disciplinary expert (Jacobs 2013). The two groups of educators hold different positions in the teaching of a student, whereby the academic literacy practitioners bring the wealth of knowledge on the language aspects i.e. conventions of writing different genres, while the disciplinary experts bring the wealth of “insider knowledge of their particular disciplines, as well as tacit understanding of the discursive practices of their particular disciplines” (Jacobs, 2007, p. 875). Such collaboration is well captured by Bertram et al., (2022) that “this could be done by academics working closely with academic development staff, or academics themselves could learn how to embed academic literacy practices in their own pedagogic practices” (pp. 165 – 166).

One of the criticisms of this type of courses is that it is costly in that different courses are needed for each discipline or field, or at least for each set of cognate fields (Maldoni & Lear, 2021; Wingate et al., 2011). It can also bring about the discrepancies between the academic literacy development lecturers and the discipline lecturers whereby the literacy practitioners feel they do not have the content, whereas the discipline lectures feel it is not their duty to teach language. Having an academic literacy development lecturer can inadvertently underscore the problematic autonomous model as the discipline expert may feel it is not their job to engage with supporting students to take on the literacy practices as this is what the academic literacy development lecturer is meant to do.

⁵ Borrowing from Clarence and McKenna (2017), academic literacies practitioners refers to “faculty members who work in academic development or teaching and learning development units, or within faculties, whose particular role is to work with lecturers and students to develop students’ academic literacy practices, most specifically for writing in the disciplines” (p. 38)

Despite the good intentions of putting academic literacy programmes in place as a way to enable students to function appropriately in the academic culture, it has been warned that having academic literacy courses in HEIs is not a guarantee that students will adjust accordingly to the needs of the universities (Lillis, 2011; Macbeth, 2010; van Schalkwyk, 2008). According to Kangira (2019), although universities have introduced such development courses, “some of the courses have proved disastrous as students’ work continue to exhibit serious flaws of academic writing after taking the courses” (unpaged). The challenge is attributed to numerous factors such as the time that the courses are introduced (Ola-Busari, 2016), the academic words and technical words that are rarely engaged with in such courses (Izaks, 2016) as well as the teaching approaches educators employ (Kangira, 2019).

Ola-Busari (2016) warns that although HEIs introduce “service courses to enhance first year students’ language and communication skills ... they come too late to correct fundamental errors” (p. 105). For Izaks (2016), offering academic literacy courses may put students in a precarious situation if not handled properly because in academia there are academic words and technical words. He describes the two as “academic words occur frequently over a wide range of academic texts across disciplines and technical words refer to words pertaining to a specific discipline” (Izaks, 2016, p. 58). With regards to pedagogic aspects, it has been warned that, teaching academic literacy through “the omnibus approach of academic writing” (Kangira, 2019, unpaged) risks placing the teaching of academic literacy outside disciplines. Additionally, it has been warned that there is a high possibility that “at tertiary institutions, academic literacy programmes are not informed by current research on literacy, but are being diluted into the task-oriented development of only discrete language skills, and thus remain one dimensional” (Smit, 2010, p. 16). So doing creates a skewed view on where the possible challenge to students’ low academic success, as evidenced by low throughput rates, lies. Importantly, it can create a blindness as to the role of the institutional cultures and disciplinary norms, to which I now turn.

3.7 Blindness to institutional culture and disciplinary norms

In the event of poor academic progression, it is common for the blame to be put on the students and none on the larger context in which the educational process occurs (Luna, 2002). It is not uncommon for “negative learners’ attitudes toward learning, low socio-economic status of learners, lack of parental involvement and lack of motivation and support” (Namupala 2013, p. vii) to be given as the contributing factors to poor student performance in school or

university. Such explanations may be useful as far as they go but they mask the role of the educational institution itself.

At HEIs, blaming poor performance in students can be said to be rife, for the terms ‘underprepared’, ‘ill-prepared’, ‘academically deficient’ or ‘academically disadvantaged’ are common adjectives in the literature regarding students’ success or failure (Perin & Holschuh, 2019; Boughey & McKenna, 2016; Bettinger & Long, 2009). Such terms emphasise the construed causal relationship between students’ attributes and their academic success. Students’ success is understood through such terms to depend primarily on attributes inherent within them such as their “levels of motivation, cognition, or language abilities” (Boughey & McKenna, 2016, p. 6).

Liswaniso and Mubanga (2019) and Ola-Busari (2016), amongst others, attribute students’ success in HEIs to their ability to read and understand texts. Emphasising the significance of reading, Ola-Busari (2016, p. 95) highlights that “reading is the gateway to the acquisition of other language skills [because] one is only capable of writing well if one has read extensively”. On the other hand, Mutimani (2016) attributes students’ poor performance in the UNAM Katima Mulilo campus to their inability to write; indicating that “from the first year, students struggle with writing across the disciplines, they find writing assignments daunting, and they often do not understand the writing requirements they are asked to embark on” (p. 2).

While such literature provides important details of the presumed causes of the disproportion between higher admission rates and low throughput rates in HEIs, they lack an understanding of the role HEIs play in the process. Indeed, while this literature helps us to understand the gaps in students’ prior learning, the problems they have with the language of instruction, and the general mismatch between students’ skills and the expectations of the academy, the literature completely absents the university itself.

So doing misses important nuances regarding the academic community and its *academic culture* comprising the “norms, standards, procedures and linguistic forms” (Van Dyk & Van de Poel, 2013, p. 45). Such traits define the community’s discourse - with discourse defined as “ways of thinking and using language which exists in the academy” (Hyland, 2009, p. 1). The norms, practices, values and expectations of the academic community define the rules students have to play by and higher education success rests in part on students being able to take on such practices.

Unfortunately, academic cultures or literacy practices are “neither monolithic nor static and [are] often not explicit” (De Rycke, 2010, p. 22). Keeping the values and literacy practices implicit has been indicated to have dire consequences including putting students at risk of academic exclusion due to inability to access the epistemologies underpinning each discipline and the related ways of doing things (Calvo et al., 2020; Papashane & Hlalele, 2014). This risks aggravating tension between student and staff as it is indicated that,

... in a learning context academic culture will often manifest itself in a tension between staff and students, where young students lack knowledge of and familiarity with the academic culture and staff assume that students have some kind of knowledge of the academic culture, appropriate enough to be functional (Van de Poel & Van Dyk, 2015, p. 5)

Against that background, this study is interested in the international phenomenon of the teaching of academic literacy in HEIs in academic development initiatives as a way to ameliorate the situation of student drop out in HEIs (Uys, 2016); to apprentice and acculturate students into the expectations of their new environment (Marinkovich et al., 2016); and to prepare them for the writing required for success in a university (Kangira, 2019). The study set out to make some of the expected literacy practices explicit, as it explored what is legitimated in a few disciplines of University of Namibia and how that matched or clashed with the content of the academic literacy course; and what that might mean for students’ academic success. Making literacy practices explicit makes it easier for students and educators to recognise the hidden or taken for granted aspects of the discipline, which allows individuals to understand and adopt it (Maguire et al., 2020; Navarro & Chion, 2016) and simultaneously opens such practices up for criticism because it is hard to critique what we cannot see.

3.8 Conclusion

As I reflected in Chapter One, and return to again in Chapter Four, I came to this study with a deep concern for student retention and throughput in the face of poor graduation rates. I wanted to make sense of what we could do to address these issues and I had an interest in the development of the English for Academic Purposes course as one initiative designed to this end. I was largely unaware, however, of the literature discussed in this chapter. The concept of academic literacies as a set of practices emerging from the norms and values of specific disciplines was largely unknown to me. As I came to understand the distinction between the ideological and autonomous models, it became increasingly evident that the autonomous model

is so dominant as to be pervasive and it is only through extensive reading of the literature that it can be challenged.

This chapter highlighted the contested nature of literacy and its significant implications for the creation of academic development courses. It underscored how the prevailing understanding often overlooks critical nuances, specifically that literacy is not monolithic and is highly context dependent. The failure to acknowledge the heterogeneity of contexts and the resultant multiplicity of literacies is a shared responsibility. Consequently, higher education institutions experience a pervasive blame game between educators and students, as well as between mainstream lecturers and academic literacy practitioners.

This oversight underscores the one-sidedness of the current body of research, which tends to focus either on students or systems, but seldom considers knowledge as an object of study. This study addresses this gap by employing Legitimation Code Theory to analyse the data, as detailed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 4: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

4.1 Introduction

Chapter Three delved into the concept of literacy, particularly academic literacy, in different contexts and reflected on how the English teaching industry has resulted in a proliferation of English courses in HEIs to address language issues alongside the development of courses focused on academic ‘skills’. However, there is a significant concern in the literature that the focus on disciplinary practices often fails to explain how and why they differ (Clarence & McKenna, 2017). Thus, while academic literacy research argues that language use is highly contextualised and requires more than grammatical correctness, it fails to account for why different disciplines have such different literacy practices.

Much research in the Sociology of Education notes disciplinary distinctions but fails to engage in what differentiates knowledge and what effects such differences make. This failure to acknowledge the effects that different kinds of knowledge have on our practices is called ‘knowledge blindness’ and is a serious obstacle to understanding knowledge building in and across disciplines (Maton & Chen, 2020). There is an urgent call to “find ways to describe what is happening in classrooms that are informed by research and theory rather than only in relation to what is required by the official curriculum documents” (Bertram, 2012, p. 4). The idea that knowledge is structured differently in different fields and that this shapes the literacy practices that students are meant to take on is central to this study’s theoretical lens.

4.2 Legitimation Code Theory

Legitimation Code Theory (LCT) is a sociological theory that seeks to explain the processes of knowledge production and distribution in society (Maton & Moore, 2010). It is realist in that it is based on the idea that knowledge is a socially constructed entity that is shaped by power relations within a given social context. Legitimation Code Theory, like all realist theories, distinguishes between the real, which we may strive to understand, and our knowledge of the real, which will always be partial. Realist approaches require that the researcher goes beyond describing a phenomenon to identifying some of the causally efficacious mechanisms conditioning the emergence of the phenomenon. The terms “causally efficacious” and “conditioning” both indicate the realist position that mechanisms can make an event more or less likely to occur but, because they rarely work on their own in a one-to-one cause-effect way, we need to make sense of the way that mechanisms can enable or constrain the conditions

whereby a particular phenomenon may or may not emerge. Key to identifying mechanisms in this study was the extent to which LCT provides the tools for the identification of the structures of knowledge and knowers.

In developing LCT, Karl Maton and Rob Moore, drew on several existing theories, including those of Basil Bernstein and Pierre Bourdieu. While a detailed explanation of LCT is provided in Section 4.3, below is a brief description of how some of Bernstein and Bourdieu's theories influenced LCT.

4.2.1 Bernstein's pedagogic discourse theory

Bernstein's theory of social class and language codes (Bernstein, 1975) provided the foundation for LCT. Bernstein indicated that social class is a key factor in the distribution of knowledge within society, with middle-class students having easier access to academic knowledge than working-class students. Central in such social inequality is language, to which Bernstein ascribes two codes: a restricted code, which is used primarily by working-class students, and an elaborated code, which is used by middle-class students (Aliakbari & Allahmoradi, 2014; Bernstein, 1971). While the "restricted codes are more context dependent and particularistic, elaborated codes are context independent and universalistic (Sadovnik, 2001, p. 609) and are more highly valued in the schooling system. Initially, Bernstein was severely criticised for this theory as it was seen to suggest a deficit in working class society. Later researchers came to understand that Bernstein was commenting on overlaps between middle class home literacy practices and those of school and university.

The issue of language as a 'social stratifier' can better be understood from Bernstein's categorisation of discourses as horizontal or vertical. He describes horizontal discourse as "common sense knowledge which everyone has access to and is likely to be oral, local, context dependent and specific, tacit, multi-layered and contradictory across but not within contexts" (Bernstein, 1999, p. 159). Simply put, the horizontal discourse represents the everyday language and knowledge that students have access to before they join formal schooling. Such knowledge is indicated to be imperative for "maximising encounters with persons and habitants" (Bernstein, 1999, p. 159). The main aim of this discourse is individuals' acquisition of operational knowledges that are context specific and dependent rather than a graded performance (Bernstein, 1999).

A vertical discourse, on the other hand, is described as a “coherent, explicit and systematically principled structure which takes the forms of a series of specialised languages with a series of specialised modes of interrogation” (Bernstein, 1999, p. 159). This is the discourse that is applicable in some schooling contexts and the discourse to which students in HEIs seek access. Importantly, vertical discourse allows ideas to transcend specific contexts and to be used in new contexts. The principled abstract nature of vertical discourse is what is seen to make it powerful.

The socio-inequalities and the discourses of knowledge in academic contexts are better framed in Bernstein’s pedagogic discourse theory - which is an attempt to describe the general principles which underlie the transformation of knowledge into pedagogic communication (Bertram, 2012; Bernstein, 1996). According to Bernstein (cited in Atkinson, 2014, p. 171) the pedagogic discourse consists of “the rules regulating the production, distribution, reproduction, inter-relation and change of what counts as legitimate pedagogic texts”. The pedagogic discourse embeds the instructional discourses and regulative discourses. The instructional discourse refers to “the syntax generating the trained capacities and lifestyles to be distributed to the school population” (Hunter, 1994, p. 95) or “the specialist knowledge and skills of the subject being taught” (Jump, 2011, p. 57). The regulative discourse on the other hand refers to “the rules generating the order within the instructional discourse” (Singh, 2002, p. 576) or comprising “the social order, relations and identity within a learning space” (Jump, 2011, p. 57). Bernstein thus suggested that the knowledge of the academy can be seen to entail several tensions and contestations as to what should be taught, by whom and how.

In academia, the knowledge transformation process is governed by the pedagogic device which is “the ensemble of rules or procedures via which knowledge is converted into classroom talk, curricula and online communication” (Singh, 2002, p. 571). The distributive rules of the pedagogic device produce three main fields, the field of production, the field of recontextualisation, and the field of reproduction (Singh, 2002; Bertram, 2012).

The field of production is where knowledge is made through research (whether field or laboratory research) and is typically disseminated through articles, books, and conference proceedings. This is usually, but not always, undertaken by academics in universities. According to Bertram (2012, p. 6), the production field comprises “the process by which new knowledge, discourses and ideas are created and modified, usually by university academics”.

The field of recontextualisation is the place where agents such as curriculum developers or lecturers choose content from the field of production to form the basis of the curriculum and how it should be taught (Bertram, 2012; Krause et al., 2021; Singh, 2002). This is where people select and organise topics and texts from several knowledge bases or domains, including subject knowledge, teaching knowledge, content knowledge of learners and knowledge of self, and so on (Singh, 2002, p. 577). That can be for example, the selection and organisation of the bits and pieces to be included in the first year's Dental Technology's curriculum or the third-year Metallurgical engineering curriculum, and what materials should be used to teach it. There are significant battles to be undertaken in the selection and sequencing of knowledge from the field of production to the field of recontextualisation.

The field of reproduction, which is the third and final of Bernstein's three fields, comprises the actual classroom practices, lectures, and activities (teaching, learning and assessment) that students engage in. This field has aspects of power and authority in terms of who manages the classroom, who sets the activities, who has the authority to assess activities, and so on. It includes 'relations of symbolic control or the principles of framing, which include an understanding of 'who' (different categories of agents) exercises control, 'where' (temporal and spatial relations), and in relation to 'what' pedagogic discourse (rules or principles for generating texts) (Singh, 2002, p. 578). Bertram (2012, p. 6) describes the field of production as "the arena where teachers engage in pedagogic and assessment practices and where the evaluative rules regulate what counts as legitimate production". This is heavily reliant on the legitimated relations of social order whereby different parties within the academia communicate in ways that comply to the pedagogic discourse. In other words, what will 'count' as appropriate according to the evaluative rules is shaped by the nature of knowledge, the structure and values of the education system, the specific society, and even the norms, values and expectations of the teacher and students. There are thus multiple axes of power in the 'legitimated relations of the social order'.

Despite the significance of the three fields of knowledge, literature has highlighted the existence of tensions in their applicability across different education systems. These tensions, referred to as "policy fractures" (Davies & Hughes, 2009, p. 596), are characterised as "disjunctures between the espoused, the enacted, and the experienced curriculum" (Bertram, 2012, p. 2). The underlying cause of these tensions lies in the variations of rules and norms that individuals encounter or adhere to within different contexts.

For instance, within the field of Philosophy, scholars may recommend that students begin their study with Plato. However, a decolonial curriculum developer, situated in the Global South, might advocate for a different philosopher, rejecting such a recommendation (Hlatswayo, 2022). Similarly, at the classroom level, a curriculum may promote assessment strategies such as group work, which may not align with the contextual constraints of its implementation. A deeper understanding of these tensions is indicated that,

What becomes the content of a school subject is not something unique or logical but is defined by what those who regulate and control the curriculum believe to be the most useful and desirable to benefit society. They are social, not logical facts (Clark, 2005, p. 36).

Other than the fields of the pedagogic device, Bernstein contends that curriculum design hinges on three critical factors: *selection*, which involves determining the course and program content; *sequencing*, which addresses the order of presentation (both within program modules and within individual module content); and *pacing*, which governs the course speed and the allocation of time for practice and student engagement (Bernstein, 1975). According to Jump (2011), teachers are key agents with a recontextualisation functions, for they have the responsibility to determine the “selection of the learning materials, the relationship to other disciplines and the sequence and pacing of learning” (p. 57).

For this study, Bernstein's work is of importance as it offers valuable insight into the production of knowledge in today's global knowledge society. Bernstein's work offers a broad explanation of knowledge production that lacks the details necessary to shape pedagogic practices for the benefit of students. Therefore, while Bernstein's work is highly relevant to this study, LCT's concepts have been extended and developed into analytical tools to be used in this study, as will be described later in this chapter.

4.2.2 Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital

Bourdieu's (1977) theory of cultural capital, briefly discussed in Chapter Two, also exerted a significant influence on LCT. Cultural capital, comprising knowledge, skills, and cultural preferences, is viewed as a form of social capital that grants individuals access to resources and opportunities in society. Cultural capital can be categorised as either embodied (in the form of family socialisation, individual dispositions, and competencies), objectified (encompassing artworks or cultural artifacts), or institutionalised (manifesting as formal qualifications and so on) (Bourdieu, 1986; Goldthorpe, 2007; Vassenden & Jonvik, 2019).

In the realm of education, Bourdieu's cultural capital theory holds significance in understanding the intricate connection between education and culture (Hultqvist & Lidegran, 2021). In his analysis, Huang (2019) explains the concepts of cultural capital stating that knowledge is acquired through an individual's immersion in a specific culture, shaping their perception and understanding of the world. This cultural capital, primarily acquired during the formative stages of learning and unconsciously influenced by one's surroundings, plays a pivotal role not only for students but also for educators in their interpretation of curriculum and their pedagogic and assessment practices (Bourdieu, 2000).

The extent to which students possess the cultural capital that aligns with or deviates from what is considered legitimate within HEI can vary considerably (Hultqvist & Lidegran, 2021; Richards, 2020). Those whose backgrounds align to a greater extent with the dominant cultural norms of HEIs tend to experience a sense of enjoyment and reward in their academic pursuits (Edgerton & Roberts, 2014). Conversely, students from backgrounds that diverge from these norms often encounter frustration and feelings of alienation (Bourdieu, 2000). That, in principle, makes cultural capital a valuable resource in determining students' experiences in HEIs as they grapple with knowledge, tools and skills highly valued by educational institutions (Richards, 2020), their new environment. This raises enormous issues for social justice. If students' prior cultural capital act as significant mechanisms in their chances of success or failure, higher education cannot be considered a meritocracy. Instead, as Bourdieu consistently argued, it can serve to reinforce the status quo of class divides.

Generally, and in the context of this study, the concept of cultural capital sheds light on the norms and values upheld by educational institutions, which may inadvertently perpetuate social inequalities. These norms and values, being predominantly implicit, often remain resistant to scrutiny or questioning. Hence, by incorporating the insights offered by cultural capital theory (as woven in LCT's conceptualisation of knowledge and knowers) within the examination of academic literacy courses and related modules, it is possible to unravel which knowledge and knowers are valued and to what extent this is made explicit for equitable epistemic access.

4.3 LCT as the theoretical lenses

Legitimation Code Theory (LCT) builds on the work of Bernstein and Bourdieu to uncover how it is that certain kinds of knowledge are deemed legitimate (or credible or valued) in certain contexts while others are not. LCT also shines a spotlight on how certain kinds of 'knowers'

who demonstrate a particular disposition or ‘gaze’ or ‘way of being’ may be deemed legitimate while others are not. The word ‘code’ in the theory’s name, Legitimation Code Theory, signifies that what is legitimated (or excluded as illegitimate) is often not made explicit but rather is ‘coded’ into our practices and interactions.

LCT is used as a theory for researching and informing practice that allows for “knowledge practices to be seen, their organising principles to be conceptualised, and their effects to be explored” (Maton, 2014, p. 1). The theory views knowledge as both real and social, recognises the rational objectivity of knowledge’s existence, and acknowledges that knowledge is a social phenomenon that is fallible rather than absolute or relative (Wilmot, 2019; Maton & Moore, 2010). Its critical stance in uncovering the interests at play in any given field and the kind of knowledge privileged in different fields or courses makes LCT suitable for this study.

LCT comprises five dimensions; Specialization, Semantics, Autonomy, Temporality, and Density (Clarence, 2015; Maton, 2014). Each of these dimensions provides a lens to understand a different aspect of what is legitimated by analysing their composition as legitimation codes (Maton, 2014). Different dimensions can be used to explore the same aspect or practice, but each will derive its own conclusions in line with the language of legitimation it employs. This study uses the Specialization and Semantics dimensions to understand the role of academic literacy courses in developing students’ disciplinary literacy practices.

4.3.1 LCT - Specialization

Specialization is the tool used to identify what distinguishes a particular field; that is, what characteristics does it have that makes it ‘special’ or different from other fields.

The Specialization dimension views social fields of practice as knowledge-knower structures whose organising principles are conceptualised as specialization codes (Maton & Chen, 2020, p. 4; Maton, 2014). This dimension holds the premise that every practice is about or oriented *towards something* i.e. there is always knowledge, and every practice is about or oriented *by someone* i.e. there are always knowers (Maton & Chen, 2020). Knowledge refers to nature of the object of study, i.e. the things that get studied; while knowers refer to the extent to which one has to be a particular kind of person to be considered legitimate. The form and structure of such knowledge and knowers varies extensively from discipline to discipline and mostly remains implicit.

Keeping the values, norms and practices governing disciplines implicit has been indicated to have negative consequences on students' academic prowess including what Barrón and Gruber (2021, p. 147) call “the mysteries of implicit expectations” whereby students get frustrated by not knowing why they score lower grades despite putting in much effort in assessment activities. The challenge is similarly echoed by Clarence (2015) who warns that “an inability to adequately account for disciplinary knowledge can lead to academic development inputs that are unable to fully address the needs of students, educators, or disciplines themselves” (p. 1). In the wake of high attrition rates in HEIs, keeping the norms and values expected of success implicit is a risk. The implicit nature of expectations often leads to miscommunication between academics and students.

To make the implicit explicit, the Specialization dimension is used to reveal *epistemic relations (ER)* and *social relations (SR)* (Maton & Chen, 2020). Epistemic relations are about the relations to the knowledge as an object of the discipline or field. It explores how knowledge, skills, and processes are strongly or weakly valued, taught, and assessed. Epistemic relations thus pertain to the nature of the object of study: the knowledge. Social relations, on the other hand, are about relations to the knower. SR explores the nature of the kind of knower that is considered legitimate in terms of dispositions and ways of being, which can include viewpoints, religion, culture, ideologies, etc.

