



Enhancing the Academic Writing Skills of First-Year English Second Language Students at a South African University

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ABSTRACT

The transition from high school to university for first-year students is challenging in academia, globally, and locally. Students must continually provide quality content at university and possess organisational and coherent language skills in writing essays and assignments. They should meet expectations such as demonstrating their academic writing skills, showing meaningful writing, which includes reasoning, and drawing readers' attention to the pertinent facts. For a few decades, academic support programmes, including writing centres, have been introduced in South African universities to assist first-year students in academic writing. Despite establishing these programmes, poor academic writing persists in many South African universities among first-year students. Therefore, this study explored how the Academic Writing Centre, as a collaborative scaffolded approach, could improve the academic writing skills of first-year English Second Language (ESL) students at a South African university. The study adopted a quantitative method through a descriptive research design. A questionnaire was used as an instrument for data collection. Fifty first-year students who were registered for the Senior and Further Education and Training phases at the faculty of education of a South African university were chosen (N=50; males=14, females=36). Descriptive results revealed that the Academic Writing Centre could be considered a collaborative scaffolded model to improve the academic writing skills of first-year ESL students. The study recommends exploring writing support centres and lecturers further as essential tools that can assist students in socialising the link between entry and the discourse of university subjects' academic requirements.

KEYWORDS

Scaffolded collaborative; academic writing centre; first year English second language students; academic writing skills.

INTRODUCTION

Recently, there have been increased research developments in improving academic writing skills in English Second Language (ESL) among university students locally and globally. Scholars highlighted that academic writing skills could be critical for the success of ESL students upon entering university (Bulqiyah et al., 2021; Jabali, 2018; Sujito et al., 2019; Toba & Noor, 2019) and for socialising students into the discourse of university subjects and disciplines (Pineteh, 2014). Universities, as Bernardo-Hinesley (2020) reiterates, “whether privately owned or state-funded”, are a common ground where students from “diverse linguistic and cultural, from dissimilar familial or circumstantial experiences that condition their language and cultural practices” meet. At the university, students must continually provide quality content and possess organisational and coherent language skills in writing essays and assignments. This means they should fulfil some expectations by demonstrating their academic writing skills and showing meaningful writing, including reasoning, and drawing the attention of the readers to the pertinent facts (Bakry & Alsamadani, 2015; Ceylan, 2019). It is important to note that first-year students’ writing skills are not as accomplished as expected. Studies have been conducted on the academic writing challenges faced by undergraduate students internationally (Ankawi, 2015) and locally in South African universities (Hurst, 2015; Pineteh, 2014).

Recommendations have been made to increase the access of previously disadvantaged students to higher education in South Africa. For example, academic support programmes and tutorials assist students in being university-prepared (Council on Higher Education, 2014). Despite these efforts, poor academic writing skills persist in South African universities and students struggle to obtain the required writing standard necessary for higher education essay assignments. Students still experience challenges in writing essay assignments, especially those who have learned ESL (Ajani & Gamede, 2020; Bulqiyah et al., 2021). Furthermore, the literature attests that their unpreparedness to transition into the university could cause academic writing challenges (Lea & Street, 2006; van Dyk & Weideman, 2004). According to Lea and Street (2006), these challenges could affect them as they come from linguistic minority communities. Morales & Bardo (2020) contend that teachers teaching these students at the school level tend to come from middle-class, academically literate backgrounds and may not be trained in such skills. Some scholars highlight that structural, grammatical, mechanical, and vocabulary difficulties could affect the academic writing skills of students (Ariyanti & Fitriana, 2017; Sabarun, 2019; Toba & Noor, 2019). Academic writing difficulties prevent students from moving forward and being retained in the university. (Pineteh, 2014). These could affect the completion delay and graduation rates of South African students, which are among the lowest in the world (Letseka & Maile, 2008). These could affect their retention to a degree, which hinders the vision of Education for Sustainable Development (Bekteshi & Xhaferi, 2020; Dube et al., 2023; Sung & Choi, 2022). This vision aims to provide everyone the chance to access the knowledge and data necessary for a social, economic, and environmentally sustainable future, foster critical and

creative thinking through a thoroughly interdisciplinary approach, and give the next generation a sense of the future. (Sung & Choi, 2022).