Both epistemic relations and social relations can be stronger or weaker (+/-). And then, depending on which aspects are stronger or weaker, ER and SR can be plotted on a cartesian plane to result in four specialization codes as explained below:

- *knowledge codes* (ER+, SR–), where possession of specialized knowledge, principles or procedures concerning specific objects of study is emphasised as the basis of achievement, and the attributes of actors are downplayed;
- *knower codes* (ER–, SR+), where specialized knowledge and objects are downplayed and the attributes of actors are emphasised as measures of achievement, whether these are viewed as born (e.g. ‘natural talent’), cultivated (e.g. ‘taste’) or social (e.g. feminist standpoint theory);
- *élite codes* (ER+, SR+), where legitimacy is based on both possessing specialist knowledge and being the right kind of knower; and
- *relativist codes* (ER–, SR–), where legitimacy is determined by neither specialist knowledge nor knower attributes – ‘anything goes’

(Maton & Chen, 2020, pp. 38 - 39)

The Specialization dimensions are depicted in perspective on the specialization plane (Figure 3) as adapted from Maton (2014, p. 30). Cognisance should be taken that these are not four discrete boxes as data can be plotted in multiple places anywhere on the graph, within each quadrant or along the lines that separate them. While within any set of data (e.g. a course guide) there might be evidence of any or all of the four codes, the intention is to determine which one is the dominant means of specialization.

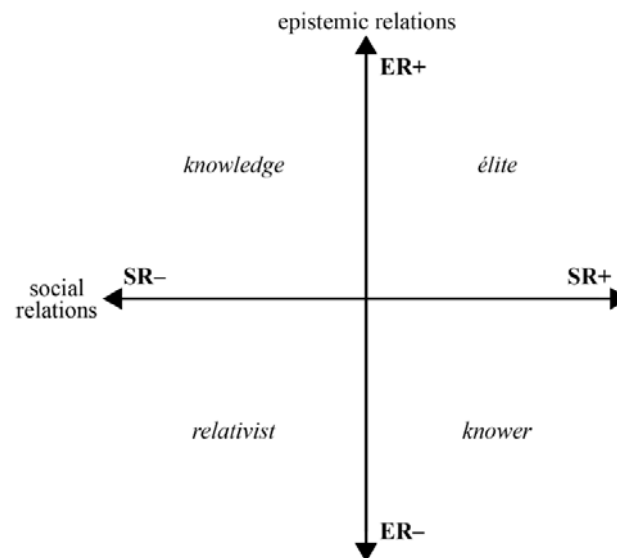


Figure 3: The LCT specialization plane

For this study, plotting the *epistemic relations* and *social relations* has the potential to unravel different constructs of knowledge and knowers by different people and in different courses. The interest is in what the codes of the EAP course is and whether this development course shares codes with the courses for which students are registered or whether there might be code clashes. In other words, is the specialisation of the preparatory course making explicit for students the epistemic and social relations that will be expected of them in their future studies? As students come to succeed in a discipline, so they are able to demonstrate their acquisition of the requisite knowledge and disposition as a legitimate knower. A code clash is where different, courses, lecturers, students, or pedagogical approaches inhabit different codes what Maton and Chen (2020) describe as “different rules of the game” (p. 49).

4.3.2 LCT - Semantics

The Semantics dimension of LCT focuses on the meaning-making practices that exist within a given field or practice. According to Clarence (2015, p. 4), this tool is concerned with “understanding how knowledge builds over time, both in terms of its relation to contexts in which it is applied and the complexity invested over time in terms of concepts and symbols” because all meanings relate to a context of some kind (Maton, 2013). Within the Semantics dimension, there are two sub-dimensions: semantic gravity and semantic density.

Semantic gravity (SG) refers to the degree to which meaning relates to its context (Maton, 2013). Semantic gravity can also be stronger or weaker (+/-) as determined by the strength of relation to context of the words, text, phrase etc being analysed. It is stronger (SG+) when meaning is strongly connected to its social or symbolic context (Kajee, 2018). Where SG+ is evident, the meaning is seen to relate only to the context in which the meaning is made and used, and it will hold little meaning outside of that context. Where SG- is evident, the meaning can relate to multiple contexts as the meaning is not tied to the particulars of a specific setting.

The process of strengthening semantic gravity can be described as “moving from the abstract and generalised ideas toward concrete and delimited cases” (Kajee, 2018, p. 56). In contrast, weakening semantic gravity involves “moving from concrete particulars towards generalisation and abstractions, whose meanings are less dependent on the context” (Maton, 2014, p. 110). According to Maton (2013), “movements in semantic gravity provide a necessary (though not sufficient) condition for the decontextualisation and recontextualisation of knowledge and thus the possibility of cumulative knowledge-building and learning” (p. 123). In other words, if students are exposed to ‘semantic waves’ whereby they are shown meaning in a context to which they can easily relate (SG+) and this is then abstracted to the underlying principles (SG-) (or vice versa from SG- to SG+) they will have a better chance of epistemological access for cumulative knowledge-building. This process should not be seen as a one-time occurrence. Rather, students benefit from repeated opportunities to connect context-specific concepts with abstract principles and back again. Such repeated movements between context-specific knowledge and abstract principles are crucial for creating a semantic wave, which facilitates the deep understanding necessary for cumulative knowledge-building.

The second aspect of Semantics is *semantic density (SD)*; this refers to “the degree of condensation of meaning within practices” (Maton, 2014, p. 182). SD can also be stronger or

weaker (+/-) depending on the condensation of the meanings. It is weaker (SD-) when meanings are easily accessible and comprehensible to many if not all people and it is stronger (SD+) when meaning is specialised and accessible only to a specific group of people.

The strengths and weaknesses of the SG and SD can also be shown along continua and the combinations of their strengths and/or weaknesses result in four ‘semantic codes’ (Maton, 2013), as described below:

- *rhizomatic codes* (SG-, SD+), where the basis of achievement comprises relatively context-independent and complex stances;
- *prosaic codes* (SG+, SD-), where legitimacy accrues to relatively context-dependent and simpler stances;
- *rarefied codes* (SG-, SD-), where legitimacy is based on relatively context-independent stances that are relatively simpler; and
- *worldly codes* (SG+, SD+), where legitimacy is accorded to relatively context-dependent stances that are relatively complex.

Maton (2020, pp. 64-65)

Such codes can better be understood from the semantic plane below adapted from Maton (2016, p. 16).

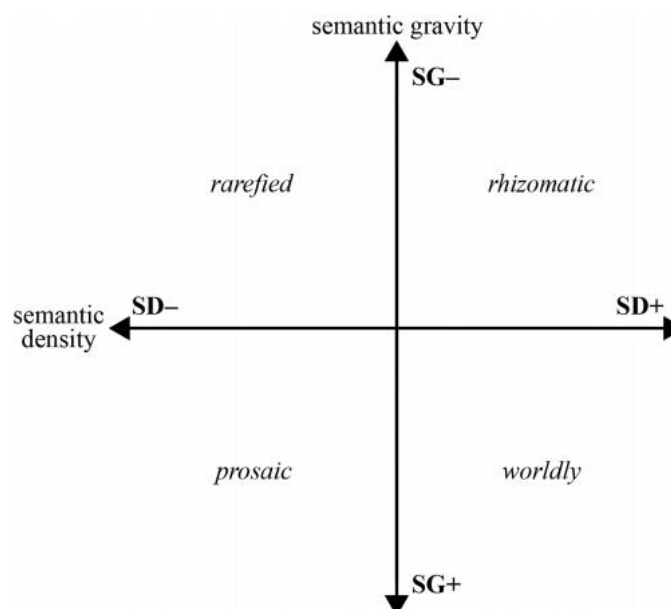


Figure 4: The LCT semantic plane

For this study, the semantic gravity and semantic density offer lenses to identify the condensation of context dependency and meaning in the EAP course and the assessment tasks given to students.

4.4 Conclusion

This section has explored LCT as the theoretical framework for the present study. It has briefly examined the fundamental contributions of Bernstein's pedagogic discourse theory and Bourdieu's cultural capital theory, which form the basis of LCT. Moreover, it has shed light on the relevance of the Specialization and Semantics dimensions of LCT as the analytical tools for this study. These insights will be instrumental in shaping the subsequent data analysis process, as elucidated in Section 5.5.

Having introduced the theoretical lenses of this study, I now go on to discuss the research design and how these LCT lenses were applied to answer the research questions.

CHAPTER 5: RESEARCH DESIGN

5.1 Introduction

Every piece of empirical research includes a set of decisions regarding the research design. The research design serves as a framework that guides the research approach and ensures the relevance of the data obtained and the analytical tools applied (Maxwell, 2022; Sileyew, 2019). According to Durrheim (2004), a research design is a strategic framework for action that connects the research questions with the implementation of the research strategy. It involves activities such as selecting subjects, research sites, and data collection procedures to answer the research questions (MacMillan & Schumacher, 2001, p. 166).

In planning my research design, I was aware that the design of any research has a significant influence on the type of data gathered and the resulting outcomes (Leavy, 2022). Thus, in this section, I share the research methodology that I employed in my study. Specifically, I provide information on how I undertook all the steps in my study and reflect on my decision-making processes. This includes a discussion of the strategies I used to collect data, such as sampling procedures, population consideration and sample size determination, data collection tools, and data analysis. Furthermore, I discuss the ethical considerations of my research.

5.2 Case study

This research adopts a qualitative case study research approach. According to Rule and John (2011), a case study is defined as "a systemic and in-depth study of one particular case in its context" (p. 4). Yin (2009) defines it as "an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident" (p. 18). The boundaries in a case study include aspects such as the time period, geographical location, or specific population being studied. Such aspects are imperative in determining the scope of the study, the resources needed, the number of participants required, and the relevance of the information collected, which feed into the analysis of the phenomenon being studied. This study is an investigation of the 'contemporary phenomenon' of academic literacy courses offered around the world to support student success, and, in particular, it is the case of the EAP course at UNAM.

To gain an understanding of a phenomenon, case studies' findings emerge from the richest possible data as obtained by studying people or systems in their natural environment (in situ)

(Nieuwenhuis, 2007; Paltridge & Phakiti, 2010). While a rich account of the site and participants will be shared under the sections research site and participants respectively (Section 5.3), it is worth sharing here that all the participants were interviewed in their respective campuses (in situ).

Data for a case study can be generated from numerous sources and can either be qualitative or quantitative or both (Bassey, 1999; Nekondo, 2017). A simple differentiation of qualitative and quantitative research is that the former focuses on textual or visual data while the latter focuses on numeric data. Considering the purpose of this study which sought the participants' *conceptualisation* of academic literacy and their *experiences* with the UNAM's EAP course, a qualitative research design was the relevant approach. According to Strauss and Corbin (1990), qualitative research produces findings not arrived at by means of statistical procedures or other means of quantification (p. 17). "Qualitative research is carried out to enhance understanding of individuals' cultures, beliefs and situations, as well as to develop theories that describe these experiences" (Kalu & Bwalya, 2017, p. 44). Furthermore, Davies (2000) states that "Qualitative research pays considerable attention to the variety of ways in which people from different social and cultural backgrounds, and in different situations, make sense of the world in which they live, give meaning to it, establish relationships within that world and, thereby, construct social reality" (p. 292). This was appropriate for this case study in that I wanted to capture the complexities around how the EAP course was conceptualised and experienced.

The aim of case study research is "not to make statements about the cases to a larger population but to explore in depth a particular phenomenon in a contemporary context" (Farquhar, 2012, p. 3). Thus, each case study has as its purpose to provide a rich picture of one example of a phenomenon so that readers who may be in different contexts trying to understand that same phenomenon don't expect their case to be identical to the one described but rather expect to achieve an enhanced understanding of how the phenomenon manifests across contexts (Takahashi, 2020).

My study looks at the case of the UNAM's EAP course and its relationship to preparing students to take on the literacy practices of other disciplines. I sought to understand how the structure of knowledge within academic literacy courses enables students' access to meaning making of discipline specific literacies.

By offering this case, I am not suggesting that all development courses around the world are like this, but it is hoped that interested parties can learn about some of the key findings and this can help them to better understand the phenomenon of academic literacy courses intended to enhance student success.

Despite the body of research on academic literacy development in Namibia and elsewhere, discussed in Chapter 3, there have been very few studies internationally that interrogate such courses in relation to the academic literacy practices to which students are seeking access in their ‘mainstream’ courses. Given that the intention of such courses is to support such access, this is a significant gap in the literature. Furthermore, the studies on any aspect of academic literacy in Namibian higher education are limited and this study contributes to building such literature in the national context.

To address the identified gaps, this study sought to answer the following research questions:

1. How is ‘academic literacy’ conceptualised in the UNAM English for Academic Purposes course curriculum?

This first question was further divided into two sub-questions: (a) How do the academics who teach the UNAM EAP course conceptualise ‘academic literacy’? and (b) How is knowledge structured in course documents and assessments?

2. How do academics who teach other courses conceptualise UNAM's EAP course and its relationship to the literacy practices expected in their courses?
3. How do students experience the EAP course at UNAM, and how do they understand the relationship between the content and activities of the EAP course and the academic literacy demands of their other courses?

5.3 Research site

This study was conducted on three different campuses of UNAM, i.e. Hifikepunye Pohamba (HP) Campus, the Jose Eduardo dos Santos (JEDS) Campus, and the Oshakati Campus. Each of these campuses offers a range of faculty-specific programs, with HP offering education courses, JEDS specialising in engineering studies, and the Oshakati Campus focusing on health-related programs. I selected these campuses based on their proximity, with HP and JEDS located in the same town of Ongwediva and Oshakati Campus situated in an adjacent town.

The primary aim of conducting the study across multiple campuses and departments was to capture a diverse range of disciplines. Although all departments were eligible to participate, I decided to limit the number of departments to two per campus. This choice was based on the willingness of the departments to participate and to ensure the viability of the study. The participating departments and campuses are listed in the table below. Further details on how I approached the participants can be found in Section 5.4.

Campus	Location	Faculty	Departments included in the study
Hifikepunye Pohamba (HP)	Ongwediva	Education and Human Sciences	• <i>Lower Primary</i> • <i>Science Education</i>
José Eduardo Dos Santos (JEDS)	Ongwediva	Agriculture, Engineering, and the Built Environment	• <i>Electronics and Computer Engineering</i> • <i>Mining and Metallurgical Engineering</i>
Oshakati	Oshakati	Health Sciences and Veterinary Medicine	• <i>Nursing</i> • <i>Public Health</i>

Table 4: Summary of the departments per campus that participated in the study

5.4 Data collection methods and tools

I employed three data collection techniques to gather data for my study: document analysis, individual interviews, and focus group interviews.

5.4.1 Document analysis

For document analysis, I used a systematic procedure to evaluate various documents that served as ‘vestiges of the past’ (Andrade et al., 2018). According to Bowen (2009), document analysis involves finding, selecting, appraising, and synthesising data contained in the documents. I analysed the EAP course outline, the study guide, the EAP lecturers' notes/slides, and the assessment tasks. I obtained these documents from the EAP lecturers who I interviewed, as discussed in the next Section 5.4.2.

To ensure the validity and trustworthiness of the research employing document analysis, claims have to be backed up by excerpts, quotations, or entire passages organised into major themes, categories, and case examples (Bowen, 2009; Labuschagne, 2003). I followed this approach in my study, and any claim I made based on data from documents was backed up by excerpts. I

triangulated the data obtained from document analysis to determine the extent to which the content of the EAP course matched or clashed with conceptualisations from individual interviews with lecturers, and focus group data, and brought these into conversation with the literature discussed in Chapter Three. This was imperative in ascertaining what was legitimated for success in the EAP course and what that meant for students' success in their discipline-specific subjects.

5.4.2 Individual interviews

An individual interview is defined as a one-on-one data collection technique that involves having conversations with the participants to find out their experiences, thoughts, and feelings about a certain thing or phenomenon (Fylan, 2005). Unstructured interviews involve researcher's minimal control over the direction of the conversation, while semi-structured interviews use a predetermined set of questions with some flexibility for follow-up questions. Structured interviews are highly controlled, with a set of predetermined questions asked in the same order without deviation or probing (Harrell & Bradley, 2009). Since my study aimed to garner participants' conceptualisation of AL and their experiences with the UNAM's EAP course, I opted for in-person semi-structured interviews. I carried out these interviews with both the EAP lecturers and the course lecturers from various other disciplines.

5.4.2.1 EAP lecturers' interviews

EAP lecturers in UNAM work within the Language Centre which is a unit in the Department of Language Development (see Section 1.8). Thus, to gain access to the EAP lecturers, I first visited the Co-Ordinator for the Language Centre at the HP Campus and briefed him on the purpose of my study. I also assured him of the ethical aspects, including explaining that I had ethical clearance by Rhodes University (Appendix 1d), as well as a permission letter granted by the UNAM's Director for the Centre for Research and Publications (Appendix 1c). A detailed explanation of gaining access is discussed in more details under ethical considerations (Section 5.5.2). There were four EAP lecturers eligible to participate in this study. Three from the HP Campus and one from Oshakati Campus, who equally serves the JEDS Campus. During the visit, I sought the email addresses of the four lecturers in their department and requested for assistance in approaching the lecturers to be invited to voluntarily participate in my study.

After receiving support from the Co-Ordinator, I sent the four EAP lecturers an email inviting them to participate in the study. The email was detailed and outlined the purpose of the study

and the ethical considerations, including freedom to withdraw at any time. Fortunately, all the four lecturers responded favourably, and we scheduled interviews at a time that was suitable for them. For the sake of convenience, I went to each participant's office to interview them in an environment that was familiar to them. In interviewing EAP lecturers, I sought their understanding of the concept of academic literacy generally and their understanding of and approach to the UNAM's EAP course in particular.

Although I had a list of prepared questions (Appendices 3a-3c), I carried out the interviews in a conversational manner, including probing for further details when something interesting or unclear was mentioned. I recorded the interviews with an audio recorder, and the duration of the interviews ranged between 26 and 46 minutes. For ease of analysis, I transcribed the audio recordings verbatim.

5.4.2.2 Discipline specific lecturers' interviews

Discipline-specific lecturers are the lecturers responsible for major subjects in the courses offered in each of the three selected campuses. By interviewing them I aimed to gain an understanding of their conceptualisation of academic literacy practices required for success in their courses, and their perceptions of the UNAM's EAP course in facilitating the development of such practices. The study targeted a total of twelve participants, with four participants per campus, consisting of two lecturers per department, with a maximum of two departments per campus.

The approach to recruiting participants varied depending on the campus. At the HP Campus, I was familiar with the lecturers responsible for the relevant subjects and was able to approach them directly to invite them. For the other two campuses, I had to introduce myself and explain the study to individuals to recruit them as participants. I also applied the snowball sampling method in that in a few cases I asked participants interviewed first to recommend other lecturers in the department to participate in the study. I chose to conduct interviews during the time when lectures had ended but examinations had not yet commenced, thus allowing for more availability and comfort in conducting the interviews in the lecturers' offices.

I provided each participant with the consent form (Appendix 2a) and all relevant ethical clearances and permission letters from both Rhodes University and UNAM. I provided such documents to participants prior to the commencement of the interviews.

Overall, this specific data collection aimed to gain insights from discipline-specific lecturers regarding academic literacy practices, success requirements in their courses, and the UNAM's EAP course. The duration of the interviews ranged from 18 to 37 minutes and were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim for analysis purposes.

5.4.3 Focus group interviews

The focus-group interview, also known as 'discussion groups' (Cortini et al., 2019), is a qualitative research technique that involves the participation of a small group of individuals who are asked to discuss a particular topic of interest. In this study six focus group interviews were conducted with students i.e. two focus group interviews per campus, with one group per department. The departments from which these focus groups were carried out were the same departments from which the discipline-specific lecturers were interviewed (see Table 4 for a summary of participating departments).

The goal was to gather perspectives from students within the same departments where disciplinary lecturers were individually interviewed to gain a comprehensive understanding of students' perceptions of the expectations for their academic success. Such information is important for triangulation purposes to ascertain disciplinary lecturers' views on the attributes of a successful student in their subjects, as well as both lecturers' and students' perceptions of the University of Namibia's English for Academic Purposes course and its contribution to students' academic achievements.

The focus group interviews were conducted after the discipline-specific lecturers' interviews, and the student participants were identified by their respective lecturers. Ethical considerations were addressed before the commencement of the focus group interviews, including obtaining informed consent from students (Appendix 2b) and explaining participants' rights to withdraw from the study. The focus groups were conducted within the campus environments where the students were enrolled or studying to avoid additional costs on the students' side, such as travel expenses to attend the interviews. Moreover, interviewing students in their comfort zones offered the potential to put them at ease and minimise the power dynamics that comes with the position of the researcher, an issue I return to later.

It is important to note that having student participants chosen by their lecturers has the potential to introduce bias into the study because some students may have had valuable information that could have contributed to the study, but they were not chosen to participate. However, this

seemed to be the best logistical means of organising such groups. Additionally, I am aware that some students may have participated in the focus group discussions more than others due to varying levels of confidence. However, to accommodate all participants I made a careful attempt to include those students who seemed more reticent in the face of more expansive peers. I acknowledge that there are ethical implications to such approach, for an individual participates willingly and has the right not to answer certain questions. But I did that in good faith to ensure that all participants were engaged and that there was a balance between the more vocal and less participating students. This seemed to work well and ensure broad participation within each group.

I conducted six focus groups with students from six different departments of the three chosen campuses. There were thus six focus groups of six students each, all of which were audio recorded with an audio recorder and transcribed verbatim⁶.

The collected data was triangulated with the data collected using other techniques. It is, however, important to acknowledge the limitations that focus group data are never generalisable beyond the groups conducted (Harrell & Bradley, 2009). This limitation applies to this study as well.

5.5 Data analysis

Data analysis “involves organizing, accounting for and explaining the data, in short, making sense of data in terms of the participants’ definitions of the situations, noting patterns, themes, categories and regularities” (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007, p. 461). There are various processes for applying a set of analytical tools to data in order to reach findings. In this study, I used retroduction, which entails going beyond the observed data to identify potential causal mechanisms (Sayer, 2000). Realist studies use theories to develop possible explanations for the emergence of phenomena, such as the EAP course in this case. The main theory I drew upon was Legitimation Code Theory, as discussed in the previous chapter.

According to Maton (2016), “one cannot proclaim without evidence nor assume that the facts will speak for themselves” (p. 1). Thus, this section provides an account of how I made sense of data which led to the findings of this study. Drawing from Kajee (2018), my data analysis is

⁶ Details on the participating departments per campus and the number of students are better summarised in Table 5.

preceded by a description of how I stored the raw data and the index coding I employed for ease of reference to the data, as well as to avoid repetition.

5.5.1 Storage of data and index coding

The data collection methods employed in this research encompassed document analysis and interviews, conducted individually and in focus groups, as shared above. I stored the raw data in two locations: my personal computer and an external hard drive. To safeguard against unauthorised access, I organised all the data into folders that were password protected.

To facilitate efficient referencing and ensure participant anonymity while minimising the need for repetitive and lengthy descriptions (e.g., Lower Primary Lecturer 1, repeated multiple times), I implemented a coding system for the interviewed participants. Each code is a three-letter abbreviation, followed by a number indicating the specific participant within that course. For example, the code CSS6 corresponds to the sixth participant who is a Computer Studies Student. The detailed coding scheme used is outlined in Table 5.

Just to provide clarity on the headings of the table, the participant description denotes the course and position of the individual(s) interviewed. The range indicates the number of participants interviewed within each course and/or position. Since these abbreviations are not universal but rather specific to this study, they will not feature in the list of abbreviations on page xi.