Academic literacy writing skills and higher education framework

It is significant to consider that academic literacy writing is essential to improve academic writing skills in higher education. DeFazio et al. (2010) conceptualised academic writing as a skill grounded in a person's cognitive domain in which conception, application, and amalgamation of newly acquired information are involved and in which creative stimulus, problem-solving, reflection, and modification are consequential for the completion of a manuscript. From the perspective of students, Hanafi (2020) advocates that academic writing conceptualises university writing for various courses, including assignments, reports, essays, and dissertations, in which they discuss thoughts and findings with logic and evidence. Additionally, it encompasses any paper students produce to improve their academic outcomes, including report writing, thesis writing, assignment writing, and even reflective and creative writing in institutions (Rahmat, 2022; Solikhah et al., 2022).

It is vital to consider that advocates of New Literacy Studies have long contended for a fresh perspective on comprehending student literacy and writing in academic settings. The new perspective contests the deficit model that represents student writing as somewhat reductionist depending on and emphasising language proficiency and transferable talents rather than critical thinking abilities (Lea & Street, 1998; Pineteh, 2014). This practical approach to literacy should consider cultural and contextual elements of writing and reading practices, which are crucial for understanding student learning. (Lea & Street, 1998; Street, 2004). Various scholars concur that academic writing is referred to as a literacy practice as it connects the admission of students into disciplinary groups and their adoption of the formal conventions associated with the academy (Leibowitz et al., 1997; Pineteh, 2014). Lea and Street (2006, p. 368) advocate that "approaches to student writing literacies should be perceived using three overlapping perspectives or models: (a) a study skills model; (b) an academic socialisation model; and (c) an academic literacies model".

The view of the three models focuses on recognising social and cultural practices as ideological. It, therefore, defines the student writing contexts in higher education as not simply adhering to a set of disciplinary guidelines or conventions (Pineteh, 2014). The literature argues that cultural and social practices are pivotal to academic literacy, as it includes utilising distinctive cognitive capacities to negotiate influence, authority, and identity within the landscape of universities (Beard et al., 2007; Pineteh, 2014; Street, 2004). The practices highly depend on the setting, control relations, and social connections that human creatures build (Archer, 2010; Lillis & Turner, 2001; Mdobana-Zide & Mafugu, 2023; Pineteh, 2014).

In various disciplines within the higher education sector, academic literacy writing is critical in socialising students into the modules offered in each degree (Pineteh, 2014). These skills are necessary for students to efficiently complete their studies, create a career and be capable of lifelong learning and entry into the labour market (Muller, 2021). This academic

writing skill is not only for students to meet the requirements at the university level, but is also part of a cycle of developing their skills and knowledge of academic writing which, as Garrone-Shufran (2021) establishes, creates a balance for training preservice teachers as well as the practical strategies for applying that knowledge to teaching. Therefore, learning in higher instruction includes adjusting to better approaches to knowing: better approaches to understanding, deciphering, and sorting out information. The reading and writing required by various disciplines determine the “central processes through which students learn new subjects and develop their knowledge about new areas of study” (Lea & Street, 2006, p. 158). In one of their “academic literacies” approaches, Lea and Street (1998) advocate that the literacy demands of the curriculum involve various communicative practices, including genres, fields, and disciplines. Therefore, the attention of the students should be drawn to the fact that writing for university studies differs from writing in their secondary and middle schools (Hanafi, 2020).

Academic writing at the university level requires the writer to be familiar with (a) content, (b) language skills, and (c) writing skills to write well (Rahmat, 2022). As Rahmat (2022) further posits, these requirements challenge students, as they are considered vital role players in making writing a difficult skill to acquire. The cycle, therefore, of academic writing skills and knowledge at the university level and impartation to learners in schools who will be joining universities at some point, begins now, with preservice teachers being trained and acquiring the skill (Garrone-Shufran, 2021).

However, cultural differences and social practices play significant roles in the academic writing of students and pose a challenge, especially for ESL learners. Lea & Street (1998) highlight the difficulties that many students encounter in writing and academic discourse when entering higher education, specifying that students from “minority community backgrounds may experience such difficulties to a greater degree than some other students”. Due to the complexity of the South African historical background and the transformation policies, students who have learnt English as a second or first additional language, mostly from rural areas, are affected to a greater extent. Ajani and Gamede (2020) highlight that students from rural secondary schools expressed fear as English is used at university as a primary form of instruction, making it challenging for individuals to understand and communicate their ideas through academic writing. Pineteh (2014) conducted a study on student academic challenges, which concluded that students struggle to adapt to institutional literacy practices and disciplinary discourses, such as academic writing when they first join higher education because they have poor literacy abilities. Pineteh (2014) further argues that the challenges result from how students were educated, their literacy backgrounds, and the attitudes they brought to the university. As DeFazio et al. (2010) conclude, regardless of the causes, the fact remains that the majority of students lack the abilities needed to communicate successfully in writing, which will enable them to succeed after graduation.

As long lamented by DeFazio et al. (2010, p. 34), the fundamental point is the major requirement for students at all levels to not only be proficient writers but “also to understand

the importance of good writing skills ... be able to assess the writing of others critically, particularly at the graduate level as well as in professional programs". Consequently, students must use and cognise precise scientific terminology, specific sentence structures, and different types of organisational structures when reading and writing scientific texts (Garrone-Shufran, 2021).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The sociocultural theory was developed by Vygotsky (1978), a social constructivist, and one of his most influential and best-known ideas is called the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). The ZPD refers to "the distance between the developmental level determined by independent problem-solving and the level of potential development determined through problem-solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86). In essence, ZPD positions that the inexperienced person can learn the necessary skills with the assistance of a more experienced individual but may not yet have or be able to do so on their own. (Taber, 2020). Vygotsky's belief, among other academics, is the idea that the purpose of education is to give learners experiences that fit their learning profiles and so promote and advance their learning, as much more meaningful learning occurs through the social interactions of the child with a skilled tutor (Berk & Winsler, 1995; Vygotsky, 1978). It is essential to note that the ZPD concept could be used interchangeably with the term scaffolding. However, based on Lev Vygotsky's work, the idea of scaffolding comes from a certain viewpoint on growth and learning. Scaffolding is "a process that enables a child or novice to solve a task or achieve a goal beyond his unassisted efforts" (Wood et al., 1976, p. 90).

For example, similar to how a scaffold is removed from a structure during construction, a teacher or more experienced peer helps the student in their ZPD as required and diminishes this help when it gets to be superfluous (Balaban, 1995). Scaffolding requires "the adult to control those elements of the task that are initially beyond the learner's capability, thus permitting them to concentrate upon and complete those elements within their range of competence" (Wood et al., 1976, p. 90). The theory was used to study the development of the students as consultations were conducted in a scaffolded method to assist them. Vygotsky (1978) suggests that there are two parts to the developmental level of a learner: the "actual developmental level" and the "potential developmental level". In this study, the ZPD was helpful, as it is a theory used by the Academic Writing Centre to structure its consultations. The student writes the first draft independently before consulting with the Academic Writing Centre. The Academic Writing Centre links and builds the prior knowledge of the students to determine their ZPD. After the diagnosis, the Academic Writing Centre, using the scaffolding approach, develops and assists the student with challenges identified from the first draft through a series of consultations for each student until the student reaches the final draft, ready

for submission. The theory is a valuable lens for the study as this longitudinal study will progress to 2nd, 3rd, and 4th-year levels with the same students in the same degree.