Participant description	Range	Code	Example
English for Academic Purpose Lecturer	1 - 4	EAP	EAP3
Computer Science Lecturer	1 - 2	CSL	CSL2
Computer Science Student	1 – 6	CSS	CSS6
Lower Primary Lecturer	1 - 2	LPL	LPL1
Lower Primary Student	1 – 6	LPS	LPS2
Maths and Science Lecturer	1 - 2	MSL	MSL2
Maths and Science Student	1 - 6	MSS	MSS5
Mining and Metallurgy Lecturer	1-2	MML	MML1
Mining and Metallurgy Student	1-6	MMS	MMS1
Nursing Science Lecturer	1-2	NSL	NSL1
Nursing Science Student	1 – 6	NSS	NSS3
Public Health Lecturer	1-2	PHL	PHL2
Public Health Student	1 – 6	PHS	PHS4

Table 5: Index coding used for participants

To make sense of the data I obtained, I drew on the theories discussed earlier. It is, thus, incumbent upon me to highlight that I used the Academic Literacy theory as a substantive

theory imperative for understanding the conceptualisation of academic literacy by various participants. AL theory also provided the lenses to understanding how AL is conceptualised in the EAP course as per the details from the document analysis of the course outline. That, however, was not sufficient to provide a detailed understanding of what is legitimated in the EAP course and how the content of the EAP course matches or clashes with the content of the other courses studies. For that, I turned to the Legitimation Code Theory. Thus, I used the LCT Specialization and Semantics to understand the basis on which the EAP course legitimates particular knowledge and knowers, and how the disciplines do so.

The data was analysed using ATLAS.ti programme. First, I developed analytic coding of Specialization and Semantics aspects codes in line with the themes that emerged from the data. My usage of the ATLAS.ti programme equated to developing an LCT Specialization and Semantics translation devices. A translation device is defined as a tool which helps bridge the discursive gap between theory and data (Bernstein, 2000). To achieve that, the translation device creates “an explicit intermediary dialogue between theoretical concepts and empirical data” (Wilmot, 2019, p. 68), with each device being specifically designed to account for the particular empirical forms emerging in the problem-situation (Maton & Chen, 2016, p. 32) and developed through engagement with the specificities of an object of study. The advantages of a translation device in qualitative research are that “it is able to make the basis of the claims made in the analysis more explicit, enabling greater analytical transparency, [and] allows for a consistent analysis to be conducted across different texts or sections of texts” (Wilmot, 2019, pp. 68-69; see also Maton & Chen, 2016; Bernstein, 2000).

For this study, I developed translation devices for Specialization and Semantics. These included columns for the coding (e.g. SR+), the description of theoretical concepts, a brief description of how the concept manifested in the study, and an example from the study data. Having developed this translation device, I applied it across data sources in the coding process. The analysis of data regarding the EAP courses was then held up to how other academics teaching discipline courses saw the structure (knowledge and knowers) of their own courses. By making sense of the various conceptualisations and experiences of the EAP and the ‘mainstream’ courses, I was able to identify code clashes and gaps alongside alignments.

With regards to Semantics, I mapped the Semantics of the EAP course. This dimension can use either or both semantic planes and semantic waves, the nature of my study was congruent to the mapping of semantic planes. Thus, I used information from the translation device (in

accordance with document analysis) to code on the semantic plane to indicate the legitimised aspect(s) in terms of the Semantics language of legitimisation as explained in Section 4.3.2.

Overall, I triangulated all the data obtained from different sources to ascertain the match or mismatch in the EAP and the discipline specific courses. Findings to that are presented in the next two chapters, Chapters Six and Seven.

I should highlight that this study has a limitation whereby the scope of a study such as this prevents a detailed analysis of the literacy practices as evidenced in the course materials for every target discipline. To this end, the mapping of the target disciplines was based on limited data from the documents shared by the discipline lecturers, as well as considering how the discipline is described in the literature, the analysis of interviews with mainstream academics and the students' articulation of their experiences within the target disciplines.

5.5.2 Ethical considerations including positionality

As a researcher, I am aware that all research involves issues of power and identity, and my study is no exception. Even though my study is realist and attempts to use 'judgmental rationality' (Quraishi et al., 2022) to provide a credible picture of the case study that represents the data in ways that are true to their context and authentic form, I am a human researcher who has made certain decisions that are inevitably influenced by who I am. My decisions are potentially shaped by my political allegiances, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, race, social class, and other aspects, as well as my beliefs about social reality, knowledge, human nature and agency (Holmes, 2020; Savin-Baden & Major, 2023; Xu & Saurwein, 2023), without my necessarily being aware of what it is that shapes my research choices. This requires reflexivity to check that all research decisions can be justified.

Since this is a qualitative study, questions of power and identity become even more significant because I am part of the data generation process. The participants bring their own expectations and assumptions about who I am, and these assumptions may affect their responses. As a result, individual responses may differ from one moment to another or may have been different if it was someone other than me collecting the data due to structured human relations, human actions, and human ideas. Therefore, it was essential for me to reflect on my positionality as a researcher.

I am a lecturer of English Language Education (ELE) on one of the campuses (HP Campus) where the study was conducted. The ELE module is offered as a discipline-specific course under the Department of Intermediate and Vocational Education, and is undertaken by students training to become language teachers at the Junior Primary phase (see Table 4). The ELE course, unlike English for Academic Purposes, is specifically designed for student teachers. It focuses on enhancing their pedagogic and assessment skills by covering discipline-specific content such as phonological and morphological features, as well as textbook evaluation. These components are essential for English teachers but would not be relevant for students in other fields, such as nursing. ELE does not have formal ties to the Language Centre which offers core modules. However, the students who take the ELE course are also required to take the EAP course, which is compulsory for all UNAM students.

As a researcher and a UNAM lecturer, my identity potentially had strongest power implications in the focus group interviews with students. It was thus especially important in these settings to establish rapport, ensure a shared understanding of the research purpose, and assure them of anonymity.

Since my study was carried out in three campuses and across different faculties and departments, I am positioned as both an insider researcher and an outsider researcher. I am employed in the university where my study participants are employed or registered to study. While our experiences of the institution may vary, we share a geographical space and historical time. That makes me an insider researcher, for I carried out a study where I am familiar with the policies and practices, and I am a member of the institution (Caruana & Montgomery, 2015; Trowler, 2011; Fleming, 2018).

But in some settings, I was arguably an outsider researcher. I was carrying out research on a topic or phenomenon that was new to me, and on which I had limited or no knowledge (Unluer, 2012). I was unfamiliar with the research on student development and academic literacies, and I do not teach the EAP course which I investigated. I am also especially an outsider on the JEDS and Oshakati campuses which fall under the Faculty of Agriculture, Engineering, and Natural Sciences, housing the School of Engineering and the Built Environment and the School of Nursing and Public Health respectively.

Being an insider researcher has advantages, such as being able to interact with participants in a relaxed manner and having shared reference points. However, there are also disadvantages,

such as overlooking some aspects as not important or significant simply because they have become normalised for me. To manage these dangers, I spent considerable time with the data and ensured that any claims I make are supported by the data. Similarly, being an outsider researcher also has its advantages and disadvantages. One advantage is that I may have a fresh perspective on the topic, but a disadvantage is that I may miss important information due to my lack of prior knowledge.

In conclusion, being aware of my positionality as a researcher was crucial in ensuring that I conducted the study ethically and accurately. I have taken measures to mitigate the potential biases that may arise from my positionality, such as being highly reflective and considering what I may be missing due to my insider or outsider status.

There were a number of other ethical considerations beyond positionality that I needed to take into account in this study. The ethical clearance process was a requisite component of the proposal phase for this study, which necessitated obtaining permission from Rhodes University. This process assisted in providing the structure to think through various aspects of the study which has ethical considerations.

The Ethical Review Application System (ERAS) was utilised to submit an application outlining various ethical considerations such as how I would ensure informed consent and anonymity. The ERAS system also requires samples of data collection tools and consent letters. Provisional approval was granted by the Ethical Clearance Committee (Appendix 1a) on the condition that clearance from the UNAM's Director for the Centre for Research and Publications was first obtained. Following clearance from UNAM (Appendix 1c), full clearance with a reference number 2020-1615-4637 was granted by Rhodes University (Appendix 1d).

Thus, though I am a UNAM employee, and could fairly easily make connection with prospective participants, I had to make a formal request for accessing data on campus through a formal letter of consent (Appendix 1b), accompanied by the provisional clearance obtained from Rhodes University (Appendix 1a). I was, however, surprised to learn that gaining access to the leading university in the country was contingent upon payment of a fee of N\$1200 to which I committed.

I took steps to ensure the privacy and anonymity of all participants and involved parties. Real names were not disclosed, and I instead referred to participants using the index coding (Table 5) during data presentation and discussion to avoid identification. However, since only one

participant was available in some instances, the possibility of being recognised by colleagues or other UNAM employees was inevitable. In writing up this research, I therefore refrained from including any identifying information that could open participants to external identification.

I acknowledge that ethical considerations are not a one-time resolution but an ongoing process. The obligation to uphold the autonomy, privacy, and dignity of individuals remained throughout the research process. As cautioned by Steffen (2016), researchers must remain mindful of the values and ethical boundaries at stake in the pursuit of knowledge.

5.6 Conclusion

This chapter detailed the research design employed for data collection and analysis in this study. It addressed the rationale behind selecting the research sites and the specific data collection techniques utilised. Additionally, it discussed my dual role as both an insider researcher at the university where I work and an outsider researcher on campuses where I am not stationed and in researching a course with which I was unfamiliar.

In the two chapters that follow I provide the findings that emerged from the LCT analysis of my data. I begin with the analysis of the participants' conceptualisation of 'academic literacy'.

CHAPTER 6: CONCEPTUALISATIONS OF ACADEMIC LITERACY

6.1 Introduction

Being able to articulate what ‘academic literacy’ means is challenging given how even those researching in the field cannot come to a neat agreement as to the definition. As discussed in Chapter 3, there is general agreement that there is no such a thing as academic literacy but rather there are academic literacies (Abdulatief et al., 2018) that emerge from the norms and values underpinning different disciplinary practices. While academics may not be familiar with the term ‘academic literacy’ or be able to define it, their understandings as to what it means to take on the practices of the field and indeed what those practices might be are crucial to the design of courses. As discussed in Chapter One, attaining epistemological access entails being able to take on such practices. Epistemic justice entails these practices being made explicit so that students are aware of the expectations and are empowered to take them on and also to critique them.

Given that the EAP course is designed to support student success and intended to smooth the transition from school to university, the ways in which those involved in the course understand academic literacy practices is important. It was from the understanding that the views about academic literacies have effects on the practices in courses designed to support the acquisition of these practices that I analysed the dominant conceptualisations of academic literacy by participants in the same university (UNAM) but from different faculties or departments. My analysis of these conceptualisations, which I present here, mapped neatly onto Lea and Street’s (2006) models of different understandings of academic literacy as well as Street’s (1984) distinction between autonomous and ideological models (as discussion in Chapter 3) and I draw especially on these in the discussion that follows.

From the data, it emerged that academic literacy was conceptualised differently by different participants and at times the same participant would move across conceptualisations, even where these were ideologically in tension if not entirely contradictory. I have categorised the conceptualisations of academic literacies as a) a set of generic skills, b) the comprehension and communication of academic concepts, and c) the ability to navigate the dynamic linguistic and other demands of various academic domains. In this chapter, I demonstrate how each of these conceptualisations emerged in the data before discussing some of the implications for the EAP course.

6.1.1 Academic literacy as generic skills

Many of the participants, both EAP lecturers and mainstream lecturers, positioned academic literacy as the technical skills of reading and writing combined with seemingly neutral and generic language practices.

Academic literacy, to me simply means is when a person has a good skill of reading and writing (LPL1).

...academic literacy is just about, if someone can read or she can write (MSS6).

... it could be when somebody is able to read and write (NSL1).

These participants frame being academically literate as having a set of technical skills that are pertinent regardless of where these ‘skills’ are enacted. Street’s (2003, 1984) autonomous model in which being literate is understood to be an individual, cognitive skill is at play here. Street argues that the autonomous model is a common understanding of literacy but is highly problematic because it “disguises the cultural and ideological assumptions that underpin it so that it can then be presented as though they are neutral and universal and that literacy as such will have benign effects” (Street, 2003, p. 77). Under such a perspective, success in academia is associated with mastering the skills of reading, writing, spelling, grammar, and so on. But this neglects that the university is a particular social space imbued with specific norms and values, and it neglects the differences between fields of study in regards how reading and writing are practised. In other words, this understanding flattens all the complex practices students have to take on in order to succeed in their various courses and presents them rather as a set of neutral skills.

In this data, it was evident that ‘academic literacy’ was seen to be something that students either had or did not have, rather than as a set of shifting practices that successful students take on over time (McWilliams & Allan, 2014). Thus, the participants repeatedly described what students needed to succeed as a set of undifferentiated skills. These skills were perceived to be neutral in that nowhere was there acknowledgement that the practices expected of students would be new to many of them and would be peculiar to the university and the specific field of study.

Academic literacy is just about if someone can read, or she can write something (MSS6)

...is when a person has a good skill of reading and writing (LPL1)

If we bring the LCT lens of Specialization to this data, we can interrogate the extent to which proficiency in ‘academic literacy’ is here conceptualised as requiring stronger or weaker specialist knowledge (epistemic relations) and stronger or weaker knower dispositions (social relations). In other words, and as discussed in Chapter 4, we can start to identify how these participants conceptualise the knowledge and knower structures required of students to be deemed to be ‘academically literate’.

It is difficult to identify the Epistemic Relations in this data because there is little to no reference to knowledge that students need to acquire in order to take on specific academic practices. Instead, across the data from both mainstream academics and EAP lecturers, academic literacy was positioned as something that sits outside of the knowledge fields to which students seek access in the academy.

... it has to do with the ability for one to be able to write, read, and communicate in a manner that you demonstrate knowledge of literature or like items that have been published (EEL1)

Academic writing simple means the ability to read, to write, and to be able to comprehend various concepts that are given (EAP2)

Dominant in the data was this view that academic literacy related to generic skills, in that they were about what Street terms ‘technical competence’ of reading and writing in the medium of instruction. There was no acknowledgement that the ways of reading and writing expected in the university are different to those students would have encountered at home or school or church etc. There was no acknowledgement that these differences are underpinned by differences in disciplinary norms and values. They were thus also seen to be neutral – that is without socio-cultural histories or positions.

it's something that I can take as a common sense something (EEL2)

academic literacy also includes the speaking, the use of appropriate, ... words, nouns, even the correct time (NSL2)

in English for academics, we are being taught how to ... read because for you to do something first, it's English, you have to read first and then you write (LPS4)

Seeing the peculiar ways of reading and writing in the academy as ‘neutral’ absented the extent to which each discipline creates knowledge (and writes about it) in ways that emerge from historical norms and values that will be foreign to students entering university for the first time.

This idea of ‘genericism’ of university practices, which suggested that academic literacy skills pertained equally regardless of the target knowledge that students were studying, also entailed the view that academic literacy must be taught to all students regardless of their study specialisation or the purposes to which they would be reading and writing.

We just teach them across borders for as long as the skills that you teach them are the ones that will help them cope in their specific disciplines (EAP4).

Academic literacy is the same because it has to do with reading and writing, with understanding. It does not matter if you are doing Nursing or any other course. You need to read and understand, and you need to write something that any other person can understand what you are trying to say (LPS3)

This data suggested an extremely weak relationship between the conceptualisation of academic literacy and knowledge in the academy and thus indicates an ER- - coding. LCT tells us the weaker ER is likely to result in teachers not teaching knowledge but rather providing minimal guidance (Maton & Chen, 2016). In that type of teaching where content knowledge is not emphasised, students are likely to assume the responsibility of organising their own studies and draw reference to their personal experiences when faced with a difficult task (Clarence, 2013). Although that sounds advantageous in a sense that the ER - - affords students autonomy to bring their backgrounds into the teaching and learning space, for this study that can be detrimental because a lack of focus on knowledge to be learned (ER - -) is likely to result in “teachers downplaying boundaries around and control over legitimate knowledge in the educational context” (Maton & Chen, 2020, pp. 45-46). When there is a lack of clear parameters regarding the knowledge content, there is a tendency for EAP lecturers to impose what they perceive as essential academic skills onto students (Sevnarayan, 2019).

This conception of AL as generic skills thus included little to no mention of specialised knowledge (ER--) and if we look at the social relations in this data, we reach a similar finding. There was little data to suggest an understanding that the disposition of the knower was significant to student success. There was no data suggesting that the participants understood that taking on academic literacy practices entailed being or becoming a particular kind of person. Finding examples of Social Relations in the data pertaining to the conception of academic literacy as a set of generic skills was challenging. Reference to the students was limited and participants did not say who the students should be in regards disposition, either before or after the EAP course.

It is compulsory that all of them do it before they progress (EAP2)

That module is compulsory. Whether you are doing computer science or whatever, the course prepares, I mean, is compulsory for you to do that course and then to do academic writing (EAP1)

The student is referred to above in only an oblique manner as the participants in a compulsory course. There is no reflection on how their ways of being, identity, dispositions, etc would be pertinent in their taking on the academic literacy practices in the course or in the academy more broadly. And where there was some reflection on the disposition of the student, this too was described in ways that were generic and decontextualised from the student as a social being:

They [students] should be willing to learn. It has nothing to do with your background, be it educational background, be it our social background, be it your parental education status, it has nothing to do with that (EAP4)

Because the dominant conceptualisation of the ideal knower of academic literacy was as generic and neutral, the SR coding can be seen to be SR - -. This is significant because, as discussed in Chapter 3, research on academic literacies suggests that issues of identity and being a particular kind of person are central to the project of becoming academically literate. Indeed, the acquisition of literacy practices as one becomes adept in a field can be seen to underpin the transformational purpose of HE. Ashwin (2020) highlights this when he indicates that “the educational purpose of a higher education is to bring students into a transformational relationship to knowledge that changes their sense of who they are and what they can do in the world” (p. 3).

According to the literature, taking on disciplinary practices around how knowledge is created and communicated and so on entails, to a greater or lesser extent, coming to *be* a particular kind of person. Smit (2008) highlights that “student identity is a very important factor in the acquisition of academic literacy” (p. 8). Equally, Braine (2002) has indicated that many students experience conflict in acquiring academic literacy due to “the lack of membership and social contact with their chosen academic discourse communities” (p. 64). To *become* adept at Chemistry is, at least to some extent, to *become* a Chemist (Blackie, 2022). To *become* excellent in Jazz studies is, at least to some extent, to *become* a Jazz musician (Martin, 2016). This taking on of a disciplinary gaze should not only affect the student’s identity but also their view of the world. To *become* adept in Sociology, entails at least to some extent, to become capable of seeing the world in sociological terms (Ashwin, 2020).

All fields of study have some kind of identity implications though LCT studies show us that different disciplines have different expectations around the kind of knower deemed legitimate and vary along lines of how important it is to *be* a specific kind of knower. While the academic literacy practices required for success in different fields may legitimate different kinds of knowers, there are always knowers in every field (Maton, 2013). The data on how academic literacy was conceptualised by participants, however, revealed a curious lack of ‘knower’. There was no data suggesting that academically literate students needed to be specific kinds of people with specific kinds of dispositions or ways of being in the world. Significantly, the EAP course is uniformly taught across various disciplines of UNAM without tailoring the content to align with students’ specific areas of specialisation, which highlights a diminished or even absent emphasis on knowerly attributes.

Bringing the ER - - with SR - - entails the identification of a relativist code evident in the data where academic literacy could be coded as a set of generic, neutral skills.

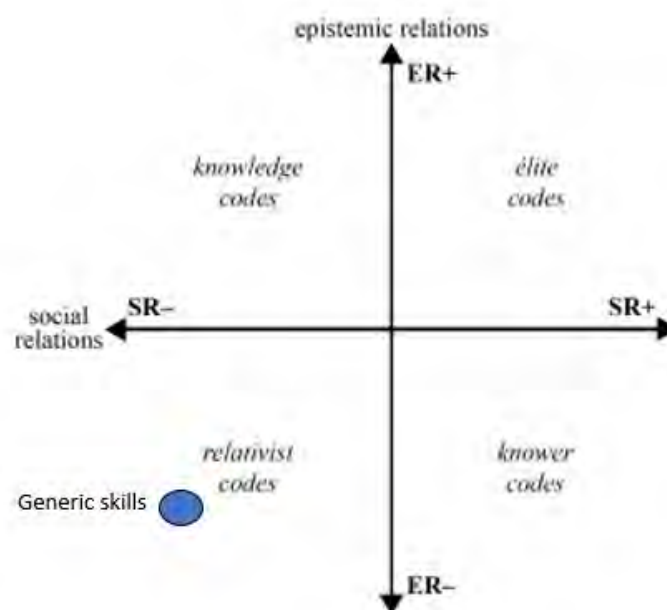


Figure 5: A heuristic illustration of Specialization coding of "Generic Skills" conceptualisation

A relativist code implies that ‘anything goes’ whereby the expectations of success are based neither on specialist knowledge nor on specialist ways of being. Maton and Chen (2020, p. 51) describe the relativist code as “nothing was the basis of achievement; there seemed to be no

‘rules of the game’”. That can be detrimental to students’ learning because in the absence of target knowledge practices and knower dispositions, students are left at the mercy of their own attempts at cracking the mysterious code of both their EAP courses and those codes underpinning their target courses. Framing it in the context of high attrition rates in HEIs, the phenomenon that drives this study, the relativist code of most participants’ understandings of academic literacy might be part of the explanation of why students who successfully complete the EAP course are still described by the participants as writing in disciplines in ways that are problematic. One of the participants attributes that to students being forgetful, keeping the taught content for immediate use and not storing it for later years retrieval or retrieval outside the EAP course.

Students are very good and very fast at forgetting. It could be possible that they apply it immediately after they had done ... English for Academic purposes. But after a year or two there is a high probability the possibility of them forgetting is there (EAP2).

It would seem that the students have managed to complete the EAP course with its relativist code but not gained access to the academic literacy practices in their other courses. They have not taken on the identity of what it means to be a successful student in their given disciplines and neither have they taken on the practices of what it means to be a successful student in their given disciplines.

Maton and Chen (2020) describe relativist codes as forcing students to resort to their past-knowledge code practices as a coping strategy when faced with a task they are unable to navigate. The context is likely to be experienced “as limbo, an emptiness devoid of direction and clarity – a total lack of legitimacy” (p. 53). This is problematic given that the participants noted the challenges in the transition between school and university and the need for students to take on new knowledge and new ways of being to succeed.

These students are coming from high school and high school does not necessarily teach things like acknowledging and how to write academic essays. Although they do essays, they might not really know the difference between a formal and informal essay (EAP2)

There was thus an acknowledgement in the data that students needed to take on both new knowledge and new ways of knowing in order to succeed in higher education, but the conceptualisation of academic literacy as a neutral set of generic skills led to a relativist code with all the problems this entails.

While this conceptualisation of AL as a set of neutral, generic skills dominated in the data, there was also evidence of a slightly different conceptualisation whereby academic literacy was seen to pertain to understanding and demonstrating academic concepts. Here it was acknowledged that students were being expected to read and write in ways that they might not have encountered at home, in school, or in church etc., albeit still as if these were a set of generic skills that applied uniformly across the academy.

6.1.2 Academic literacy as generic academic communication

In this conceptualisation, which was also prevalent in the data, participants went beyond defining academic literacy as mere technical skills that were pertinent in any context whatsoever. Instead, they emphasised the application of academic literacy within an academic environment. Thus, central in their definition is an incorporation of the word ‘academic’ to highlight that academic literacy involves specific tasks that are found in academic contexts.

... being able to write assignments and anything that is academically at least having the basics to write ... in an academic way (EAP3).

, ... has to do with reading and writing in the academic setup (EAP4).

Academic literacy means to be able to read and write but in the academic way (EAP1)

Defining academic literacy with an emphasis on ‘academia’ acknowledges that these literacy practices are situated in the university. So doing might be seen to align well with Van Dyk and Van de Poel’s (2013) definition of academic literacy as “being able to use, manipulate, and control language and cognitive abilities for specific purposes and in specific contexts” (p. 56). However, the data did not evidence much deep reflection on what the ‘specific purposes’ and ‘specific contexts’ might be within the wider academy.

Some participants singled out what they presume to be academic specific aspects of reading and writing. For example:

how to ... write in academic, how do you put your arguments in academic and also how do you speak academically (LPS1).

Is a way that differentiate how we academic, articulate or present our ideas or our writings using right terms ... so that even the person that is not from your discipline should be able to understand what you're trying to write (MEL2)

... academic literacy is ... a process of teaching someone how to write these academic papers or academic outputs (MSL1)

While such definitions bring the academic context to the understanding of academic literacy, such a conceptualisation still primarily adopts a skills-centric viewpoint. Core in their definition, explicitly or implicitly, is an assumption that the presumed academic skills are universally applicable in academic contexts and can be taught in any given institution with equal effectiveness across various disciplines. This perspective overlooks crucial nuances in the process of constructing arguments, presenting ideas, or writing academic papers and how these differ significantly across disciplines. Moreover, this perspective contrasts with the expectations at university, where students are expected to learn to become integral members of knowledge fields and use the language (terminology and wider practices) of their respective fields to signify their membership (Izaks, 2016).

Teaching under this perspective tends to emphasise the development of general skills in reading, writing, speaking, listening, and referencing without differentiation based on students' disciplinary practices (Street, 2010). What is seen to need to be developed are the presumed students' basic skills of reading, writing, and speaking 'in academia' which are expected to be transferred to other subjects because all they need is just a shift from learning these in their general development courses, such as the EAP course in this study, to their other academic disciplines.

As long as there's the basics of writing and there is the basics of reading any type of text, it's very easy to apply those reading skills and those writing skills to this academic way, because it's only like a shift, you know. ... one skill, but now you just have to apply it to something else which is more specific. ... so, any type of student can do it as long as they know to read and how to write comprehensively (EAP3).

You are teaching them in such a way that if they come from my class listening to the lecturer, the same listening skills that they are using in my class is the same listening skills that will help them when they go to a Biology class (EAP4).

As with the previous identification of a 'generic skills' understanding, this perception is equally autonomous and problematic, as it overlooks the need for developing specific skills in reading, writing, and speaking within the context of each academic discipline. When we read, write, speak, listen, and act in any way, we are doing so within a context and towards a specific end. As Searle (2020) indicates, the autonomous model is problematic because it assumes that there is a defined set of skills that, once taught, can fit a person for the rest of their lives. Amongst many other issues, this conflates the idea of academic words and technical words (Izaks, 2016) whereby the latter refers to words that occur frequently over a wide range of academic texts and the former pertaining to words specific to specific disciplines.

More worryingly, this idea allows the blame for an inability to take on the academic literacy practices to be placed on the shoulders of the student (Izaks, 2016). Researchers (such as Lonsdale & McCurry, 2004 and Venezky et al., 1990) argue that defining literacy from the individualistic perspective, as if this is a set of neutral, generic skills students either take on or fail to do so, absolves the university more widely of responsibility for student success or failure.

Boughey and McKenna (2016) expound on the notion of pinning poor performance on what they term a “decontextualised learner” (p. 969) who is positioned as separate from their social context. Other researchers (such as Clarence & McKenna, 2017; Wilmot & McKenna, 2018) equally highlight how the decontextualised learner becomes the victim of the blame game where they are labelled as having deficiencies that support courses aim to fix. However, any teaching that employs genericism is counterproductive to students’ academic development because taking on discipline-specific literacy practices has implications for students’ identity formation and adopting the ways of being in line with the specialisation. The autonomous skills-centric perspective can exacerbate students’ struggle to cope with the demands of academic discourse as it presents such struggles as a simple matter of generic skills acquisition.

When analysed through the LCT Specialization, this understanding of AL as practices required in the academy but which are nonetheless neutral and generic across the academy, suggests an ER-, SR- coding. The data related to this conception was arguably slightly more aware that there was a knowledge endeavour pertaining to the university, though without clarity as to the exact nature of that knowledge. There was thus a call to be able to read academic texts and write academic essays, but with no acknowledgement that the texts students read in Maths would be markedly different to those in Social Anthropology, or that the essays required in Social Anthropology would have their own expectations and that the Maths student may not write an essay at all. I therefore coded this data as ER- (as opposed to the ER- - in the previous code). There was also some acknowledgement that the successful student would need to take on some new ways, but these too were only barely evident in the data and there was no clarity as to the required disposition or the ways in which taking on these new practices might have identity implications, and thus a coding of SR-.

This again suggests that this conceptualisation of academic literacy as a set of generic academic skills is a relativist code wherein there is neither legitimisation of specialised knowledge nor an emphasis on specific knower attributes required to succeed. That implies an ‘anything goes’ fashion whereby the course is taught by the same lecturer to all students irrespective of their

area of specialisation or backgrounds etc. and whereby the lecturers themselves might not be specialised knowers with a specialised body of knowledge. Kangira (2019) calls this an “omnibus approach” to teaching academic writing which pays little attention to discipline specific aspects. Under this relativist conceptualisation of academic literacy practices, poor performance is mostly attributed to students with little to no emphasis on the role of institutional and disciplinary cultures and expectations (Luna, 2002). This is because the generic skills have been taught through generic courses and it is then assumed that this sufficiently prepares the student to take on the expectations of their courses.

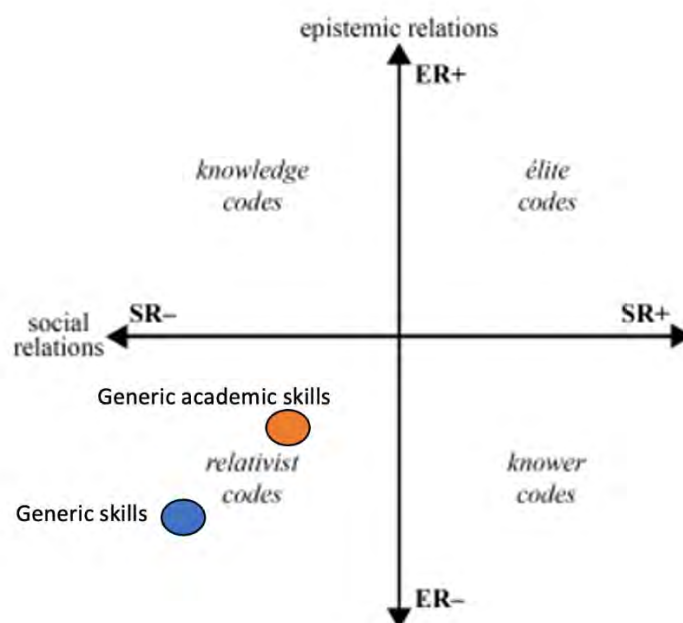


Figure 6: Heuristic illustration of Specialization coding of "Generic Skills" and "Generic Academic Skills" conceptualisations

Kangira (2019) characterises undifferentiated instructional methodologies in academic literacy as adopting a uniform or blanket approach, implying a one-size-fits-all paradigm. In such approaches, skills are not understood as emerging from discipline-specific requisites, and the focus is primarily on preparing students for the challenges within the language development course itself rather than aligning with the distinct demands of individual disciplines. Kangira (2019) thus points to an irony whereby courses meant to develop students' chances of success become their own barometer of success. The circular logic becomes that if students are doing well in the development course, then they are doing well in acquiring generic academic skills.

This approach fails to recognise the diverse and nuanced requirements in various academic fields, which are context-specific and are unlikely to be effectively imparted outside the specific disciplinary contexts. It also fails to account for why students may do well in the EAP course but still fail their other courses.

In contrast to the two autonomous conceptualisations of AL identified in the data thus far, there were also some examples of a more ideological understanding of the nature of academic literacy practices, and it is to this that I now turn.

6.1.3 Academic literacy as emerging from varied academic domains

Other than the recurrent skills-centric perspectives, there emerged a marginal consideration of AL as related to the expectations and guidelines set by the institution at large and specific fields or disciplines in particular. AL here is defined as the ability to learn and express oneself within the parameters (guidelines and requirements) set by the institution(s) and the students' fields of study.

Academic literacy, the way I understand it, is how one is able to express himself or herself academically. Let's say if this student is in English class and then this student should be able to speak academic, speak or write academic English. If the student is in Physics class, then this student should be able to write in scientific language expected to be used in Physics subject, and so on other subjects (MSL2).

Academic literacy is when you have the subject knowledge matter of what you are doing. Let me say for Natural Science and Mathematics, if you don't have an academic literacy, then you don't know what you are doing (MSS4)

These assertions notably recognise the diverse literacy practices prevalent within HEIs that within the academic realm, the diverse demands of different domains underscore the plurality of academic literacy as 'literacies' that differ markedly from one discipline to another. Acknowledging that knowledge is specialised and not generic solidifies the multifaceted nature of 'literacies' advocated by the New Literacy Studies. Recognising varied 'literacies' assumes an ideological dimension (Street, 2006). The ideological perspective advocates a departure from traditional, skill-oriented views of academic literacy and strongly endorses the discipline-specific pedagogical approaches that recognise the interplay between language choices and context.

Furthermore, the ideological perspective underscores the consideration of power dynamics and identity issues, which are manifold, aligning with Gee's (2003; 2000) conceptualisation of

‘ways of being’. These attributes exhibit diversity and context-dependency as explained in Chapter 3. Highlighting the context dependency of literacy practices within disciplines, some participants emphasised how reading in academia extends beyond the technicalities of decoding text.

... students are not only reading one type of a text. For example, the way I read Biology is not the way I am supposed to read Mathematics. So, I need to use the reading skills that are befitting the type of a text that I am reading (EAP4)

In the quote below, the participant points out that students would already have acquired a range of ways of engaging with text, but none of these would be exactly relevant at university:

Academic literacy is a broad concept. For example, at Junior Primary ... reading pictures to us is also reading. You know, I can read pictures and then understand what the pictures are all about (LPL1)

Engaging with the demands of disciplinary requirements compels students to assume identities (or at least aspects of identity) related to their respective specialisations. This underscores the context-dependent nature of meaning-making, as highlighted by Hakim (2020) and Thonus (2020) (Section 3.4). Gee’s (2003) discussion of identity formation rejects the treatment of language practices in academia as generic skills. In his view, identity and the use of language are always entwined. He also argues that these extend beyond printed text to include images, and other visual symbols specific to particular situations or contexts, for meaning is built ‘on the spot’.

Li (2022, p. 2) posits that the ideological perspective holds that “academic literacy is by no means only a cognitive issue but situated social and cultural practices widely shaped by power, structure and ideology”. Literature (such as Farnese et al., 2022; Harrison, 2006; and Tinto, 1975) has indicated that taking an ideological perspective to teaching academic literacy in HEIs requires such courses to be tailored to enabling access to disciplinary demands.

However, the context of EAP teaching at UNAM presents a challenge to this minority position. As explained in Section 1.8, the EAP course is administered by English language specialists who, as outsiders to disciplinary norms, may not fully understand the nuanced demands to which students are meant to transfer what is taught in EAP. There were thus loud calls in the data related to this specific conceptualisation for the contextualisation of the EAP course at UNAM to align with the diverse demands of multiple disciplines within the university.

We cannot be teaching the same English for Academic Purposes to teachers and engineers. They should be distinct as to how it is taught, the content should be based on what they are going to do there after they graduate because you don't expect a geography teacher to be having the same knowledge as someone who is going to be an electrical engineer for example (EAP4).

I feel like the content should be focused on every course like English for Nursing, English for Engineering, because I also don't understand like how are we being given the same knowledge with Engineering students, with students of Public Health because we do not work in the same setting at the end of the day, we do not write the same ... and also the exams are not the same (NSS2)

While the proposition to tailor academic literacy courses to specific needs of individual disciplines presents an important consideration, it is worth noting that in both cases above the participants refer to literacy practices required in the workplace rather than those needed for success in the academy.

What is of course also clear is that the practical implementation of such an approach can be a formidable challenge. One key challenge is that it is expensive to hire EAP lecturers for each discipline in the university. Even if this were possible, literature has indicated that tailoring courses to students' disciplines is no easy feat. The primary complexity emerges from the divergent perspectives held by crucial stakeholders in this endeavour, academic literacy practitioners and disciplinary lecturers (Jacobs, 2007). The disparity in viewpoints between these two stakeholders becomes evident when observed from the positionality of 'outsiders', where academic literacy practitioners perceive their role as separate from teaching disciplinary content, contrasting with disciplinary lecturers who may see language instruction as beyond their scope. A pressing need arises for collaboration, initially with a fundamental shift in the conceptualisations of academic literacy held by both parties. This transformation is crucial to mitigate the perpetuation of a narrative rooted in divergent expertise between academic literacy lecturers and disciplinary lecturers, fuelled by the conceptualisation of academic literacy as an autonomous body of knowledge (Jacobs, 2007; Boughey, 2002; McKenna, 2003).

In response, calls for staff development initiatives in HEIs have heightened to create awareness on mainstream academics of the unique and specific academic literacy practices required by their courses. Given the prevalent skills-centric conceptualisation of AL found in the study data and reported in the literature, it is essential to adopt teaching methods that make these literacy practices more explicit in order to improve student success. This approach involves addressing elements typically embedded within the 'hidden curriculum'—those practices crucial for academic success that are rarely overtly taught.

The ideological conceptualisation of academic literacy discussed here was very much a marginal one, with limited data. Nonetheless, an examination of this third postulation through the lens of Legitimation Code Theory's Specialization dimension reveals a distinct recognition of the value of knowledge and its articulation within specific fields. Unlike the other postulations, there is a clear acknowledgement that knowledge varies by field, suggesting a potentially stronger epistemic relations (ER+). Additionally, there is a realisation that differences in knowledge types align with variations in the identity that students need to adopt for success, such as becoming a teacher or an engineer, thereby emphasising the value of knowers and potentially indicating a stronger social relations (SR+).

Superficially, the acknowledgement of varied knowledge (ER+) and the recognition of knowers (SR+) might suggest an elite code on a Cartesian Plane (Figure 3). However, this study contends that merely mentioning knowledge is insufficient. Although there is a potential for ER+ (albeit not particularly robust, given the broad referencing of knowledge rather than any specific detail as to how such knowledge varies), there is a notable absence of an explanation on how or why different knowledge are structured and emerge in distinct sets of practices, rendering it a weaker Epistemic relation (ER-), albeit stronger than the previous two positions.

Similarly, identifying knowers primarily as who students need to be after graduating (teachers or engineers) without emphasising the development of disposition or identity required for success in their studies results in a coding of weaker social relations (SR-). Consequently, despite this postulation presenting more evidence of both stronger ER and slightly stronger SR compared to previous conceptualisations, it falls short of meeting the criteria for an elite code, and adopts an ER-, SR- configuration indicative of a relativist code.

If the mainstream lecturers had been asked to describe the specific academic literacy practices within each of their own fields, rather than to explain what academic literacy was, they may well have provided data that evidenced knower codes, knowledge codes or elite codes, depending on their field.

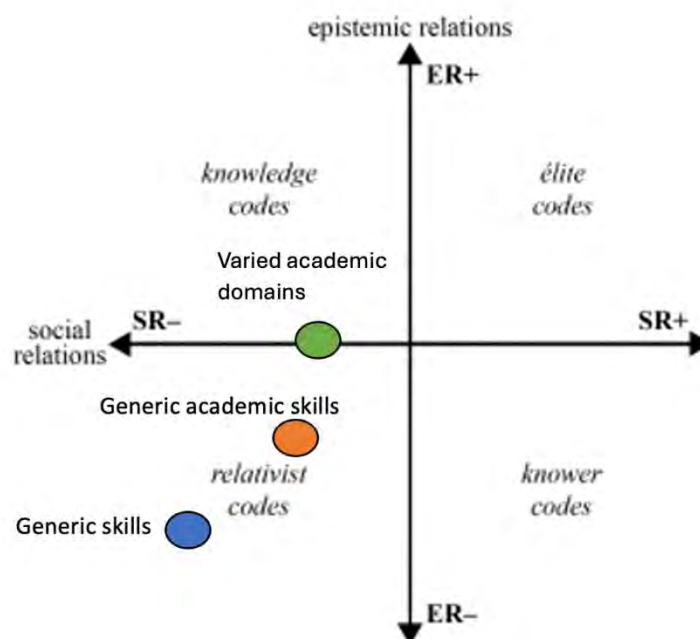


Figure 7: A heuristic illustration of Specialization coding of three conceptualisations of Academic Literacy

6.2 Conclusion

This chapter presented the conceptualisations of academic literacy in the data from mainstream lecturers, EAP lecturers and students. There was an overwhelming dominance of a skills-centred understanding demonstrating a relativist code, suggesting that becoming academically literate was seen to be unrelated to the norms and values of specific contexts. Additionally, the analysis elucidates the implications of these perceptions on the pedagogy of EAP within the UNAM context, and the implications for students' academic success. Having reflected on how lecturers and students understand academic literacy, the implications of such understandings for the nature of the EAP course are interrogated in the next chapter. The next chapter thus delves into an analysis of the UNAM's EAP course and its contributions to student development.

CHAPTER 7: THE EAP COURSE

7.1 Introduction

The focus of this chapter moves from participants' perspectives of academic literacy presented in the previous chapter to an analysis of UNAM's EAP course. It is understood that how lecturers understand academic literacy affects how a course such as the English for Academic Purposes course is constructed and offered. The conceptions outlined in the previous chapter can indeed be seen echoed in the course itself, as will be discussed here. However, a course does not emerge only from the discursive constructions of those who offer it, it is also greatly enabled and constrained by larger institutional structures and cultures. The practicalities of offering a generic course, for example, no doubt impact on the ways in which the course is structured. This is an issue to which I return in the next chapter.

The course is discussed primarily from an analysis of the EAP study guide, along with interviews with EAP lecturers. The coding of the conceptions of academic literacy as relativist in the previous chapter is again evident in the coding of the EAP course itself. As I demonstrate in this chapter, there is an assumption that knowledge is 'everyday', 'common sense' and generic, that is, it is ER-. And there is also little that speaks in the EAP course content to the taking on of particular knower dispositions, that is, it is SR-.

In this chapter, the EAP course content is also considered in light of the expectations of other courses, as evidenced in other course guides. As I will demonstrate, a number of code clashes are evident. The use of Semantics in this chapter allows a reflection on the extent to which the EAP course moves from stronger semantic gravity to weaker SG, that is if it enables students to understand the need for abstraction in specific fields from precise contexts to higher principles. The extent to which there is semantic density in the EAP course, that is condensation of meaning into terminology, formula, and other symbols that are so common in academic texts (Maton, 2020), is also discussed.

The chapter ends with a look at the data from EAP lecturers, mainstream lecturers, and students about the perceived value of the EAP course. These perspectives are mapped against Bernstein's concepts of selection, sequencing, and pacing that are central to curriculum design. Given that LCT draws from Bernstein's' works, as explained in Section 4.2.1, it is important to emphasise that these Bernsteinian concepts are not an entirely different theory being introduced at this stage. As I will demonstrate, the analysis suggests that much of the dismissal

of the course evident in the data emerges in response to its relativist nature and the limitations to which it can thus enable epistemic access to students.

I begin with the analysis of the guide, which is a document of 182 pages and is a mandatory resource for the EAP course.

7.2 The Study Guide: A Blueprint for EAP Learning

Compiled and published by the university's Language Centre (as discussed in Section 1.8), the study guide⁷ is the main material used in the course. The study guide comprises twelve distinct units that are designed in accordance with the content outlined in the course outline (see Section 1.9). Below is a tabulated summary of the EAP study guide's outline.

Summary of the EAP course study guide topics

Unit #	Title (directly from the Study Guide)	Summary/Key idea (paraphrased from the Study Guide)	Example of assessment (direct quote from the Study Guide)
1	Academic listening comprehension and note-taking	Listening extends beyond auditive activities, for it involves mental processes in order to organise the words and ideas which were heard according to the various relationships	Write down some of the difficulties that you experience when listening to academic lectures. Write down three skills necessary for effective note taking
2	Basic academic study skills	Introduces students to various reading techniques in order to learn how to interact with different texts and articles	Answer the Wh- questions based on the reading
3	Academic reading	For true comprehension of a text to occur, reading should actively involve cognition as well as the recognition and comprehension of vocabulary in a text.	In each of the paragraphs below, • Find the topic, • Underline the topic sentence, • Write the main idea in your own words
4	Academic vocabulary	Academic vocabulary is central in language used for academic purposes and is not	Read the text and underline or highlight all the academic vocabulary words using the

⁷ It should be noted that despite using 'EAP' throughout my writing, the course guide uses the acronym ULEA which is the subject code. Thus, the terms EAP, ULEA and LEA (including the number 3519 in some instances) all refer to the English for Academic Purposes course in UNAM.

		frequently encountered outside academic meaning systems.	Academic Words list by Coxhead (1998) ⁸
5	Mechanics in academic writing	Introduces students to the mechanics and conventions of academic writing i.e. basic grammatical items of language such as sentence structure, tenses, punctuation, reporting verbs and full forms of words.	Change sentences from active to passive voice and vice versa Write down five examples of features that distinguish the academic essay from the non-academic one.
6	Writing academic paragraphs	In academic writing, students are required to divide their essays into several types of paragraphs: introductory paragraph, main paragraphs and a concluding paragraph for any reader to follow the argument.	Identifying topic sentences, supporting sentences and linking words in paragraphs
7	Functional situations in academic writing	There are different scenarios that dictate the way we write. Those include the type of audience, the purpose and the content or topic.	Essay writing: Write an introduction of one paragraph on a topic of your own choice.
8	Selecting and synthesising	This entails selecting relevant facts, ideas, theories and concepts from various sources.	Write a short essay in which you discuss the two opposing views about capital punishment. Your essay should have four paragraphs: an introduction, two paragraphs in which you discuss the arguments for and against capital punishment and a concluding paragraph in which you draw your own conclusion based on the ideas discussed in your essay. You should acknowledge the sources read by making use of the academic conventions dealt with in the ULEA Study Guide.

⁸ All direct quotes from the EAP Study Guide are verbatim. Errors such as this tautology of ‘vocabulary words’ are included as they appear in the guide. The existence of multiple grammar and spelling errors in the EAP course guide should be noted. This is not to dismiss the endeavours of the EAP course. Rather this irony is noted here to illustrate that despite the guide telling us that surface level correction is an expectation of academic writing, and despite the bulk of the EAP course being on training students to write with adherence to surface level writing rules, the EAP study guide is comprehensible to all readers, albeit with a fair number of such errors.

9	Applied writing	Explains what an abstract is and how to write it. Examples of abstracts will also be provided. Defines and classifies reports according to purposes and types	Write down the main idea of each of the three abstracts provided. Write down 3 or 4 steps (you can think of) to follow when writing a short formal report.
10	The APA reference style	The APA writing style has entrenched itself as one of the most widely used writing styles for academic documentation.	Identify three references in the essay and then write them down into the APA format.
11	Editing and revising	Students will practise how to edit and revise academic essays by identifying language errors and correcting them as part of the writing process.	Using the marking key provided, identify and underline the errors (in a provided essay) and then mark them with the appropriate symbol as suggested in the marking key.
12	Academic speaking	Prepares students for the planning and preparation of a presentation based on a written project in order to fulfil the requirements for the EAP course in which they are required to give an oral presentation.	Prepare visual(s) for your presentation. Focus on aspects such as colour, size, shape, spelling, readability, relevance, clarity, etc.

Additional readings are listed in the guide as per below:

- Du Toit, P. Heese, M. & Orr, M. (1999). *Practical guide to reading, thinking and writing skills*. Cape Town: Oxford University Press.
- Clarke, M. and Silberstein, S. (1977). *Toward a realization of psycholinguistic principles in the ESL reading class*. In *Language Learning*, 27, pp. 135 – 154.
- Richards, J. C. and Schmidt, R. (2002). *Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics*. London: Pearson Education Limited.