Objective of the study

The study explored how the Academic Writing Centre, as a collaborative scaffolded approach, could enhance the academic writing skills of first-year English Second Language (ESL) students at a South African university.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research approach and design

The study used quantitative research to investigate the Academic Writing Centre as a collaborative scaffolded approach to enhance the academic writing skills of first-year ESL Senior and Further Education and Training (Sen and FET) phase students at a South African university. Quantitative research systematically investigates phenomena using statistical, mathematical, or computational methods (Mohajan, 2020). Creswell (2007) concurs that quantitative research also includes gathering information, typically numerical, utilising investigative techniques to establish compatibility with statistical data collection techniques. The study adopted a descriptive design that allowed the researchers to describe and interpret the status of the settings and conditions of the respondents (Mertler, 2014) while in their natural settings.

Respondents

The respondents in this study consisted of fifty first-year students (N=50; males=14, females=36) who were chosen from a South African university. They were registered for the Senior and Further Education and Training phases at the education faculty. Thus, this study explored how the Academic Writing Centre, as a collaborative scaffolded approach, could enhance the academic writing skills of first-year English Second Language (ESL) students. Respondents experienced academic writing challenges and were recommended to consult tutors at the Academic Writing Centre for assistance in their academic writing. Their demographical variables were considered in this study.

Data collection tool

The data for this study were collected using an online questionnaire. The questionnaire was developed using Google Forms, with questions related to the study conducted with the sampled first-year ESL students in the Senior and FET, who visited the Academic Writing Centre as detailed in the results section (see Tables 1 to 6). The questions required students to share their views and any effects from the consultations with the Academic Writing Centre. Respondents answered a series of questions by indicating their responses by choosing, marking, writing a number, and checking a box (Young, 2015). The questionnaire consisted of six sections. First, the demographic section dealt with the demographic details of respondents (e.g., *gender, age, study years, study programs, phases, ethnicity, and home languages*). The second section involved how the respondents rated their writing skills/abilities (for example, *how would you*

rate your writing skills/ability?). The following section measured the consultation duration per session at the Academic Writing Centre (e.g., *approximately how long was your consultation today?*). The next section specified how the booking was made, whether they were individual or group consultations with the Academic Writing Centre, followed by a section that gave details of the consultation (e.g., *the consultant listened attentively to my concern*). The last section measured the Academic Writing Centre as a helpful and collaborative scaffolded approach for students (e.g., *understanding the topic, purpose, or subject of my assignment*). The internal consistency of this questionnaire was acceptable .70.

Data collection procedure

This study used questionnaires for data collection from fifty first-year ESL students from the Senior and Further Education and Training (Sen and FET) phases in education. The questionnaires were administered through Google Forms. The Google form questionnaire was made accessible to the whole class, and their participation in filling in the Google form was voluntary. There was no penalty for students who did not respond to the questionnaire. Some students who responded to the questionnaire had not attended the consultations with the writing centre and therefore were not included in the sample. Some students did not respond to the questionnaire.

The researchers used the five Likert scale, where respondents could select a range of possible responses to a specific question or statement. These included *Strongly Agree (SA)*, *Agree (A)*, *Neutral (N)*, *Disagree (D)*, and *Strongly Disagree (SD)*. The respondents were informed that participation in the research was voluntary and that the information collected would be confidential and only be used for academic purposes.

Data analysis

The data collected were analysed using descriptive analysis. According to Kaliyadan & Kulkarni (2019), descriptive analysis breaks a substantial quantity of data into its simplest form. Descriptive research extracts and transforms the data sets into meaningful dimensions to uncover patterns and inform improved decision-making (Loeb et al., 2017). The primary purpose of descriptive analysis is to offer a precis of the samples and measurements obtained in a study. The researchers analysed the data collected via SPSS 25, which involved descriptive statistics, including variable types (nominal, ordinal, interval, and ratio), frequency, and percentage (Kaur et al., 2018). The researchers performed the percentage to determine the demographic results of the respondents. It further assessed their rate of academic writing skills, duration in minutes for consultation per session, booking an individual or group session, details for consultation, and the Academic Writing Centre as a helpful and collaborative scaffolded approach.