(EAP Course outline, 2023, Unpaged)

While these materials are listed in the course outline as additional, it is noteworthy that none of the EAP lecturers or students referred to any prescribed materials beyond the guide itself. Consequently, my analysis for this chapter primarily relies on the study guide as per the below.

This content outline reveals a distinct emphasis on generic, skills-based instruction - consistent with the prevailing autonomous perspective discussed earlier. Over 90% of the units focus on so-called ‘foundational skills’ such as writing, speaking, reading, and listening. These skills are positioned as transcending disciplinary boundaries and as being able to be attained through to the completion of this course and then transferred to other contexts.

Many of these ‘skills’ pertained to correct English language usage. Many of the details provided about skills, such as listening in a lecture or taking notes, offer details at the level of what researchers have identified in analysis of practice, rather than in what they suggest novices need to know. The focus of the course is largely on meta-level discussion of skills abstracted from the context of use of such skills (SG-). For example, EAP students need to learn that note-taking requires the identification of micro-markers, such as illustrated in the extract below:

Segmentation	Temporal	Causal	Contrast	Emphasis
<i>Well</i>	<i>At that time</i>	<i>So</i>	<i>Both</i>	<i>O f course</i>
<i>OK</i>	<i>And</i>	<i>Then</i>	<i>But</i>	<i>You can see</i>
<i>Now</i>	<i>After this</i>	<i>Because</i>	<i>Only</i>	<i>You see</i>
<i>And</i>	<i>For the moment</i>		<i>On the other hand</i>	<i>Actuallv</i>
<i>Riaht</i>	<i>Eventuallv</i>			<i>Obviously</i>
<i>All riaht</i>				<i>Unbelievablv</i>
				<i>As you know</i>
				<i>In fact</i>
				<i>Naturally</i>

Figure 8: Excerpt from EAP Course Guide Unit 1 Page 8

There are many more examples of the focus on meta-level discussion of a practice, rather than induction into the practice are provided below. For example, the activity for the section on note-taking is that EAP students need to “Write down the FOUR different purposes of notetaking” and “Write down the THREE skills necessary for effective notetaking” (EAP Study Guide p.8).

It is also evident that much of the course content comes from a very different context to the one that students will encounter at UNAM. For example, in a list of suggested abbreviations students should use when taking notes in lectures, are the following (with no reference to any other countries):

G.B. – Great Britain

U.K. - United Kingdom

Eng. – England

Brit. – British

Almost every activity involving a text in the study guide is taken from some other book. These texts are set in the United States or the United Kingdom. This not only means that the texts may include inferences and assumptions that the UNAM students cannot bring to the texts but also that there is very little representation in the course of the students' concerns and realities. Fricker's concern about representation as being a key aspect of epistemic justice is worth considering here.

Literature indicates a worldwide and historical tendency for EAP courses to prioritise generic skills on the assumption that these can be acquired decontextualised from where the skills will be used and decontextualised from who will use these skills (Blaj-Ward, 2017; Butler, 2013; Hakim, 2020). These competencies are generally perceived as universally applicable, equipping students with essential tools to establish a language proficiency base crucial for navigating academic contexts, irrespective of their specialised fields.

It is useful to reflect on the prevailing perspective on generic skills through the lens of Bernstein's pedagogic device framework (1990, 1996, 2000), which highlights three key elements: selection, sequencing, and pacing (refer to Chapter 4 for a more detailed discussion). Selection involves decisions regarding what should be included in the curriculum and what should be excluded. This field of recontextualisation is often a contentious area where power dynamics are at play (Hoadley, 2006). In the case of the EAP course, the content was subject to strong framing by the study guide, with very limited opportunity for student input regarding their specific needs. The content for every lecture and each assessment is set out in the guide and pre-specified.

Despite this strong framing, there was weak classification. That is, the field from which the content was selected was without a strong knowledge or knower base. Considerations regarding the selection of content for inclusion in a first-year curriculum, whether in Physics or History, are likely to be complex, involving both pedagogical and disciplinary factors. In the instance of content selected for the EAP course, there was a noticeable absence of interview data around

the selection of content. The selection appeared to rely on 'common sense' assumptions regarding what students need in order to use English effectively across diverse academic settings.

English for Academic Purposes is concentrating more on general language but it's not concentrating more on specific discipline languages. Let me say students who are doing Physics, Chemistry, Biology, Mathematics and so on, are all squeezed in the same classroom and they are all being told that you are here for English for Academic Purposes to learn English, and this is not being specific to specific subjects (MSL2)

To illustrate the essence of the EAP course as evidenced in the guide, I now present three specific examples of topics taught in the EAP course: *the genre of reports, the genre of essays, and the use of referencing*, and thereby discuss the issue of the selection of content in more detail, drawing on the LCT concepts of Specialization and Semantics.

7.2.1 Reports as a generic genre

The EAP course study guide provides comprehensive content about report writing, spanning from page 145 to page 151. A report is described as a type of writing “used to give information, report on the results of an investigation or evaluate or introduce fresh approaches to existing issues” (EAP Study Guide, 2012, p. 145). The content elucidates the rationale behind report composition and presents various outlines and exemplars of reports. The objectives within this section are stated as follows:

- Define report writing;
- Discuss the purposes of reports;
- Identify different types of reports;
- Discuss the steps necessary for compiling a report;
- Use the correct format to write a short formal report;
- Use the correct language and tone when writing a short formal report.

EAP Study Guide, 2012, p. 145)

The first three bullets are arguably ‘meta’ in that they expect students to describe the nature of reports, rather than assisting students to produce reports. While they have a focus on report writing, the basis for success in the assessment of these bullets was in the learning of everyday

understandings about the nature of reports. This content has lower semantic density (SD--) as students are not being introduced to complex, condensed ideas.

The unit goes on to introduce students to the actual writing of a report, but the assumption is that all reports follow the same format and, more importantly, that all reports are written for a generic readership and for a generic purpose. The relativist nature of the course is evident. This is about neither specialist knowledge nor specialist knowers.

It was interesting to note that report writing was evident in several other mainstream courses. For instance, in the module Workshop Practice (I3640IW) undertaken by Electronics students, there is a requirement that they write a ‘lab report’ as per the below:

Task 1	• Tools and their applications. • Cables and wires	• Describe and demonstrate the use of workshop tools E.g. Phillip and Flat screw drivers. Side cutting and Long nose pliers. Tweezers and Wire Strippers. • Explain and demonstrate how to connect and wire a three-pin plug. • Explain the color coding of electrical wire, with reference to Live, Neutral and Earth (Ground). • Explain and demonstrate different cables and wires used for electronic purposes.	Lab reports. 
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Table 6: Lab report requirements in the Electronics Engineering module

Cementing the relevance of report writing in Electronics Engineering, one lecturer indicated that it was useful that the EAP course introduced students to report writing as this would be expected in the Electronics Engineering course.

There is a relationship because at some point we expect our students to write those reports (EEL2)

The Electronics Engineering report required some specialised knowledge but is purely descriptive in nature.

In another example, in the course Introduction to Biology (BLG3511) students are required to write a scientific report as per the learning objectives below:

Learning Outcomes/Specific Outcomes

On completing the module students should be able to:

- Use microscopes and make scientific drawings from them
- Write a simple scientific report
- Discuss the chemical basis of life
- Describe and discuss major mechanisms of cellular transport
- List all major cell organelles with their functions in eukaryotes and prokaryotes
- Discuss mitosis and meiosis
- Discuss the basic principles of Mendelian genetics through solving basic genetic problems
- Discuss evolution from a variety of viewpoints
- Discuss concepts of natural selection
- Discuss systems of classification

Figure 9: Scientific report assessment in the Introduction to Biology module

In both the Workshop Practice report assignment and the Introduction to Biology report, the tasks are designed to introduce students to report writing. The content for these reports is relatively weaker semantic density, because while the students are expected to draw from the knowledge of the field, it is still at a fairly everyday level. Both tasks are thus designed to introduce students to the specific genre of report writing, in much the way that the EAP course does, albeit with the content more related to their fields.

The EAP course content addresses the existence of different kinds of reports and the importance of following proper formatting guidelines. Thus, there is arguably a match in content between the EAP course and other courses when it comes to report writing. But an LCT analysis reveals that this apparent alignment is superficial. While both the EAP course and other modules require report writing, this shared element does not inherently signify code-matching. Rather, it reflects what I term ‘masked incongruity’. Superficially, it may appear as if the content aligns because there is overlap in the focus of what is being taught (in this case, report writing), but the basis of success varies significantly. Maton distinguishes between basis and focus as follows: basis deals with the content, while focus examines the social dynamics and actors involved in knowledge construction and dissemination. In other words, the focus can be about a specific topic, such as report writing, but the basis for success can be on practices unrelated to the topic (see also Rusznyak et al., 2021; Maton, 2014). Closer examination reveals hidden disparities that limits of the impression of code-matching. Thus, the masked incongruity is essentially a code-clash.

This incongruity starts with the overarching guidance provided within the EAP curriculum, which lacks specificity regarding why, when, and how reports are written in various mainstream courses or workplaces.

In this unit reports will be defined and classified according to purposes and types. Various types of reports will be mentioned, but for the purpose of the ULEA course only the short formal report will be discussed thoroughly. The unit will also deal with the steps necessary for writing the report and short activities based on the information given.

(EAP Study Guide, 2012, p. 145)

The short formal report is the focus in the EAP course. It is described as per below, and the format is indicated to include “terms of reference, procedure, findings, conclusion, recommendations, reference list and appendices (if any)” (EAP Study Guide, 2022, p. 147).

The short formal report is used where middle or senior management has to report to top management, and can be used for investigation and/or research reports. The report is structured with headings, sub-headings and numbers to make it reader-friendly (Evans, 1992; Whiting & Davids, 2003).

(EAP Study Guide, 2012, p. 146)

Therefore, while there is a semblance of alignment in the shared inclusion of report writing across these courses, the absence of comprehensive guidance within the EAP curriculum underscores a divergence from disciplinary knowledge-building approaches. This observation resonates with the argument presented by Lea and Street (1998), who contend that discipline requirements are such that the ability to write in one field does not mean that a student is able to write in another. It is evident that the short formal report as taught in the EAP course is management-related, whereby middle or senior managers report to top management. This emphasis on management-related report writing does not seamlessly transcend across disciplines in HEIs because not all specialisations have to write management-related reports, or indeed any reports at all. Arguably, what is learned about report writing in the EAP course is the idea of a tightly organised text, the need for formal objective writing in some genres, and the describing of events rather than including much by way of opinion in reports. But these

characteristics are not the focus of the course as outlined in the study guide, which is more focused on the surface structure of the genre, which would vary by context.

In comparing the structured format of the short formal report taught in the EAP course with the lab report in the Electronics Engineering course (Appendix 4), inevitable differences become apparent, particularly in the structure. But perhaps more important than differences in sub-headings or formatting are different understandings of the purpose and readership of reports. Hence, the instructional focus on short formal reports within the EAP curriculum may inadvertently neglect the diverse specialised writing requirements required in other academic disciplines.

There was also some data suggesting that report writing is vital in the workplace but that students felt ill-prepared for this, regardless of their completion of the EAP course or their mainstream courses.

To be honest, I only got to know about how to write an incident report at the clinical setting. It was never mentioned here, especially in class. ... We don't know if it should have the conclusion. We do not know if you should put your own idea or maybe I saw this, then I decided not to act. Or do you just say I did not? It's just, I don't know (NSS2).

In the context of the EAP course, both in instruction and assessment, the concept of a 'report' is largely unanchored by contextual relevance. Students are expected to craft reports that adhere to the stated requirements in the EAP course, but which draw on generic content and for a generic purpose (of "writing to top management"). This situation suggests that the EAP course has weaker semantic gravity (SG-). It is important to note that SG- is often considered a significant attribute of the powerful knowledges accessed in the academy. Principled, powerful knowledge should allow students to understand a concept beyond its specific application in one context to be able to abstract it for application in various contexts (SG-). However, in the case of the EAP course, the lack of context (SG-) was not about the abstraction of principles but rather about the decontextualised nature of the EAP course, whereby the practices were taught generically, as if there was no context.

The report writing portion of the EAP curriculum also has weaker semantic density as students are expected to write about whatever content they like. That is better depicted in the instruction to an activity below:

Conduct an investigation about an issue of concern in your faculty (at the university). It could be absenteeism of students or lecturers, lack of punctuality or non-adherence

to deadlines. It could also be more serious problems (theft, disciplinary problems) (EAP Study Guide, 2022, p. 150).

There is thus a code-clash between the generic reports expected in the EAP course and those they need to write in their mainstream courses which expect both stronger semantic gravity, as the reports describe very specific contexts, and stronger semantic density, as the reports draw on complex disciplinary language. Using Legitimation Code Theory, we can argue that code-clashes can hinder academic success, presenting obstacles in adhering to disciplinary writing standards, particularly given that the overarching purpose of the EAP course is to equip students with the skills necessary in the context of university studies. Lecturers might be under the misapprehension that because the genre of report writing has been covered in the EAP course, the students can produce this genre in their mainstream courses. But the literacy practices required of them in their mainstream courses may be quite different to those they practised in the EAP course.

Allowing students to choose their own topic for their EAP report is commendable, especially considering the interdisciplinary nature of EAP at UNAM. In essence, this allows students to think, write and reason from their areas of specialisation, which illustrates how disciplinary knowledge can be incorporated into teaching of EAP. However, this practice also presents certain challenges; one of which is the misalignment in technical language and terminologies.

the current impression I have is that ... it [EAP] is more focused on the sociology ... and I don't see it focusing more on technical things like engineering, agriculture and in science in general (EEL2)

there is a need to supplement the English for Academic Purposes in order to cope with the required medical terminologies, and not to necessarily continue using the so-called laymen language (NSL2)

There were thus three issues that emerged from the analysis of report writing as a genre taught in the EAP course. Firstly, there was an assumption that all students will write reports, which is not the case. Secondly, that report writing can be taught in a generic manner without disciplinary terms or concepts (SD-) and without a specific readership and purpose (SG-). And, thirdly, that learning report writing as a generic genre will enable students to take on the writing of discipline-specific reports.

Another genre that is covered in the EAP course is that of the academic essay.

7.2.2 Essays as a generic genre

One of the objectives of the EAP course is to “empower students with the skills necessary to produce a referenced and researched essay written in formal academic style in the context of the university studies”. This objective is addressed in the EAP study guide, particularly Unit 7 (*Functional situations in academic writing*), which focuses specifically on essay writing. The content runs from page 113 to page 129. The unit has the following objectives:

- Identify types of essays;
- Identify the language and style of each writing situation;
- Use a good argument for reasoning;
- Demonstrate ways of critically assessing the validity and relevance of arguments in a piece of writing;
- Outline the major function of writing;
- Apply the overall academic writing techniques to essays or any other type of writing in an academic setting.

(EAP Study Guide, 2012, p. 113)

The second objective acknowledges, through the words ‘each writing situation’, the nuanced nature of writing, in contrast to the simplistic view of skills as singular entities. It underscores the importance of adapting writing to fit the norms of specific disciplines, professional environments, and communication objectives. Moreover, it highlights the need for tailored approaches rather than uniform methods, recognising the varied demands of different fields. By delving into this objective, one discerns an awareness of the necessity to adjust language and writing style according to context, while also revealing the diversity inherent in writing practices across disciplines—an ideological dimension.

In the sixth objective, the focus shifts towards the application of academic writing skills across all academic contexts. Essentially, this objective reinforces a skills-centred perspective, presenting essays as a homogeneous genre. For instance, the directive for students to apply "overall academic writing techniques to essays or any other type of writing in an academic setting" implies the existence of a standardised set of techniques that can transcend disciplinary boundaries once mastered.

It should be noted that while essay writing is highlighted in the English for Academic Purposes course materials, the reviewed syllabi from other academic courses did not explicitly include essay as an assessment. It is clear that essay writing is not a genre used in many courses, and in those courses where it is used, there is often no call for report writing.

According to the EAP study guide, an essay is “a piece of writing that contains several paragraphs and that is written about one topic” and comprises an introduction, a main body, and a conclusion (EAP Study Guide, 2022, p. 145). Such definitions set clear structural and functional boundaries between essays and reports within the academic context. Other than the general understanding of essays as per above, the EAP study guide distinguishes between a general essay and an academic essay, which is defined as involving “careful reading and selection of information relevant to a topic and the purpose of writing the assignment” (EAP Study Guide, 2022, p. 130). An illustrative activity that aligns with academic expectations is prompting students to “write an introductory paragraph on a topic of their choice”.

Given the provided instruction, it seems that the assessment assumes a uniformity in the form and function of introductions across various fields of study and types of essays. However, this assumption is not accurate and can hinder students’ disciplinary knowledge development.

One task in the Unit 5, which is entitled “Mechanics of Academic Writing” and introduces students to the genre of academic essay writing focuses on two short texts, both about the dangers of smoking with the instruction:

The following two essays are similar in content in many ways, but one is academic and the other is non-academic.

Problematically, however, both include features that could be considered ‘academic’ or ‘non-academic’. The first essay, which is meant to be the one that is ‘academic’ in nature includes a few direct quotations, with the necessary references. This seems to be the main clue to it being academic. But it also includes a number of claims made without any form of referencing or other form of substantiation, for example:

Research indicates that the children of mothers who smoke are twice as likely to contract bronchitis and pneumonia as other children. Smoking during pregnancy can cause low birth weight, which, in turn, is related to infant mortality. It is estimated that three million infants per year are exposed to harmful chemicals through bloodstreams of mothers who smoke. It is also believed that a man who smokes heavily may produce

irregular shaped sperm cells, which could reduce his chances of fathering healthy children.

Importantly, it is unclear who the readership of the article is, given that it relies heavily on everyday knowledge (ER- and SD-). Apart from the inclusion of referenced direct quotes, the piece does not evidence any other characteristics that might be deemed to make it ‘academic’. Furthermore, characteristics that supposedly makes the second piece ‘non-academic’ are that it includes an anecdote, rhetorical question, and the use of first person, such as in this quote:

How do we get men together in a clinic to teach them these discoveries? I have no answers to this question.

The EAP Study Guide (p. 81) states that: “Personal pronouns, especially ‘I’ Feelings are generally avoided. Pronouns like ‘it’ ‘one’ and ‘there’ are used instead.” Besides the grammatical error and spelling error in this instruction, it is problematic because the use of first person is very common in some disciplines and fields (Starfield, 2015). Khedri and Kritsis (2020) demonstrate how in some fields the use of first person is an essential means of grappling with positionality and developing authorial voice.

In Unit 7 of the course, entitled Functional Situations in Academic Writing, students are introduced to argumentative writing, but this is seen to pertain to a particular *structure* of the essay rather than being the development of a position or stance. Furthermore, the word ‘argument’ is used both in relation to developing a convincing line of reasoning and in relation to offering arguments for and against a viewpoint. The term ‘argument’ is thus often used in an everyday sense. Knoblauch (2011) suggests that the disciplinary variations of what constitutes an argument and how it is developed are generally very poorly understood. Generic explanations and examples of ‘argument’ in academic essays can downplay the more expansive ways in which ‘argument’ plays out.

In a set of additional notes (see <https://www.studocu.com/row/course/university-of-namibia/english-for-academic-purposes/4911074>), which offer students a list of ten features they can apply to make their “own writing more formal and professional”, they are once again confronted by advice that contradicts academic writing norms in some fields. For example, Point 4 on the list states as follows:

Use formal structures/more complicated sentences such as clauses and noun phrases not just short simple sentences. For example: “It is important to consider all shareholders in this matter, they have the final vote.”

This is not only confusing advice, but also incorrect in most cases. Generally speaking, academic writing has shorter sentences and simpler structure than many other genres because of the complexity of strong semantic density and weak semantic gravity. The cognitive challenges of the content generally require simpler sentences (Cutts, 2020).

Another tip on the same notes, tells students:

Do not use ‘but’, ‘and’, ‘so’ at the start of a sentence.

However, in an analysis of thousands of academic journal articles, Bell (2007) found that starting a sentence with *And* or *But* was common, especially in the Humanities and Social Sciences. Once again, we see examples of everyday, commonsense advice being taught as it were generic fact, even where academic practices do not bear the advice out.

One of the EAP assessments in Unit 7 is as per the following extract:

Question 7: Academic Features	
Identify the main academic features represented in the following sentences.	
7.1. Paragraph 3:	(1)
The study was undertaken in two phases.	
7.2. Paragraph 4:	(1)
The majority (86%) of the skills identified had mean scores of 2 or above, indicating that they are of medium or high value.	
7.3. Paragraph 4:	(1)
This is not to ignore the importance of subject knowledge.	
7.4. Paragraph 10:	(1)
There may be a need to set some time aside at these levels as well.	
____/4/	

Table 7: Assessment task on Unit 7

Question 1 demonstrates the use of the passive voice rather than active voice, despite many disciplines using this form very sparsely. Confusingly, in a later section, students are told “Use the active voice, but without the personal pronouns I or we” (p. 142).

Question 2 demonstrates the use of statistics, though in this case the statistic is an everyday descriptive statistic and thus as commonly used in news articles or other genres. Question 3 demonstrates that contractions are not an academic feature, though they are often used in certain fields. Question 4 pertains to the use of hedges, which students are told in the document offering 10 tips:

Use hedging statements or tentative language such as ‘may’, ‘its possible that’ [note that despite earlier advice, this is a contraction, though it should be written as “it’s”], ‘appears to’ to qualify statements. This avoids absolute statements, which may be in error: “It is possible that the Liberal government is responsible for increased habitat destruction and environmental degradation”.

The focus on categorical explanations, often at the meta-level of describing academic writing rather than showing how it is done is common across the EAP Study Guide, and particularly in the unit on essay writing.

It is important to note that disciplinary differences in essay writing are not absolute. The student is not expected to write one kind of essay in Politics and an entirely different kind in Social Anthropology – there will be overlaps and echoes. But in all cases where the student is expected to write essays, they will be expected to engage with discipline specific content and to build arguments in specific ways (North, 2005). Baynham (2000) suggests that it would be futile to train students in the nuances of specific essay writing practices in different disciplines, but rather that what is needed are opportunities for students to practice taking on the social and discursive practices of different fields. This emphasis on practice moves beyond just making disciplinary norms explicit and towards a focus on creating opportunities to try out the practice and to get feedback on this. Baynham (2000) thus joins many other researchers in bemoaning the study skills approach to teaching essay writing, which is so evident in the EAP Study Guide.

7.2.3 Alignment on referencing

Another key focus of the EAP course, along with report writing and essay writing, is the issue of referencing in academic writing. The EAP study guide has an entire unit (*Unit 10: The APA reference style*) on referencing in academic writing. The unit indicates that “

At the end of this unit students should be able to:

- Avoid plagiarism
- Identify and present own voice in text
- Demonstrate the ability to properly cite information from various sources using the APA writing style
- Demonstrate the ability to properly write a reference using the APA writing style
- Construct a reference list in proper APA writing style format
- Demonstrate ability to organise list of reference in an acceptable APA format

(EAP Study guide, 2012, p. 152)

The prioritisation of plagiarism as the initial objective within the referencing unit underscores the fundamental commitment to academic integrity. Plagiarism, characterised by the failure to appropriately attribute sources, poses a significant threat to the credibility of academic institutions and the integrity of knowledge creation (Clarke et al., 2023; Hsiao, 2015).

The widespread proliferation of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) has significantly facilitated access to diverse information resources for academic learning and research (Yesmin & Ahmed, 2023). This necessitates HEIs to establish robust ethical guidelines to govern practices related to referencing. This includes addressing incorrect or inadequate acknowledgement of the sources and the use of materials from the internet without proper citation (Yesmin & Ahmed, 2023). Ethical guidelines are made available to students in various ways including study guides, university websites, flyers and other relevant sources, all aimed at educating students about the perils of plagiarism (Mphahlele & McKenna, 2018).

Globally, many HEIs have adopted a zero-tolerance stance toward plagiarism. As an example, UNAM emphasises its commitment to combatting plagiarism, as outlined in the EAP Study Guide (2022, p. 153).

Plagiarism therefore involves copying without acknowledgement of sources by the author. Using someone else's facts or ideas, submitting an assignment for one course that was handed in for another course without permission from the instructor is plagiarism. Plagiarism is a serious crime at the University of Namibia and a student who submits copied work receives a zero for reproducing another person's work without acknowledging sources.

Figure 10: UNAM's intolerance for plagiarism

However, the provided definition of plagiarism, although widely accepted and capturing some essential aspects, remains somewhat simplistic and incorrect. It falls short in accurately representing both the nuanced nature of referencing in academic writing and the true nature of plagiarism. For example, emphasising that plagiarism entails “copying without acknowledgement of sources by the author”, suggests a one-size-fits all offense regardless of the context. This oversimplification creates a misleading notion that every instance of writing necessitates explicit acknowledgement of sources. But in academia different disciplines impose distinct expectations regarding referencing and originality, and even different sets of expectations within different genres.

Notably, issues considered common knowledge, widely accepted facts, and general information do not need acknowledgment of sources. Even though a student may only have become aware of an issue through reading about it, they do not need to reference it if it is considered ‘common knowledge’ by experts in their field. For example, botanists do not reference where the term ‘chlorophyll’ comes from, nor do they need to reference who first articulated the concept of photosynthesis. Furthermore, expectations around use of references in different sections of a text vary significantly. Reports on research in the Natural Sciences often have no references in the methods section, even if the researcher is replicating a study done elsewhere. In contrast to this, reports on research in the Social Sciences often require references to substantiate all research design decisions (McKenna, 2022).

The definition also overlooks that referencing has many functions beyond attribution of sources. Scholars (such as Gravett & Kinchin, 2021; Neville, 2016) have highlighted that referencing serves multiple purposes, including signifying the integration of external knowledge into one's own work, situating one's argument within a scholarly discourse, and ensuring the credibility of the author's claims through substantiation by peer-reviewed publications. Thus, referencing constitutes an integral component of becoming academically

literate in a field, and it is not mandated for acknowledgement for every instance of external content utilisation.

Many materials students are expected to engage with, such as textbooks and study guides, lack explicit referencing or contain minimal citations. Interestingly, the EAP Study Guide is replete with ‘facts or examples’ which do not originate with the study guide authors and yet they are not referenced. This text therefore disproves its own definition of plagiarism.

Despite students being expected to engage with learning materials such as the EAP guide where referencing is scarce or non-existent, it is commonplace for HEIs to misconstrue an absence of citation in students’ works as plagiarism. This understanding of referencing as a technical process used for every fact and idea obtained elsewhere has the potential to diminish the quality of students’ writing (and keeps the disciplinary norms of referencing obscure to them). Simplistic understandings of where and why we reference also fuels the blame game whereby lecturers may feel that students who do not reference correctly are being obtuse having been taught how to do so in the EAP course.

Researchers such as Mphahlele and McKenna (2018) warn that the prevailing conceptions of plagiarism suffer from theoretical shortcomings. These scholars emphasise that it is common for agents (particularly academics and members of disciplinary committees) to perceive all instances of plagiarism as intentional transgressions deserving the meting out of punishment rather than an educational response (Mphahlele & McKenna, 2018). However, this perspective is flawed because it overlooks unintentional plagiarism, particularly among novice writers who may not yet be fully aware of disciplinary norms (Angelil-Carter, 2000), and it fails to give students access to the powerful disciplinary purposes of referencing. These oversights underscore the need for a more nuanced understanding of plagiarism and academic integrity – one that transcends simplistic punitive measures (such as being awarded a zero as per the extract above) and embraces broader educational imperatives.

Given the problematic definition of plagiarism, it is perhaps not a surprise that the following is outlined as essential for avoiding plagiarism.

In order to avoid plagiarism, before you carry out a library research on a given topic, you must always first brainstorm ideas to establish what you already know about the topic because others may influence your writing. The process of brainstorming ideas enable you to have own voice in the essay which is an important aspect in essay writing. When reading around the assignment question, be accurate when recording publication details such as title of source, author's name date of publication and the like. Such details are helpful in distinguishing carefully between your own words and those of others.

(EAP Study Guide, 2012, p. 153)

Within the provided text, two distinct but presumably interconnected aspects *brainstorming* and *own voice* emerge as central to combating plagiarism. Firstly, there is a misconception that if one brainstorms, they initially formulate their own original ideas which then automatically belong to them, and thus do not need to be referenced. However, this oversimplification is flawed in that brainstorming does not guarantee originality because no one was born in the world with vast information of their own. Instead, we come to learn all that we know through external sources including readings, media, and conversations with others. Thus, to say we do not need to reference what we brainstormed might unfortunately result in plagiarism because different disciplines require different ways to acknowledge what has happened, and what one may assume is their original interpretation or phrase may be a key concept within a certain scholarly work and thus need acknowledgement.

Secondly, the understanding that brainstorming allows individuals to discern their existing knowledge and thereby build their 'own voice' is equally problematic. Objective 2 of the section of referencing is that students should "identify and reveal own voice in text" and so the issue of 'voice' can be seen to be fairly pertinent in the EAP course.

However, on closer examination the understanding of voice presented in the course appears to be superficial and thereby fails to offer students the opportunity to develop a discipline-specific voice. In essence, 'voice' is equated with brainstorming and personal ideas. Central in such misconception is a common-sense understanding which tries to distinguish between 'in your head' and 'from elsewhere' in attempt to detect, understand or avoid plagiarism; and that 'voice' is about having your own ideas which are separate from literature.

Voice in academia is multifaceted and extends beyond individual ideation. Essentially, it entails being able to confidently make claims in ways deemed legitimate in the field and drawing on evidence (typically through referencing) to substantiate claims where required within the field (McQuillan, 2021). Clandinin and Connelly (2004) argue that emerging

researchers often summarise or point to other people's research rather than demonstrating their own position within that field with a strong voice. Being able to demonstrate voice in such ways is neither universal nor generic, but discipline-specific in that what is a 'strong voice' in one field might not work in another (Gray, 2017).

While referencing is often understood in terms of acknowledging sources, it goes beyond that for it entails who to reference, when to reference, and why to reference, all of which are discipline-specific considerations (dos Santos et al., 2023). Thus, although referencing is addressed in the EAP course, it remains detached from students' disciplinary contexts. The teaching focuses on the technical aspects of APA conventions and plagiarism prevention, thereby neglecting the broader functions of referencing across diverse academic domains. This underscores that knowing how to reference, particularly in the context of EAP, where referencing is explicitly taught, does not guarantee that students will cope with the demands of their respective disciplines. This observation further emphasises the relativist nature of the EAP course, as discussed in the preceding chapter. Referencing is taught in ways that are untethered to the knowledge making process and unattached to the identity of the writer.

Objectives 3 to 6 of unit's overview on referencing emphasise practical and technical aspects to referencing, for they require students to *demonstrate* or *construct* references or reference lists in accordance with the APA conventions. In practical terms, this means that students must grasp technical details such as where to begin when citing an author's name or surname, as well as the correct placement of punctuations (commas, full stops, etc.) and how to compile a comprehensive reference list. The focus on technical aspects, which computer software now performs for most researchers, is bemoaned in the literature as it fails to tackle the issue of where and why references are used in different fields (Vehviläinen et al., 2018).

Despite this, two participant interviews indicated that the skills acquired in this unit found practical application within their disciplinary contexts.

we gain knowledge that we can apply to other modules, such as referencing (LPS3)

... if maybe I am stuck somewhere I can still go back to my English academic notes and see how I reference how to maybe reference a journal article. So, this module is helping me to progress (LPS4)

Literature (such as Julius et al. 2023; Mpofu & Maphalala, 2020) contend that there is more to referencing than the acquisition of *technical* referencing skills. Hendricks and Quinn (2000)

challenge any notion that referencing is solely about adhering to conventions such as citing surnames, publication years, and page numbers and argue that it is instead central to learning how to make and substantiate claims in different fields of study.

Gravett and Kinchin (2021) argue that within HEIs, both lecturers and students tend to view referencing as peripheral and easily acquired. They join other researchers in arguing that referencing pertains to issues related to disciplinary identity and knowledge production (see, for example, Mphahlele & McKenna, 2018). As students engage with academic referencing practices, they not only acquire essential skills but also undergo a transformation, gradually becoming part of the broader academic community. Being able to reference according to the norms and values of a discipline entails coming to understand which kinds of knowledge claims are sufficiently accepted in the field as to not need a reference, which claims require more than one reference, which references flag a particular school of thought, and so on. Scholars like Gourlay (2009) and Gravett and Kinchin (2021) emphasise that these practices cannot be effectively taught in isolation from disciplinary contexts. Referencing, like other academic conventions, is multifaceted and extends beyond the surface-level mechanics with which the issue is grappled in this course (ER-, SR-). As Willans et al. (2019, p. 1) indicate:

Deeper questions about whether secondary sources are being used to acknowledge the origin of empirical evidence, explain the framework within which the current work is situated, or to support a position within a widely contested debate, for example, are essential to explore before learning how to find the right type of sources, and deciding what kind of information it would be useful to make notes about.

Teaching referencing practices with the presumption of the learning extending beyond disciplinary boundaries presents several challenges. One of these challenges is the inadvertent alienation of students. This issue is compounded by the fact that when students encounter academic essay writing, their primary concern tends to be avoiding plagiarism, and escaping the label of academic dishonesty, rather than developing independent research skills (Gravett & Kinchin, 2021).

Additionally, many academic staff members rely on referencing as a tool to identify potential plagiarists instead of focusing on fostering student identity and a sense of belonging (Hutchings, 2014). According to Hutchings (2014), when students struggle to connect the taught content on proper citation within their specific disciplines, they may perceive themselves as outsiders. This sense of ‘non-belonging’ can have detrimental effects on students’

educational experiences, potentially contributing to attrition – a critical issue that motivated this study.

The three examples presented thus far, report writing, essay writing and referencing, all evidence the extent to which the EAP course assumes that writing within the academic context entails taking on a set of neutral, generic skills that are largely divorced from the specific fields of study. That is, these examples demonstrate how the relativist code understandings presented in the previous chapter were echoed in the relativist code nature of the course content.

The course draws on generic understandings of writing. While the course does indeed offer facts and skills, some of which I have argued are contentious or even wrong, the strength of knowledge as a means of specialisation is relatively weak (ER-). There is very little in the course that focuses on becoming a specialised kind of knower, with a particular disposition (SR- -). On a number of occasions, the student is explicitly instructed in the EAP course that they should not allow their particular lived experiences, gazes, ways of being into the university, through statements such as:

The academic writer tries not to let His personality intrude too much into the writing, in order to allow the facts and the evidence speak for themselves.

But beyond language competence, students have to take on knowledge-building processes specific to their disciplines. When students effectively align their communicative practices with the legitimisation codes of their academic fields, they not only enhance their credibility within scholarly communities but are also more able to actively contribute to ongoing academic conversations (Maton, 2013).

7.3 Disparities between EAP and other courses

There were several ways in which there was evidence of a code-clash between what was being valued in the EAP course and what practices were expected for success in the mainstream courses for which the EAP course was meant to prepare students. While it is essential for students to have a mastery of technical terminology to navigate the requirements of their diverse disciplines, it is impossible that EAP lecturers, in their capacity as outsiders to mainstream courses, would be able to nurture the taking on of such terms.

Consequently, despite the inclusion of content related to report writing or essay writing or referencing in the EAP course and the presence of these practices in other modules, there was

a prevailing perception among educators and students that EAP does not adequately address students' needs in this area.

Unfortunately, we cannot have classes that are arranged as per their disciplines, we just teach them across (EAP4)

EAP lecturers, who may lack expertise in specific academic disciplines, would no doubt encounter difficulties in evaluating essays or reports that incorporated terminologies from various fields and would thus be unable to offer feedback as to its appropriate use. A good example of this is seen in the Chemistry for Life Science module under Public Health; in the topic of Acid-Base reactions, students are required to;

- explain the concept of acid-base reactions;
- discuss acid and base in term of Arrhenius definitions, Lewis definitions and Brønsted-Lowry definitions;
- discuss Conjugate acid-base pairs and give relevant examples;
- explain reaction chemistry involving conjugate acid-base pairs

The above clearly requires specialist understanding of these semantically dense (SD++) terms but also to apply them in ways that demonstrate stronger ER and weaker SR. For instance, A Lewis acid is defined as “a species that can accept a pair of electrons (electron-pair acceptor)” (Namidi, n.d., p. 6) resulting in a coordinate covalent bond, whereas for Brønsted-Lowry, an acid is “any species that can donate a proton (H⁺) – proton donor” (Namidi, n.d., p. 7). Students using the term ‘acid’ need to understand the specialised meanings of the term (ER+) and how to appropriately use the term in ways that present the information as objective and separated from their own opinion and identity (SR-). In this field, the value of objectivity requires that students write in the third person or passive voice to separate the knowledge from the knower. Furthermore, the writing requires a statement of empirical facts without descriptive opinion attached to it. This Knowledge Code (ER+, SR-) and very stronger semantic density (SD++) is not cultivated through the EAP course with its relativist code and weak semantic density. In LCT Semantics the everyday understanding of terms such as acid and alkaline, as defined by the PH scale, for example, has a lower semantic density (SD-) than would be expected in the field. This is because it lacks the comprehensive definitions, characteristics and scientific implications condensed in the said words.

The adoption of an open approach to assignment writing whereby the students select their own topic may result in EAP lecturers providing incorrect feedback, and either overgrading or undergrading the essays. As Olivier (2016, p. 46) suggests, literacy lecturers “may find technical content uninteresting, unfamiliar and even intimidating”. While EAP lecturers may be better placed to provide feedback on writing focused on everyday topics, this writing is less likely to enable students to take on the demands of their fields of study. This approach is counterproductive, as “academic literacies should be about making explicit to students the way in which different disciplines structure their knowledge bases and produce knowledge” (Jacobs, 2013, p. 132).

In this chapter I have thus far argued that the concerns raised in the academic literacy literature about add-on courses are starkly evident in the UNAMs EAP course content. There is a code-clash between the ‘skills’ and genres taught in the EAP course and the practices required for success in the mainstream courses.

The extent to which this course is perceived as valuable by EAP lecturers, mainstream lecturers, and the students taking the course is also important. Even if the course content is unlikely to scaffold the taking on of discipline specific practices, it might be a space of confidence building and provide opportunities for students to undertake reading and writing, albeit of a more generalist kind.

7.4 Participants’ perceptions of the UNAM’s EAP course

There was some data that indicated that the EAP course was perceived to have merit as a foundation course for students.

... it helps us with the flow of writing ... in knowing how to write like the report. You are required to write in patterns and you cannot use like the present tense since you are reporting. And also how to use linking words like firstly, furthermore etc. (MSS4)

It introduced them to all the basic things they need to do in their courses. That means there is referencing there. There is report writing there. There is essay writing there. All these things are there (MSL1)

Unfortunately, however, the dominant finding was of adverse perceptions of the EAP course. On the one hand there was a very instrumentalist approach to the EAP course where it was seen simply as a programme requirement to be completed. On the other hand, there was data suggesting a complete dismissal of the course. I look at each of these responses in turn.

7.4.1 Instrumentalist approaches to teaching and learning EAP

Many participants perceived the EAP course instrumentally, with the primary objective being success within the course itself. Specifically, data revealed that some EAP lecturers viewed their role as fulfilling a requirement of the students' studies, rather than facilitating meaningful academic development.

I just teach it because I have to. My module is my work (EAP1)

Several lecturers of both the EAP and mainstream courses noted that students approached the EAP course with little commitment, driven by the instrumentalist desire to attain passing grades in this required course so that they could advance in their studies.

In most cases, most of the students are just doing this for marks and as long as they write something to get marks and then they leave (MSL1).

A number of them just want to get done with it (EEL2)

Similarly, students themselves acknowledged their instrumentalist approach towards the course.

... we are just studying to pass. What we did in English Academic we do not really keep it in our mind So, we are just memorising (LPS5)

Some students also argued that some EAP lecturers followed a 'teach to the test' approach. This approach is characterised by a narrow focus on the components that are directly related to the assessments, often at the expense of other educational content.

our lecturer ... just covered things that we needed for our marks. For example, presentations. ... she covered that one for us to ..., how to be formal and all that just because she knew that we have to present for our marks (NSS5)

This approach, while useful in achieving the immediate goal of passing the EAP course, may inadvertently lead to a 'negative washback effect' (Taylor, 2005). In the teaching of EAP, such a constrained educational approach can hinder the learning process by failing to address the broader educational needs of students.

From the data, it was notable that there was a lack of engagement amongst participants regarding the broader purpose of higher education or the transformative potential of academic studies as regards what students come to know through their studies, or who they come to be (Ashwin, 2020). Thus, the EAP course was viewed not as an integral part of their education

but rather as an obstacle to overcome in order to graduate. This perception underscores prioritisation of compliance over genuine intellectual involvement. It also reflects a broader trend within educational institutions wherein processes are often influenced by instrumental values rather than educational ones (Van Noordwijk et al., 2023).

Instrumental rationality, defined by Blau (2020) as the focus on efficient means rather than a deep consideration of the ends, emerges as a central aspect of higher education processes. In contrast, value rationality, as posited by Van Noordwijk et al. (2023), highlights the integral role of values in higher education, particularly within adaptive learning cycles that address contemporary societal concerns. These values not only motivate individuals and systems to either embrace change or maintain the status quo but also shape the evaluation of alternatives when opportunities for change arise. In contrast to such value-based approaches, instrumentalist approaches focus on doing the least possible to achieve the perceived ends, which are often exchange value rather than use value (Harley, 2017, Holloway, 2010). Thus here, the EAP course seems to have been perceived by the students as something they simply needed to do in *exchange* for credit and progression in their course, rather than for the *use* of the course in providing access to knowledge and ways of knowing.

The prevailing conceptualisation in the data of academic literacy practices as comprising generic skills can be seen to be closely intertwined with this instrumentalist interpretation of the EAP courses' role. Instrumentalism in language learning emphasises the acquisition of language skills for practical purposes, contrasting with an integrative orientation focused on utilising language within specific contexts to achieve particular objectives (McKenna, 2004). While instrumentalism can be perceived positively as pragmatic, it can also lead to an understanding where an activity becomes an end in itself, devoid of broader philosophical aims. Blau (2020) cautions that "instrumental rationality can even be irrational; seeking means to ends which are based on palpably irrational beliefs is hardly the epitome of rationality" (p. 2). Irrationality drawing from instrumentalist perspectives in this study are evident given that, data from the lecturers and the students suggested that the logic of the course was thus instrumental in nature whereby the aim for students and EAP lecturers became the successful completion of the course, rather than the acquisition of academic literacy practices that could stand them in good stead beyond the EAP course. With this instrumentalist understanding of the course, it is perhaps unsurprising that there was also evidence in the data of the course being dismissed as irrelevant.

7.4.2 Dismissal of the EAP course

There were several instances in the data where both lecturers and students indicated disdain for the EAP course. While this disregard may be attributed to the instrumentalist approach discussed earlier, in this section the dismissal of the EAP course reflects broader concerns regarding its relevance and administration.

Students expressed concerns about the relevance of the EAP course, indicating that the content is redundant because it overlaps with their prior English education at the Grade 12 level and argued that this minimises their interest in the course.

... we kind of already got the picture ... because we already knew, like, some of these things from high school (NSS2)

Other participants cited the disjointed nature between the EAP course and their mainstream courses indicating that there is no link beyond the fact that EAP and the mainstream subjects are all taught in English.

So, in actual English for Academic Purpose and Physics, the only relationship there is the language itself which is the English simply because Physics is taught in the same language (MSL2)

... attending lessons for me was just very weird. I'm sitting in class. Maybe I had the previous lesson was General Nursing. In here I'm sitting, I'm hearing things linguistic. I'm like, what is going on? It's like, I'm having two things at the same time here (NSS4).

Having discussed earlier that concerns were raised about the selection of course content, I here also return to the other two key Bernsteinian concepts pertaining to curriculum, sequencing and pacing. One key thing that emerged from the data was the dismissal of the EAP course due to inconsistencies in sequencing and pacing. As discussed in Chapter 4, Bernstein's interest in the ways in which pedagogy reinforced social divides included a deliberation on how the classroom practices emerge from deliberations around selection, sequencing and pacing, and differences in who gets to frame (or control) each of these. As discussed earlier in this chapter, the EAP course suffers a problem around selection because of its relativist nature. It is unclear from what specific knowledge and knower base the course content is being selected.

What was clear was that there were also issues pertaining to sequencing and pacing. Sequencing entails the order in which content is included in the curriculum and the extent to which this does or does not lead to cumulative knowledge-building. Pacing entails the extent

to which the time spent on various topics and activities is determined by the academic (strong framing of pacing) or if the curriculum can be mediated to meet the needs of the students (weaker framing of pacing). From the data, it has emerged that the EAP course is taught generically without differentiation of the content. Evidently, as shared below, students from different programmes are combined to be taught in one EAP class, and similar tests are administered across the institution regardless of students' course of study.

... my impression is that the English that we are taught here at UNAM is general throughout all campuses because I know that the same [EAP] that I am taught here at Oshakati campus is the same one that was taught at JEDS or is being taught at JEDS. Literally the same content. We actually even had the same lecturer ... we are taught the same thing; we write the same tests and all that (NSS2)

Other than undifferentiated content between various disciplines/faculties, it has also emerged that there are discrepancies in the sequencing. Thus, students within the same course (Lower Primary Education) and the same year of studies (Year 2) did EAP at different times or semesters.

It's a module that I did in my first year, semester 1 (LPS1)

I did this module when I was in my first year, second semester (LPS4)

... for me, I did it in in year two (LPS6)

Disparities in sequencing stem from prerequisites based on Grade 12 English scores, resulting in an ad hoc approach to course structure. This arbitrary sequencing reflects a relativist perspective, wherein the organisation of the curriculum prioritises instrumental concerns over pedagogical coherence.

Sequencing is intended (ideally) to ensure that students are first introduced to items that are more closely related to the everyday and in terms that are readily understandable (in LCT terms, SG+ and SD-) and then these are scaffolded up (through semantic waves in LCT terms) to SG- and SD+, that is, to abstracted, principled, specialised knowledge. If the sequencing of courses (and content within courses) is arbitrary, then it suggests a lack of semantic waves that are so vital for cumulative learning. Semantic waves, as highlighted by Maton (2020), are essential for high academic achievement. These recurrent shifts in context-dependence and complexity weave together different forms of knowledge, thereby facilitating cumulative knowledge building. The absence of these pedagogic aspects can be particularly detrimental. As Maton (2020, p. 79) notes, "if the ability to wave is not equally shared among learners of different

backgrounds, then teaching students how to master semantic waves is an urgent task”. The importance of semantic waves in teaching is better summarised as follows:

- Helps make expert knowledge accessible to novices;
- Varies the context of the concept to build links with concrete examples;
- Connects the technical terminology used in activities with simpler meanings;
- Helps learners to unpack new concepts and repack them into more complex contexts, to encourage the acquisition of new knowledge;
- Promotes achieving a secure knowledge of one concept before progressing to the next;
- Helps novices develop both understanding of abstract concepts and mastery of technical meanings

(National Centre for Computing Education, 2020, p. 1)

Given that different students undertook the EAP course at different stages of their programmes, it would seem that the sequencing was fairly arbitrary. Alongside problems with the sequencing of the course, and the doubts this casts about its role in scaffolding cumulative learning, were concerns about pacing.

The time available for the course in the curriculum emerged as a concern, with both lecturers and students advocating for a longer timeframe to facilitate more comprehensive engagement. Teaching EAP within a short duration, typically one semester, was perceived as insufficient for developing the requisite ‘academic language skills’ for students’ entire academic journey even though the selection of course content meant that ‘language skills’ were conceptualised in generic and neutral ways.