Limitations of the study

The study was set and limited to fifty first-year ESL Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) degree students, registered for the Senior and Further Education and Training (Sen and FET) phases in one South African University.

RESULTS

Demographic results

This section outlines the population statistics of the respondents who took part in the study.

Table 1

Demographic results from respondents

Variables		n	%
Gender	Male	14	28
	Female	36	72
Age	18-22	45	90
	23-27	3	6
	28-32	2	4
Study Years	First Year	50	100
Study program	B Ed	50	100
Phases	Senior & FET	50	100
Ethnicity	African	50	100
Home languages	IsiZulu	24	48
	English	1	2
	Setswana	3	6
	Sesotho	11	22
	Tshivenda	1	2
	Xitsonga	1	2
	IsiXhosa	9	18
Total		50	100

Notes:

B Ed: Bachelor of Education

Senior and FET: Senior and Further Education and Training

Table 1 above shows the population statistics of the respondents in the study. The table details the gender, age, study year, the program the students are enrolled in, the phase they are being trained for, and their various ethnicities.

Table 2

Rate of academic writing skills

Statement	Rate of academic writing skills							
							Total	
	Very Good		Average		Below Average		N	%
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
How would you rate your academic writing skills/ability?	7	14	39	78	4	8	50	100

The results in Table 2 showed that thirty-nine (78%) respondents rated their academic writing skills as average after the consultation with the Academic Writing Centre. This indicates that the consultation with the Academic Writing Centre developed and improved the writing skills of the students, therefore benefitting them.

Table 3*Duration in minutes for consultation per session*

Statement	Duration in minutes for consultation per session											
	5-10		10-15		15-20		20-30		30- more		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Approximately how long was your consultation today?	1	2	3	6	3	6	5	10	38	76	50	100

The results in Table 3 indicated that 38 (76%) respondents spent more than 30 minutes per consultation session at the Academic Writing Centre. This means that most of the students required more time and assistance from the consultants during each consultation session they attended.

Table 4*Booking an individual or group session*

Statement	Booking							
	Individual				Group		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Did you book an individual or group session?	46	92	4	8	50	100		

The results in Table 4 showed that forty-six (92%) of the respondents booked an individual consultation for their academic writing at the Academic Writing Centre, while only four (8%) applied in a group. This means many students preferred and required individual attention and assistance from the Academic Writing Centre consultants instead of being assisted in a group.

Table 5*Details of the consultation*

Statements	Details of the consultations										Total	
	SD		D		N		A		SA		N	%
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%		
The consultant listened attentively to my concerns	1	2	0	0	4	8	15	30	30	60	50	100
The consultant seemed	1	2	0	0	3	6	13	26	33	66	50	100

friendly														
The consultant explained concepts clearly	1	2	0	0	5	10	19	38	25	50	50	100		
The advice my consultant gave me was very useful	0	0		2	4	8	18	36	27	54	50	100		
I am more confident in my ability to write a strong essay assignment now than I was before the consultation	0	0	2	0	7	14	26	52	16	32	50	100		
I think my paper improved because of the consultation	0	0	0	0	9	18	25	50	16	32	50	100		
I plan to return for another Write Site consultation	0	0	1	2	2	4	21	42	26	52	50	100		
Do you think the involvement of your module lecturer in the project motivated you to approach the Write Site?	0	0	1	2	3	6	20	40	26	52	50	100		

The descriptive results in Table 5 showed that thirty-one (60%) of the respondents strongly agreed that consultants at the Academic Writing Centre listened attentively to their concerns, which could develop their academic writing skills. The results in the same table revealed that thirty-three (66%) respondents strongly agreed that consultants were friendly during the consultation, and twenty-five (50%) respondents strongly agreed that consultants explained concepts clearly. The results further indicated that twenty-seven (54%) respondents strongly agreed that the consultants gave students beneficial advice. The results showed that twenty-six (52%) of the respondents agreed that they felt more confident in writing essay assignments than before the consultation. Twenty-five (50%) respondents agreed that their essays improved after the consultation at the Academic Writing Centre and twenty-six (52%) strongly agreed that they would return for another consultation at the Academic Writing Centre. The results showed that twenty-six (52%) respondents felt that the lecturer's involvement could motivate them to approach the Academic Writing Centre.