I am still having reservations because of the way it is conducted, the manner how we teach this course and the length. These students will come in first year students ... and you only teach them for three to four months and they are done. If they feel like they do not want to do this first semester and then they go to the second semester. Now if you are saying it is supposed to equip them with the skills and the knowledge to cope with their academic journey, they are being taught from February to May only. And there are those that are not being taught. So how are they coping? (EAP4).

Teaching EAP in a short duration was seen as a quick remedy for students’ perceived language deficiencies. Implicit in that understanding is the notion of the transferability of the ‘presumed’ taught skills to other contexts. It is no surprise that the EAP lecturers perceived themselves as having a pivotal role in guiding and assimilating students into the ‘undifferentiated’ norms and conventions of the university environment.

As a lecturer, it's my responsibility to make sure that students know how to write. They know how to produce academic paragraphs, ...how to use thesis statement, how to use topic sentences, how to use cohesive devices ... It's my responsibility to also make sure that students know how to speak publicly (EAP2)

[My] purpose is to equip students ... with ... writing skills ... with presentation skills and ... with reading skills because these students are reading a lot of texts across their field of studies (EAP4)

As good as it sounds, a focus on presumed generic academic skills disregards the notion that students' development of disciplinary literacies is an ongoing, nuanced process deeply embedded in the specific academic context (Mpofu & Maphalala, 2020). It also fails to acknowledge that taking on literacy practices continues for the duration of a student's academic journey (Calvo et al., 2020) because “academic literacy development should be inherent in every course in the curriculum throughout the degree programme, rather than something offered at the beginning as a quick fix” (Bengesai, 2012, p. 62).

In LCT terms, teaching EAP in an undifferentiated fashion suggests that students need neither specialised knowledge (ER-) nor certain knower attributes (SR-). The negative impact of such understanding cannot be over emphasised in this study, for students risk being left on the margin to crack the codes of their disciplines if they are to access the epistemologies relevant to the courses they do. But this relativist code also provides some explanation as to why the course was understood in instrumentalist ways (as simply a requirement to be completed) or dismissed entirely.

7.5 Conclusion

The relativist code of the understandings of academic literacy, discussed in the previous chapter, were clearly evident in the EAP course discussed in this chapter. The content of the course generally assumes that academic practices comprise generic skills which can be taught separately from disciplinary content and that students would be able to not only acquire these skills but also transfer them to varied contexts. In this chapter I honed in on three content areas, reports, essays and referencing, to illustrate that the course content may focus on genres and practices that students might be expected to enact in their mainstream studies but that the overlap was fairly superficial. The data on the course structure and content and on the perceptions of the EAP course also suggest concerns about selection of course content, sequencing of the course within students' programmes, and pacing of materials in a one-semester course. The relativist nature of the EAP course is in many regards unsurprising as

there is no strong field from which to choose the course content (selection). That students undertake the course at different stages of their studies (sequencing) and that the course is offered over just one semester (pacing) were both seen to limit the extent to which the course could contribute to the taking on of academic literacy practices. The instrumentalist understandings of the course's purpose and in some cases the dismissal of the course can be seen to be conditioned by this relativist code.

The use of Semantics in this chapter allowed us to see that there was very little introduction to complex concepts (SD-) that might allow the student to see and understand the world or themselves in new ways (Ashwin, 2020). Alongside this weaker semantic density, there was also evidence of weaker semantic gravity (SG-), where the course materials were not attached to any specific context but rather were generic in nature. The SG- was thus not a reflection of the movement of knowledge from one space to another, that is the use of principled knowledge to explain new contexts, but rather the SG- suggests that the EAP course was without a context. Weaker SG can be indicative of tasks that are 'inauthentic' (Maton 2014). The SD- and SG-coding, that is the rarefied code, signifies a course that offers "context independent stances that are relatively simpler" (Maton, 2020, p. 65). Maton suggests that in rarefied codes "meaningful ideas (SD+) may become equated with meaningless claims (SD-), academic discourse (SD+) may be equated with jargon (SD-)" (Maton, 2020, p. 88).

As indicated earlier, it is possible to interpret this very critical analysis as blaming those designing and offering the course. This would be a mistake because courses such as these do not just emerge from the ideologies, agendas and beliefs of individuals. Instead, the extent to which such courses have emerged in common ways around the world means we need to understand some of the underpinning mechanisms from which they emerge. I return to a discussion of these mechanisms as I conclude the study in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSION

8.1 Introduction

This study delved into the role of academic literacy courses designed to support students in their transition into higher education and their taking on of requisite disciplinary knowledge. It was prompted in part by the global concern over persistently high attrition rates in higher education institutions. In particular, I was interested in concerns that poor student performance is often attributed solely to individual student factors, deflecting attention from systemic issues. As I outlined in Chapter 3, the result of such explanations of student success and failure is that HEIs are absolved of responsibility. In part this is achieved by their provision of support for what are known as academic literacy courses to equip students for success. However, despite the existence of such courses, high attrition rates persist.

In light of the concerns in the literature, and my own concerns about student success at the University of Namibia, I undertook this study looking at the English for Academic Purposes course, its purposes and how it was conceptualised by EAP lecturers, lecturers of other courses, and the students who took it. Given how widespread such courses have become internationally, albeit relatively recently introduced in universities in the Global South, there is a great need for us to make sense of what they intend to do and how they are understood.

The literature discussed in Chapter Three suggests that the efficacy of these courses in fostering students' disciplinary knowledge-building remains inadequately explored, and that questions about the sufficiency of current approaches need to be asked. Such calls for further research were key to this study.

This chapter reemphasises the key findings discussed in Chapters Six and Seven, that emerged through the analytical process of retroduction. Retroductive analysis, as discussed in Chapter Five, is a methodological approach that entails going beyond data descriptions and allows for speculative exploration of underlying causal forces behind observed patterns (Sayer, 2000). According to Kajee (2018), retroduction has the potential to provide "likely explanations for explaining the status quo in attempt to plan a way forward" (p. 143). That is exactly what this study sought as it aimed to ascertain the role academic literacy courses play in students' disciplinary knowledge-building.

The study thus did not aim to ‘prove’ how the course was designed, implemented and experienced, but rather, taking a realist position, it sought to identify some of the knowledge and knower structures of the course and to consider how these intersected with what the course intended achieving and how it was experienced. The study was guided by the following questions:

1. How is ‘academic literacy’ conceptualised in the UNAM English for Academic Purposes course curriculum?

This first question was further divided into two sub-questions: (a) How do the academics who teach the UNAM EAP course conceptualise ‘academic literacy’? and (b) How is knowledge structured in course documents and assessments?

Further two questions brought in data from the perspective of two other sets of stakeholders:

2. How do academics who teach other courses conceptualise UNAM's EAP course and its relationship to the literacy practices expected in their courses?
3. How do students experience the EAP course at UNAM, and how do they understand the relationship between the content and activities of the EAP course and the academic literacy demands of their other courses?

Data collection involved individual interviews with both EAP lecturers and discipline-specific lecturers from three UNAM campuses. Additionally, focus group interviews were conducted with students from these campuses. Triangulation of data was achieved through document analysis of EAP course materials and mainstream course documents to identify instances of code-matches or code-clashes, alongside the use of the interviews with the three different groups. Triangulation in this study pertained to collecting as diverse a set of data as possible given that a full exploration of the phenomenon through multiple data sources can greatly increase the validity.

It is imperative to clarify that while the study centred on UNAM's EAP course as a case of such courses recently introduced in the Global South, its aim was not to critique this particular course or the colleagues who offer it. Rather, it sought to add to the ongoing deliberations about how such courses emerge and whether they are effective in enhancing students’ possibilities of success. Many findings from this study resonate with issues identified in academic literacy

research globally, underscoring the persistent challenges associated with generic approaches that often fall short of truly enhancing epistemic access. This thesis presented a comprehensive examination of a specific course and its reflection of prevalent generic common-sense approaches. In doing so, it added to the deliberations in the literature on such attempts to address ‘academic literacy’ outside of the curriculum, but it did so from a specific context where such attempts are relatively recent. Furthermore, through the use of Legitimation Code Theory, the study was able to use retroduction to look particularly at the structure of knowledge in the EAP course. The use of LCT is important given the ‘knowledge blindness’ of much academic development work. While academic literacies research rightly alerts us to the existence of particular academic practices that are ideological in nature and that vary over time and space, this research fails to account for *how* and *why* such practices emerge in the way that they do. As Clarence and McKenna (2017, p. 39) point out, consideration of the actual structure of knowledge and understanding of the expected dispositions of knowers is essential to meaningful academic development work:

Simply put, knowledge itself acts to shape and determine what counts as context, and how one needs to read, write, think, and act within such contexts. Thus, seeing knowledge structures as distinct from, but always connected to, processes of knowing or producing knowledge is an important part of academic literacies development work.

Crucially this study illustrates the ways in which LCT can shine a spotlight on courses to demonstrate what is being legitimated. This enables epistemological access by making explicit what it is that is expected of students. Furthermore, as discussed in Chapter One, shining a light on the expectations of various academic practices also opens them to critique. When expectations are opaque, they can come to seem ‘commonsense’ by insiders in a field. This makes them very difficult to challenge. Epistemic injustice (Fricker, 2007) can thrive in the ‘hidden curriculum’ where the explicit nature of expected academic practices is assumed to be obvious.

The following section offers an overview of the primary findings derived from this study.

8.2 Summary of Key Findings

8.2.1 Perception of academic practices as generic

A general finding was that there was an assumption that taking on academic practices entailed taking on a set of generic skills, largely pertaining to basic language competency. There was

very little recognition that the university required students to read and write (and think and be) in new ways that would vary across subjects. While participants understood that the transition to university was challenging there was not much recognition that this entailed taking on practices that would often seem mysterious to them or that this would entail taking on new dispositions.

This genericism meant that the content of the EAP course has very weak Semantic Density. The course did not introduce the students to abstracted terms or complex concepts (SD-). The Semantic Gravity was also weak in that the course content was not attached to a specific context of use. But there was no evidence of the course content being abstracted in ways that could empower the students to take what they had learned and transpose it to other contexts. Thus, the general view that SG- can allow for students to move knowledge from its context (SG+) to apply the knowledge in other contexts was not evident. Such movement from stronger SG to weaker SG, that is semantic waves, was not evident in the data. Indeed, as shown in Chapters Six and Seven, the participants noted that success in the EAP course did not seem to lead to success in other courses and that topics dealt with in the EAP course, such as referencing, remained a problem in their other courses. The lack of context in the EAP course materials thus cannot be seen to have empowered students to apply their learning to new discipline-specific expectations.

8.2.2 The add-on nature of the EAP Course

The data analysis revealed a prevalent conception of the EAP course as an ‘add-on’ to university education, which would continue in the same ways as it always had. The EAP course was seen to run parallel to the mainstream and have no bearing on issues of epistemic access within the mainstream and therefore failed to enable epistemic justice, despite the course being introduced in response to concerns about student retention and throughput. This perspective was enabled by the dominant understanding that the primary objective of the EAP course is to enhance students' English language proficiency and to inform them about ‘academic skills’ and that this would enable them to meet the academic demands within universities. Implicit within this misconception is the belief that language competence and neutral skills are pivotal to success in higher education and that language works as a neutral conduit for meaning, rather than being central to how meaning is crafted in context.

The understandings underpinning the course oversimplified students' challenges, attributing educational issues, like high attrition rates, mainly to students' limited English language proficiency. But students encounter difficulties emerging from multiple mechanisms in interplay with each other, including their status as outsiders to academic discourses (Julius et al., 2023). The understanding that success in higher education pertains to far more than language proficiency and includes the complex epistemological practices inherent in disciplinary knowledge was lacking in the data. Such complex epistemological practices are thus often implicit.

Regrettably, the conception of EAP as an add-on course led to a one-size-fits-all approach. At UNAM all students, regardless of their field of specialisation, engage in the same EAP course. The course prioritised general language and skills remediation over facilitating students' epistemological access. That was evident in the conceptualisation of academic literacy as a set of neutral skills, and was echoed in the skills-centric focus evident in the EAP course documents. In this way, students were receiving what Hashemnezhad and Hashemnezhad (2012, p. 724) calls "inadequate or outmoded writing instruction". Despite good intentions, this approach may hinder HEIs, shifting the focus away from inducting students into disciplinary literacy practices towards language instruction. Consequently, students may struggle to navigate the epistemological demands of their chosen fields—a frustrating aspect contributing to high attrition rates in HEIs.

The design of the EAP course as add-on and generic (with a focus on technical language competence and decontextualised skills while neglecting the many varied disciplinary practices that students have to master) was shown to be problematic. The course was disconnected from the students' mainstream courses, failing to adequately address these epistemological nuances. Scholarly literature (such as Julius et al., 2023 and Nekondo, 2021) argues that while basic proficiency in the medium of instruction within HEIs is crucial for academic success, such proficiency alone does not guarantee it. As Noor (2006, p. 67) warns, "without proper guidance and assistance, these students may fail to adjust accordingly, or may continue to adjust inappropriately to the demands of undergraduate study".

These two key findings echo those already available in the literature and discussed in Chapter Two. However, they add to our understanding in showing that these critiques play out in similar ways in the Global South. This is an important contribution as most of the literature on academic literacy practices and university attempts to address students' needs in this regard

has been done in the Global North. While there is a substantial body of work about this from South Africa, there is very little from other parts of Africa and so this study is important in establishing that similar issues are in play in Namibia. Given the globalised nature of the world, an issue I return to shortly, research on how phenomena (such as EAP courses) ‘travel’ across countries needs to be undertaken and this study contributes to such conversations.

Importantly, while there is much Global North literature on the problematic generic, add-on nature of EAP courses echoed here, there is very little that attempts to analyse the structure of EAP course content. It is in this regard, using LCT, that this study makes its most important contribution.

8.2.3 EAP course as a relativist code

Using Specialization and Semantics from Legitimation Code Theory (LCT), the study analysed what was legitimated in the EAP course. An important contribution of this study was the identification of the relativist code nature of the EAP course. By identifying the strengths of focus on the object of knowledge (ER) and the subject of knowledge (SR), it is possible to map out the ‘code’ of any particular field. Put very simply, knowledge codes emphasise what you know, knower codes emphasise who you are, elite codes emphasise both specialised knowledge and the right kind of knower, and relativist codes are devoid of both specialised knowledge and the legitimating of specialised knower dispositions (see Figure 3).

The study analysed course documents augmented with interviews with EAP lecturers to interrogate what specialised the EAP courses, or to put it another way, what is legitimated in the course. The analysis revealed a lack of a well-defined knowledge base (ER-) and lack of a clear target knower (SR-). As discussed in Section 4.2.1 curriculum design occurs in what Bernstein (2001,1990) terms the field of recontextualisation. This is where content from the field of production is recontextualised into a syllabus and course materials and then later taught and assessed in the classroom in what is known as the field of reproduction. However, given the findings that there was a (mis)conception of students’ needs as pertaining to basic language proficiency, academic literacy as being generic skills, and a lack of conception of the student as someone taking on the dispositions of novices in various fields, there was an identification of an ‘anything goes’ nature of the curriculum content decisions of the EAP courses. It seemed that the EAP has no field of production of its own, as such, beyond generic language skills. It

is thus no surprise that the EAP course is offered in a generic format to all students in UNAM regardless of their specialisation.

Literature has indicated that in instances where there is little specialised knowledge within the curriculum, the design of the curriculum typically reflects the views of the programme designer rather than the norms and values of the field (Kajee, 2018; Chen, 2010). Pertinent in that aspect is the notion of authority (specifically programme designers) deciding on what counts as knowledge arbitrarily (Kajee, 2018). Such can be detrimental to students' disciplinary knowledge-building because "programme designers do not all operate from the same place, ideologically and academically; they have been shaped by, and in turn, shape the knowledge that is included in their programmes" (Kajee, 2018, p. 144).

Other than the selection of content on a fairly arbitrary manner as simply related to basic language competence and academic skills, the relativist nature of EAP courses can also adversely affect curriculum pacing and sequencing. As Petrina (2004, p. 82) indicates, "The very nature of student experiences are shaped by the way we choose to design, or not design, curriculum". The issue of the short duration of the course and students not doing the EAP course at the same time within their programmes also emerged as a finding in the study. While the short duration does not afford students sufficient time to complete the course effectively, not doing EAP at the same time leads to asynchronous learning experiences. The idea that the course acts as a means of supporting the transition from school to the practices of the academy is undermined by the fairly arbitrary sequencing of the course. Importantly, this relativist code risks positioning students on the periphery because succeeding in academia requires the taking on of discipline specific literacy practices including discourse aspects (Street, 2010, Lee, 2020 etc.), including ways of being (Gee, 2003, Heath, 1983).

The finding that the EAP course is relativist has important implications beyond the University of Namibia. The extent to which courses designed to support students' transition into higher education and the taking on of practices required for success are likely to achieve their aims if they are not assisting students to access powerful knowledge and powerful ways of knowing (Wheelahan, 2010; Muller & Young, 2019) is doubtful. The use of LCT allows us to have a language to understand the problem with generic, add-on courses focused on decontextualised language skills in ways that much of the academic literacy research fails to do. Clarence and McKenna (2017) call for work that uses theoretical and analytical tools for conceptualising disciplinary knowledge structures so that these can connect with academic literacies

development work. In analysing the EAP course and finding that it is a relativist code, this study did indeed “show that understanding the knowledge structures of different disciplines can enable academic developers to build a stronger body of practice” (Clarence & McKenna 2017, p 38).

Unfortunately, academics are rarely inducted into “knowledge of the field of higher education, in order to enable them to design courses and pedagogical processes that will provide epistemological access for a diverse student body” (South Africa. CHE, 2017, p. 83). Mainstream lectures often become adept in their own fields through immersion, trial and error. Ensuring epistemological access (Morrow, 2007) and epistemic justice (Fricker, 2007) for a diverse body of students requires far more explicit induction into the knowledge and knower structures and their emergent literacy practices. The extent to which an add-on course can do this depends on the extent to which the EAP lecturers themselves have knowledge of the research on academic literacies and are able to collaborate with the expert mainstream lecturers to ensure that they are helping students to recognise the knowledge and knower practices of their target fields.

Considering that academic literacy courses around the world are often free-floating and do not draw from a field of production, that means both students and EAP lecturers are left at the mercy of fulfilling the academic expectations. Quinn (2012) puts it well that the many add-ons generic teaching and learning initiatives in HEIs need scrutiny because it is common for many subjects (including academics, accreditation bodies etc.) to believe that institutions are addressing the problem by virtue of having such courses while, in fact, they are unlikely to have any effect.

The understanding of academic literacy as a set of language skills, as revealed in this study, elucidates why many participants approach the EAP course instrumentally, with some even dismissing its importance. The student participants, in particular, reported that they did not see value in this course as so understood it simply as something that had to be completed for instrumental purposes of getting the required credits. Chen (2010) also reports on a case where students understood a course as relativist whereby the students perceived a context empty of both legitimate knowledge (weaker epistemic relations) and legitimate knowers (weaker social relations). This relativist code was experienced as a vacuum and, as a result, students reported feeling insecure, anxious, and frustrated. This was certainly echoed in this study data, highlighting why the relativist code of the EAP course is so problematic.

The problem of the relativist code is especially evident in the study's consideration of the apparent misalignment between content of the EAP course.

8.2.4 Code-clashes between the EAP course content and expectations of other courses

One key finding of this study was that the EAP course content which was intended to support students' taking on of academic practices often clashed with expectations of the mainstream courses. The assumption that the skills taught in the EAP course seamlessly translate to other courses was brought into question.

The study found that even where genres such as report writing or essay writing were taught in the EAP course and these were in some instances also found in mainstream courses, there was a code clash in that the norms and values underpinning the use of this genre in the mainstream course were not evident in the teaching of these genres in the EAP course.

Existing literature on academic literacy practices generally focuses on the context-dependent ideological nature of such practices and the literature on EAP courses often focuses on the problematic autonomous assumptions of such courses. This study identified the relativist nature of this EAP course and argued that this results in code clashes with the practices students have to take on to succeed in their mainstream classes. The use of LCT allows for the knowledge and knower structures to be made explicit. ER and SR are always evident; the EAP course did thus have both knowledge and knower expectations. However, because these were based on the idea that basic technical language skills are at the root of students' challenges and the idea that these could be taught outside of the mainstream, both the ER and SR were very weak. Similarly, the study found that there was very little introduction to condensed, powerful concepts (SD-) and the materials were largely decontextualised from where the 'skills' would be applied (SG-).

Although code-clashes are not inherently negative in academia, in courses meant to ensure inclusion, they can foster a sense of non-belonging for students (Chen, 2010). In this study, the content taught in the EAP course often contradicted the expectations of other disciplines, suggesting that such courses are at best irrelevant and at worst might make students feel they do not understand what is expected of them in the academy. Burns and Foo (2012) asserts that without clear guidelines on how to write in academia "students tend to produce writing that they think their teachers would approve" (p. 45). That alone is a discord and may precipitate a

blame game between students and lecturers, with lecturers potentially attributing students' difficulties to laziness, lack of seriousness, or inadequate English proficiency despite completing EAP courses. Conversely, students may believe they have adhered to EAP teachings when writing, only to find their work at odds with disciplinary norms. The repercussions of such code-clashes are likely to manifest as a high attrition rate in HEIs, with no resolution in sight unless current strategies, techniques, and policy aspects are critically examined and reevaluated. Most significantly, this will require a re-evaluation of the idea that there is a single 'place' called academia with generic expectations of students.

8.3 A few concluding thoughts

As indicated above, this study should shine a light on simplistic 'blame game' attempts to explain student failure as resulting from weaknesses inherent in the student or on the failure of courses such as the EAP course as if the individuals involved intended not to achieve the goal of supporting student success. Instead, as an example of realist research, this study has endeavoured to indicate a few of the many causal mechanisms that have conditioned courses such as the EAP course to take the form they do, despite a wealth of research indicating the problems with this approach.

The analysis offered in Chapters Six and Seven honed in on the nature of knowledge and knowers in the EAP course and demonstrated why add-on, generic courses with their relativist code cannot address the problems students may encounter when entering a university. I would like here to turn briefly to a reflection back on the larger context discussed in Chapter 2 and consider how these global forces also condition the emergence of such courses in the Global South despite the many critiques.

This study took place in Namibia, a Global South context. This is important because EAP courses, and those of various other related names, all of which are attempts at enhancing student success through add-on courses, have a much longer history in the Global North. These courses are relatively new in universities in Africa and other countries in the Global South. The adoption of academic literacy courses in the Global South can be seen as entwined in trends such as globalisation and neoliberalism discussed in Chapter 2. These forces shape the context in which these courses are introduced.

Literature on globalisation indicates that the knowledge flows from North to South are often neocolonial in nature and serve to bring about mimicry in universities in the Global South

(Badat, 2010). In this case, the ‘commonsense’ understanding of language use as autonomous of context (Street, 2010) comes together with increased concerns for efficiency (Halvorsen, 2016) rather than a focus on epistemological access with epistemic justice. The focus under a neoliberal higher education sector is on efficiency where knowledge is often seen to be a commodity for sale in the form of a qualification (McKenna, 2022). While it was beyond the scope of this study to consider the issues of globalisation and neoliberalism in detail, it is important to reflect on how the particular study’s findings fit into larger concerns about the purposes of higher education, and the extent to which universities in the Global South might be conditioned by such forces.

As discussed in Chapter 2, neoliberalism entails, among other things, the reduction of human activity to economic costs and benefits (Sayer, 2000). This means that higher education is understood not as the space for knowledge creation as a public good (Badat, 2010; McKenna, 2022) or as a space for students to enjoy a transformative relationship to powerful knowledge (Ashwin, 2020) but rather as a training centre for industry that sells qualifications to students (Halvorsen, 2016). These narrow economic accounts of the purposes of education mean that there is an emphasis on efficiency. Initiatives such as the EAP course can thus be framed as a means of ensuring students complete their studies in regulation time, rather than being a space where students can come to critically engage with powerful knowledge and related literacy practices.

Neoliberalism focuses on individual choices and activities and thereby absents a focus on the role of social structures (Sayer, 2010). This allows explanations for experiences to be placed in the hands of the individual rather than to see them as emerging from larger mechanisms of privilege and oppression. This was evident in the study in the ways in which the university’s norms, values and practices remained unexamined while the students were seen to need remedial attention through the EAP course.

Related to such reflection on how globalisation and neoliberalism enables the uptake of add-on, generic courses despite the critique in the research as to their effectiveness is the positioning of English as the global lingua franca. English is seen as the language of the global economy and the language of power (Cameron, 2012; Tsuda, 2013). The centrality of this in a globalised world not only reduces the value of local indigenous languages, but it also underpins the understanding that it is a lack of competence in the technicalities of language proficiency that accounts for student challenges.

Given that the concerns raised in this study about the EAP course are pervasive in the literature, it is imperative that there is no 'blame game', where individuals are held responsible for the commonsense and ineffective approaches used to address students' problems. This is one of the reasons why it is useful to consider the global forces that shape the EAP course, especially when reflecting on the nature of the language specialists in the EAP centre. While the lecturers have expertise in grammatical issues, they are not experts in the research on academic literacies, which may better enable them to develop activities that code match with the target fields. Thaiss (2012, p. 7) argues that, "to look at the teaching of writing at the programmatic level is to engage in a rich subfield of writing research". This raises the pragmatic issue of how discipline specific courses can be developed that support students to take on the practices in their mainstream studies. It would be extremely expensive and logistically challenging to offer a discipline-specific academic literacy course for every discipline. As discussed earlier in Section 3.6.2, there are recommendations in the literature (Jacobs, 2007) that academic literacy experts co-teach with discipline experts in ways intended to make the peculiar disciplinary norms more explicit to students. This would enable more scaffolded epistemological access as expectations would no longer be assumed or 'hidden' but rather would be demonstrated to students who would have opportunities to practise taking on these practices.

Others have argued that the best way of ensuring genuine epistemological access to discipline-specific practice would be through staff development. Academics often teach without any qualifications in curriculum development or pedagogy. They are unlikely to have reflected on how knowledge from the field of production has undergone changes as it moves through the fields of recontextualisation and reproduction. They are equally unlikely to have reflected on how their expectations of students in regards reading, writing and other academic literacy practices may be peculiar and related to disciplinary norms rather than to basic language competence. Teaching in ways that make these norms explicit and that offer opportunities to take on the literacy practices emerging from these norms is unlikely to be something they are trained to do.

Most importantly, if academics were trained to recognise and make explicit the norms of academic literacy practices in their field, they would also begin to see the need to critically reflect on some of these norms. Making them explicit entails opening some of them to critique by academics and students. This also means moving from a focus on gaps in the individual students' capabilities, which are seen to be in need of remediation, to a focus on collective

norms and values which can be critiqued. This is central to the call for epistemic justice (Fricker, 2007). Bringing the systemic aspects to share the responsibility underscores the warning by Lillis (2003, p. 192) that if not planned well higher education may “thwart opportunities for a higher education premised upon inclusion and diversity”.

Universities are potentially places of empowerment where knowledge is created and disseminated and where individuals enjoy transformative relationships with that knowledge that changes the ways that they understand the world and their own place within it (Ashwin, 2020). Because this includes bringing “individuals into literate contact with one another means that we cannot ignore how literacy is taught and learned” (Thaiss, 2012, p. 9). Enabling epistemological access and epistemic justice by making academic norms, values and practices accessible to all and open to critique by all thus becomes a key social justice concern.

8.4 Future Research

In my concluding thoughts, above, I argue that we need to reflect on how EAP courses are emerging in universities in the Global South in part as a larger process of globalisation and the emergence of neoliberalism as the dominant ideology of the university. This was not a key focus of the study but is a line of research that I believe could be productive going forwards and could assist in making sense of how EAP courses are being introduced across the Global South in add-on, generic ways despite the wealth of literature suggesting that they are not an effective means of enabling epistemological access. As Lillis argues, it is time to take “an imaginative leap away from conventional ways of thinking about meaning making in academia” (Lillis, 2003, p. 197).

This study looks at EAP courses being introduced in Namibia. Similar initiatives are taking place in universities across the rest of Africa. Studies that ascertain the extent to which the findings here are echoed in other contexts are needed. Furthermore, the key finding of the study, that the relativist nature of the course undermines its potential to enable epistemological access and make code clashes likely should be tested in other geographic spaces and across other kinds of EAP and “academic literacy” courses. This finding offers an opportunity for those who have researched such courses in the Global North to ascertain if the relativist code is what is legitimated in courses there too.

8.5 Conclusion

This study was undertaken from a concern about students' epistemological access to higher education and the low retention rates in Namibia. The study focused on an initiative at the University of Namibia to address this matter via the introduction of the English for Academic Purposes course. The study found that despite intentions of enabling access, the course was generally under theorised and premised on an autonomous model of literacy that understood student challenges largely as emerging from basic language proficiency. The course was a relativist code in LCT terms and thus did not equip students with either specific knowledge or specific knower dispositions that might be expected for success in their chosen courses.

It is hoped that the findings of this study offer a way forwards that might move away from replicating problematic aspects of remedial courses in the Global North to rather enabling both epistemological access and epistemic justice.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: ETHICAL CLEARANCE DOCUMENTS

Appendix 1a: Provisional Ethical Approval: Rhodes University



Education Faculty
PO Box 94, Grahamstown, 6140, South Africa
t: +27 (0) 46 603 8393
f: +27 (0) 46 603 8028
e: e.rosenberg@ru.ac.za
www.ru.ac.za

17/09/2020

Linus NEKONDO

CHERTL

g13N6679@campus.ru.ac.za

Dear Linus NEKONDO

Your application for the study "The role of academic literacy courses in students' disciplinary knowledge-building: A case study of a Namibian University", **Number 2020-1615-4637**, has been reviewed by the Education Faculty Research Ethics Committee (EF-REC).

Ethics approval has been granted pending written permission being obtained from the organisation(s) listed in your application, namely:

The Director, Centre for Research and Publications, University of Namibia.

Your application can be downloaded as a PDF version and forwarded with your permission request. Please refer to the Applicant User Guide for how to do so.

Please forward the written permission, once received, to the EF-REC Chair (E.Rosenberg@ru.ac.za) and to the Education Research Ethics Coordinators (g.chakona@ru.ac.za; s.manqele@ru.ac.za) in order for your approval to be finalised.

The Education Faculty Research Ethics Committee had a few comments on your application, which you can view on ERAS, including that:

The point about neocolonial praxis should be carefully and sensitively developed in this study, and care should be taken to not over-ideologise this point as it could cause discomfort to colleagues. It should ideally be deliberated within the research with participants and not used as a judgemental pointer to the existing form(s) of praxis. Whether contextualisation will resolve this may also be a point to consider further in the research - this whole point is an interesting ethical concern to deal with in contemporary institutional studies. The point is made to support the researcher to engage with it as the study unfolds.

Sincerely

Professor Eureka Rosenberg

Chair: Education Faculty Research Ethics Committee

Appendix 1b: Permission Request Letter to UNAM

P O Box 402
Outapi
26 September 2020

The Director: Centre for Research and Publications
University of Namibia, Main Campus
Windhoek
Namibia

Dear [name]

Re: Requesting permission to conduct research – PhD Studies

I am a registered PhD student with Rhodes University (South Africa) and a full-time Lecturer in UNAM - Hifikepunye Pohamba Campus. I am seeking permission to conduct a study on academic literacy teaching in UNAM as per the details below:

1. **Proposed topic:** The role of academic literacy courses in students' disciplinary knowledge-building: A case study of a Namibian University
2. **The objectives of the study:**
 - a) To explore the conceptualisation of academic literacy by the AL lecturers and other discipline lecturers;
 - b) To explore what is legitimated in a few disciplines of University of Namibia and whether that matches or clashes with the content of the academic literacy course; and what that means for students' academic success.
3. **Scope of the study**

To gather sufficient data, I intend to carry out the study in three faculties, i.e. the Engineering, Education and Health Sciences Faculties, on the Jose Eduardo Dos Santos (JEDS), Hifikepunye Pohamba (HP) and Oshakati Campuses. The campuses have been chosen considering their location and distance from each other in relation to HP which is my own duty station.

The data generation process involves document analysis of the UNAM Academic Literacy course documents including the course outline, study guides and assessment tasks given to students. It also includes interview with AL lecturers and discipline lecturers, as well as a focus group interview with students.

I should highlight that, whether students pass or fail Academic Literacy is NOT the purpose of this study at all and will not in any way be part of the writing of this study, nor is this study an analysis of AL courses. Rather this study will contribute to an international literature on the role of academic literacy courses in enhancing student success. Furthermore, the study will aim to provide information to the university on ways of supporting students towards success.

4. I am therefore seeking your consent to allow me access to the UNAM course materials, and to allow the Lecturers and students to participate voluntarily in this study.
5. The requisite procedures as regards ethics will be adhered to, and the findings of the study will be shared with your good office. No individuals will be identifiable in any of the reporting of data and all individuals will only participate if they elect to do so. Informed consent will be obtained from all participants prior to data collection.
6. Should you require further information, please do not hesitate to contact me on +264 81 306 5563 and lnekondo@unam.na. Alternatively, you can contact my supervisor Prof Sioux McKenna on s.mckenna@ru.ac.za
7. I hope my request will receive your favourable consideration and that this study can contribute towards the university's goal of providing access to knowledge to all our students.

Yours sincerely



Linus V. Nekondo (Mr)

Appendix 1c: UNAM Ethical Clearance



CENTRE FOR RESEARCH AND PUBLICATIONS

Office of the Pro-Vice Chancellor: Research Innovation and Development

UNIVERSITY OF NAMIBIA, Private Bag, 13301 Windhoek, Namibia

340 Mandume Ndemufayo Avenue, Pioneers Park, Office D090 ☎ +264-61-2064624 ✉ research@unam.na Fax+264-61-206 4624

07 October 2020

Dear Mr. Linus V. Nekondo,

PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH ACTIVITIES AT THE UNIVERSITY OF NAMIBIA (UNAM)

Your application to conduct research at UNAM entitled: **"The role of academic literacy courses in students' disciplinary knowledge-building: A case study of a Namibian University"** was considered based on ethical evaluation from your institution. Hence, permission is hereby granted with the following conditions:

1. During the course of your research activities at UNAM, you will observe the required procedures, norms and ethical conduct in accordance with the relevant Research Policies and Guidelines. If unsure, please consult *the Centre for Research and Publications* at UNAM for guidance. Any deviations and amendments to the original documents submitted (i.e. research proposal, interview guide, consent forms, etc.) must be submitted again for approval, before the research activities can commence.
2. **The results of the findings will be shared with the PVC: Research, Innovation and Development, and the Centre for Research and Publications, before they are disseminated or published in the public domain.**
3. Upon completion, a copy of the Research Report must be lodged with the UNAM Library for our records.
4. Proper, full acknowledgements of the University of Namibia and all participants /respondents shall be done in the Research Report and any subsequent publications arising from this research.

If you are agreeable to the above conditions, please sign and date a copy of this letter and return it the Centre for Research and Publications (Email: research@unam.na). If you have any queries, do not hesitate to contact the Centre for Research and Publications.

Wishing you all the best with your research.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Linus V. Nekondo', is written over a horizontal dashed line.

Director: Centre for Research & Publications

Appendix 1d: Full Ethical Approval: Rhodes University



Education Faculty
PO Box 94, Grahamstown, 6140, South Africa
t: +27 (0) 46 603 8393
f: +27 (0) 46 603 8028
e: e.rosenberg@ru.ac.za
www.ru.ac.za

09/10/2020

Linus NEKONDO

CHERTL

g13N6679@campus.ru.ac.za

Dear Linus Nekondo and Professor Sioux McKenna

Research Ethics Approval: The role of academic literacy courses in students' disciplinary knowledge-building: A case study of a Namibian University

I hereby grant full ethics approval for the above PhD study.

The application has been reviewed by four senior staff and tabled at the Education Faculty Research Ethics Committee meeting of 17 September 2020. The letter indicating permission from the Director, Centre for Research and Publications, University of Namibia has been received and you may proceed with the study.

Approval is granted for 1 year. An annual progress report is required in order to renew approval for an additional period. You will receive an email notifying you when the progress report is due.

Should any substantive change(s) be made during the research process, that may have ethical implications, you should notify the Education Faculty REC Chair via email. This includes changes in investigators. The REC Chair will advise as to whether a new application is necessary.

Do keep this clearance letter secure and accessible throughout your study and after its completion. It will be needed when a thesis is examined and when publications are submitted to journals.

Please also submit a brief report to the REC Chair on the completion of the research. This can be done via email. The purpose of this report is to indicate whether the research was conducted successfully and whether any ethics-related matters arose that the committee should be aware of, in order to guide future studies.

The Ethics Clearance Number for this study is 2020-1615-4637.

Sincerely,

Prof Eureta Rosenberg

Chair: Education Faculty Research Ethics Committee

APPENDIX 2: PARTICIPANTS' INFORMED CONSENT

Appendix 2a: Lecturers' informed consent declaration

Project Title: *The role of academic literacy courses in students' disciplinary knowledge-building: A case study of a Namibian University*

*I understand that, **Linus V. Nekondo** from the Faculty of **Education**, Rhodes University has requested my permission to participate in the above-mentioned research project.*

The nature and the purpose of the research project and of this informed consent declaration have been explained to me in a language that I understand.

I am aware that:

1. The purpose of the research project is to ascertain the role that English for Academic Purposes (LEA3519) plays in students' knowledge building for their disciplinary courses.
2. Rhodes University has given ethical clearance to this research project and I have seen/may request to see the clearance certificate.
3. By participating in this research project I will be contributing towards knowledge about academic literacy, particularly the issue of making the literacy practices that are expected of students explicit. The study has the potential to benefit curriculum developers, the course itself, students and the academic literacy field in general because there is a lack of empirical studies that foreground knowledge in the AL curricular in Namibia and elsewhere.
4. I am participating as a member of the teaching staff/lecturer in the Department of the campus.
5. My participation is entirely voluntary and should I wish to withdraw from participating further at any stage, I may do so without any negative consequences.
6. I will not be compensated for participating in the research.
7. There may be limited risks associated with my participation in the project. I am aware that I am being asked to share my views, perceptions, experiences and/or expectations of the course and my experiences of being a lecturer in the university.
8. I also know that I am free to leave questions unattended, as well as to withdraw from the study any time without any harm or penalisation.
9. The researcher intends publishing the research results in the form of a PhD

thesis and/or articles. However, anonymity of records will be maintained and my name and identity will not be revealed to anyone who has not been involved in the conduct of the research.

10. Transcripts of the interviews will be made available to other researchers via the Rhodes University's open data source, Figshare, but these will be fully anonymised before being made available on the platform. This process of open access to anonymised data is aimed at making sure that your input is used as fully as possible.
11. I will receive feedback in the form of an electronic copy of the thesis regarding the results obtained during the study.
12. Any further questions that I might have concerning the research or my participation will be answered by the researcher, who can be contacted on +264 81 306 5563 and lnekondo@unam.na, or by his supervisor Professor Sioux McKenna who can be contacted on s.mckenna@ru.ac.za.
13. By signing this informed consent declaration, I am not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies. A copy of this informed consent declaration will be given to me, and the original will be kept on record.
14. Signing this document also includes my permission to be recorded for the purposes of an accurate record of my views.

I, have read the above information / confirm that the above information has been explained to me in a language that I understand and I am aware of this document's contents. I have asked all questions that I wished to ask and these have been answered to my satisfaction. I fully understand what is expected of me during the research. I have not been pressurised in any way and I voluntarily agree to participate in the above-mentioned project.

.....

.....

Participant's signature

Date

Rhodes University, Research Office, Ethics
 Ethics Coordinator: ethics-committee@ru.ac.za
 t: +27 (0) 46 603 7727 f: +27 (0) 86 616 7707
 Room 220, Main Admin Building, Drostdy Road, Grahamstown, 6139

Appendix 2b: Students' informed consent declaration

Project Title: *The role of academic literacy courses in students' disciplinary knowledge-building: A case study of a Namibian University*

*I understand that, **Linus V. Nekondo** from the Faculty of **Education**, Rhodes University has requested my permission to participate in the above-mentioned research project.*

The nature and the purpose of the research project and of this informed consent declaration have been explained to me in a language that I understand.

I am aware that:

1. The purpose of the research project is to ascertain the role that English for Academic Purposes (LEA3519) plays in students' knowledge building for their disciplinary courses.
2. Rhodes University has given ethical clearance to this research project and I have seen/may request to see the clearance certificate.
3. By participating in this research project I will be contributing towards knowledge about academic literacy, particularly the issue of making the literacy practices that are expected of students explicit. The study has the potential to benefit curriculum developers, the course itself, students and the academic literacy field in general because there is a lack of empirical studies that foreground knowledge in the AL curricular in Namibia and elsewhere.
4. I will participate in the project by being part of the student focus in the Department of the campus.
5. My participation is entirely voluntary and should I wish to withdraw from participating further at any stage, I may do so without any negative consequences.
6. I will not be compensated for participating in the research.
7. There may be limited risks associated with my participation in the project. I am aware that I am being asked to share my personal experience of the course and my experiences of being a student in the university.
8. I also know that I am free to leave questions unattended, as well as to withdraw from the study any time without any harm or penalisation.
9. The researcher intends publishing the research results in the form of a PhD thesis and/or articles. However, anonymity of records will be maintained and my name and identity will not be revealed to anyone who has not been involved in the conduct of the research.

10. I will receive feedback in the form of an electronic copy of the study regarding the results obtained during the study.
11. Any further questions that I might have concerning the research or my participation will be answered by the researcher, who can be contacted on +264 81 306 5563 and lnekondo@unam.na, or by his supervisor Professor Sioux McKenna who can be contacted on s.mckenna@ru.ac.za
12. By signing this informed consent declaration, I am not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies. A copy of this informed consent declaration will be given to me, and the original will be kept on record.
13. Signing this document also includes my permission to be recorded for the purposes of an accurate record of my views.

I, have read the above information / confirm that the above information has been explained to me in a language that I understand and I am aware of this document's contents. I have asked all questions that I wished to ask and these have been answered to my satisfaction. I fully understand what is expected of me during the research. I have not been pressurised in any way and I voluntarily agree to participate in the above-mentioned project.

.....

Participant's signature	Witness	Date
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Rhodes University, Research Office, Ethics
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APPENDIX 3: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Appendix 3a: EAP Lecturers' interview questions

Working Title: *The role of academic literacy courses in students' disciplinary knowledge-building: A case study of a Namibian University*

These detailed questions were for guidance only. The interviews were conducted in as How do you understand the concept of 'academic literacy'?

1. What do you see as the purpose of the LEU3519 module?
2. What do you think are your main roles or responsibilities as a LEU3519 lecturer?
3. What type of knowledge do students need to acquire to succeed in this module? (Can you share some examples? Can you share examples of the readings and writing and other activities students do in the module?)
4. Do you think that students need to be particular kinds of people to succeed in this module? Are there particular attributes or characteristics that they need to have to succeed? If so, what are these?
5. Do you think that this course prepares students for their university studies? How? Do you think the course makes students aware of the expectations in other courses? How? Do you think that students see the connection between this module and what is expected of them in other modules?
6. What assessment activities do you give in this module? What do you hope to measure or ascertain through the assessment activities? Do you give students feedback on their assessments? What form does this feedback take? Do you think the students use the feedback?
7. The ULEA3519 course has as one of its aims a focus on academic reading, writing, listening and oral presentation skills for academic purposes. What do you see as the nature of these skills for academic purposes and how does it differ from reading, writing, listening and speaking in other contexts?
8. The ULEA3519 has as one of its aims the empowerment of students with the skills necessary to produce a referenced and researched essay written in formal academic style in the context of the university studies. Do you think that all UNAM students need to write academic essays, regardless of the discipline?
9. How do you see the differences between academic essays in different disciplines?
10. The module guide focused strongly on empowering students. How do you think this is achieved through the course? How successful do you think the course is in this regard?
11. Do you have much contact with the lecturers of other courses your students do? (If yes, probe the extent to which the disciplinary norms influence the ULEA3519).

APPENDIX 3b: Disciplinary lecturers' interview questions

Working title: The role of academic literacy courses in students' disciplinary knowledge-building: A case study of a Namibian University

1. Can you tell me a bit about your own course? What kinds of knowledge do your students need to acquire in your course? Can you share your course guide with me?
2. Can you tell me a bit about the writing students need to do in your course? (essays, reports, log books, etc) Are your students able to write at the level you expect of them? If not, what do you do to support them in their writing?
3. What kinds of texts are your students expected to read? Can you share an example of some readings with me (textbooks, course guides, journal articles)? Do you think your students are reading the texts and engaging with them at the level expected?
4. Your students all complete the LEA3519 module. This course states its aim as developing students' reading, writing, listening and oral presentation skills for academic purposes. How do you understand the purpose of the course in relation to your own course and student's engagement with your course?
5. The LEA3519 module is also meant to empower students with the skills necessary to produce a referenced and researched essay written in formal academic style in the context of the university studies. Do your students write essays in your field? If so, what is your experience of their competence in this regard? How do you support their development in essay writing? (probe about the academic essay – if expected at all and if so, what form does it take. What is the purpose of the essay in their field – what makes a 'good essay' in their field)
6. Have you heard of the concept 'academic literacy'? If so, what do you understand it to mean? (reassure that there are no right answers as the literature doesn't even agree)
7. What is your general impression of the UNAM's academic literacy course?
8. Do you think the literacy practices that students need to succeed in your course are met in the LEA3519 course?

APPENDIX 3c: Student questions' interview questions

Working title: The role of academic literacy courses in students' disciplinary knowledge-building: A case study of a Namibian University

1. Can you tell me a bit about the courses you are studying? What kinds of knowledge do you have to have to succeed? Can you share your course guide with me or just describe your course a bit?
2. Can you tell me a bit about the writing you do in your course? (essays, reports, log books, etc) Do you feel that you are able to write at the level expected by your lecturers? What are any academic writing challenges you have, if any?
3. What kinds of texts are you have to read for your courses? Can you share an example of some readings with me (textbooks, course guides, journal articles)? Do you find the reading easy or difficult and do you keep up with the readings you are meant to do?
4. You all complete the LEA3519 module. This course has the aim of 'developing students' reading, writing, listening and oral presentation skills for academic purposes'. Can you tell me a bit about your experiences of the course? Did you enjoy it or not, what do you think the aim of the course is, what did you learn from the course? I would like to hear your honest views about the course. How do you understand the purpose of the course in relation to your own studies?
5. The LEA3519 module is also meant to 'empower students with the skills necessary to produce a referenced and researched essay written in formal academic style in the context of the university studies'. Do you have to write essays in any of your other courses? If so, did the LEA3519 course help you to do this? What support do you get for essay writing? Do you feel like you need more support? If so, in what form and from whom? (probe about the academic essay – if expected at all and if so, what form does it take. What is the purpose of the essay in their field – what do they think makes a 'good essay' in their field)
6. Have you heard of the concept 'academic literacy'? If so, what do you understand it to mean? (reassure that there are no right answers as the literature does not even agree)
7. Do you think the LEA3519 course helps you to succeed in your university studies?

APPENDIX 4: FORMAT FOR THE LAB REPORT

WORKSHOP REPORT FORM - ELECTRONICS

<i>Date</i>	<i>Student Name</i>	<i>Student Number</i>
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BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF WORKS PERFORMED

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SEQUENCE OF OPERATION FOR MAIN JOB

No	Operation	Tools & Equipment