Table 6

Academic Writing Centre as a helpful and collaborative scaffolded approach for students

Statements	Responses				Total	
	No	%	Yes	%	N	%
Understand the topic, purpose, or subject of my essay assignment	10	20	40	80	50	100

Brainstorm ideas on the topic	19	38	31	62	50	100
Develop a thesis statement and supporting evidence for the argument(s) in my essay assignments	20	40	30	60	50	100
Follow the correct structure for my essay assignments	13	26	37	74	50	100
Organise and link my ideas logically	24	48	26	52	50	100
Write well-formulated paragraphs	18	36	32	64	50	100
Find and correct language mistakes in my sentences	22	44	28	56	50	100
Reference my sources effectively and accurately	11	22	39	78	50	100

The study in Table 6 revealed that the Academic Writing Centre could be a helpful and collaborative scaffolded approach for students developing academic writing abilities. The results indicated that 40 (80%) respondents understood the topic, purpose, and subject of their essay assignment, and thirty-one (62%) respondents agreed that this approach could help them brainstorm ideas about the topics of their assignments. Thirty (60%) respondents reported that this approach allowed them to develop a thesis statement and supporting evidence for the arguments in their essay assignments. Thirty-seven (74%) respondents confirmed that this approach followed the correct structure for their essay assignments. Only twenty-six (52%) respondents declared that this approach helped them organise and link their ideas logically to essay assignments. Thirty-two (64%) respondents mentioned that this approach assisted them in writing well-formulated paragraphs, and twenty-eight (56%) respondents declared that they discovered their writing mistakes in their sentences while writing their essays. Thirty-nine (78%) respondents highlighted that this approach assisted them in referencing their sources effectively and accurately in their essay assignments.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The findings revealed that the academic writing skills of most respondents were rated average after they consulted with the Academic Writing Centre and mostly spent their time consulting on their writing skills per session. The findings indicated that students needed more assistance in each consultation as they struggled when they entered higher education to deal with institutional literacy practices and disciplinary discourses in their academic writing. These results were consistent with scholars who pointed out that students enter higher education with weak literacy skills and struggle to cope with academic writing, such as institutional literacy practices and disciplinary discourses (Pineteh, 2014). These findings corroborated the literature, which highlighted that diverse linguistic and cultural, familial, and circumstantial experiences, which conditioned their language and cultural practices, could be factors that influence their academic writing skills at the university (Bernardo-Hinesley, 2020).

The findings revealed that almost all the respondents booked individual consultations for their academic writing sessions at the Academic Writing Centre. This indicates that, as the students are required to use and cognize precise scientific terminology, specific sentence structures, and different types of organizational structures when writing scientific texts (Garrone-Shufran, 2021), cultural differences and social practices play a significant role in students' academic writing and pose a challenge, especially for ESL students. The biographical details of the participants in the study also revealed that almost all the students are students whose mother tongue of their home language is not English. Further attested by Garrone-Shufran (2021) these are also the students who are coming from lower socioeconomic backgrounds and diversified cultural and ethnic groups. Students who have learned English as a second or first additional language, mostly from rural areas, are affected to a greater extent. As has been long highlighted by Lea and Street (1998) that the difficulties that many students encounter in academic writing and discourse when entering higher education, specify that students from minority community backgrounds may be more likely to experience such difficulties to a larger extent than others. Morales & Bardo (2020) contend that the teachers who are teaching these students at the school level tend to come from middle-class, academically literate backgrounds and may not be trained in such skills.

The biographical results from respondents in the study also revealed that all the students are more fluent in their home languages, which is not English, a medium of instruction in South African higher education. Scholars supported the finding that students from rural areas, lower socioeconomic backgrounds, and diversified cultural and ethnic groups have learnt English as a second or first additional language and encountered difficulties in academic writing and discourse when entering higher education (Fesi & Mncube, 2021; Morales & Bardo, 2020; Garrone-Shufran, 2021).

The findings showed that more than half of the respondents strongly agreed that consultants at the Academic Writing Centre were helpful. This is because tutors listened attentively to their concerns. They were friendly and explained to the students how to structure their work, and these sessions were practical and developed their academic writing skills. They felt more confident, and their writing of essay assignments had improved since the consultations at the Academic Writing Centre. As the students attested in their responses, most strongly agreed that they were willing to return for another consultation at the Academic Writing Centre. DeFazio et al. (2010) encourage the fundamental point of developing students into good communicators and critical writers. Most students accredited the Academic Writing Centre with the skills they gained from the consultations. They aimed to develop students to write and critically analyse their work independently. The findings suggested that half of the respondents acknowledged that the involvement of their lecturer in the process motivated them. This meant that the collaboration and participation of the lecturer with the Academic Writing Centre played an essential role in encouraging the students to book consultations with the Academic Writing Centre, which in turn benefited them. The Council on Higher Education

(2014) emphasises the importance of ensuring that academic support programmes such as lectures and writing centres are in place for the benefit of students.

The findings revealed that the Academic Writing Centre could be considered a collaborative scaffolded approach for students to develop their writing skills at a South African university. Such collaborations may be a means of assisting in achieving the vision of Education for Sustainable Development, which, according to Sung and Choi (2022), provides everyone the chance to access the knowledge and data necessary for a social, economic, and environmentally sustainable future, foster critical and creative thinking through a thoroughly interdisciplinary approach, and give the next generation a sense of the future.

Most respondents understood the content, coherence, topic, purpose, and subject of their essay assignments. This approach brainstormed ideas and allowed them to develop a thesis statement and supporting evidence for the arguments in their essays. This approach followed the correct structure for their essay assignments and helped them logically organize and link their ideas. It assisted them in writing well-formulated paragraphs, and to discover their writing mistakes in their sentences while writing their essays. Consequently, the scaffolding assistance provided by the writing centre assisted the students in using and cognising precise scientific terminology, specific sentence structures, and different types of organisational structures when reading and writing scientific texts (Garrone-Shufran, 2021). This approach helped them reference their sources effectively and accurately in their essays. The data also indicated that the scaffolding approach of the Academic Writing Centre enabled students as novices to develop and achieve beyond their unassisted efforts (Wood et al., 1976). As purported by Garrone-Shufran (2021), assistance with academic writing skills is not only for students to meet the requirements at the university level but is also part of a cycle of developing their skills and knowledge of academic writing as a preservice teacher to practically apply in teaching in schools. The Academic Writing Centre approach aligns with Vygotsky's (1978) theory that students require to develop from their "actual developmental level" to the "potential developmental level" of performance (Vygotsky, 1978) by having an adult handle the parts of the work that are initially out of the learner's scope, leaving space for growth.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, data overtly indicated that ESL students experience challenges with academic writing at the university level. Therefore, favourable environments that allow them to negotiate the meaning and understanding of their assessment, such as writing centres, benefit their development. In addition, the collaborative strategy between the lecturer and the Academic Writing Centre played an important role in negotiating the effectiveness of the consultations of students with the Academic Writing Centre. Writing centres and lecturers are essential tools that can assist students in connecting and socialising the link between entry and the discourse of university subjects and disciplines. More studies on collaborative strategies that can be used to enhance academic writing for ESL students when entering the university level need to be

explored further. The collaboration between the lecturer and the writing centre played a role in giving students a reason to approach the writing centre and receive assistance and encouraged revisits to the centre in the future. The study recommends further exploring writing centres and lecturers as essential tools that can assist students in connecting and socialising the link between entry and the discourse of university subjects.

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