UNIVERSITY OF CAPE COAST

GENDERED DIFFERENCES IN EXPOSITORY ESSAY WRITING
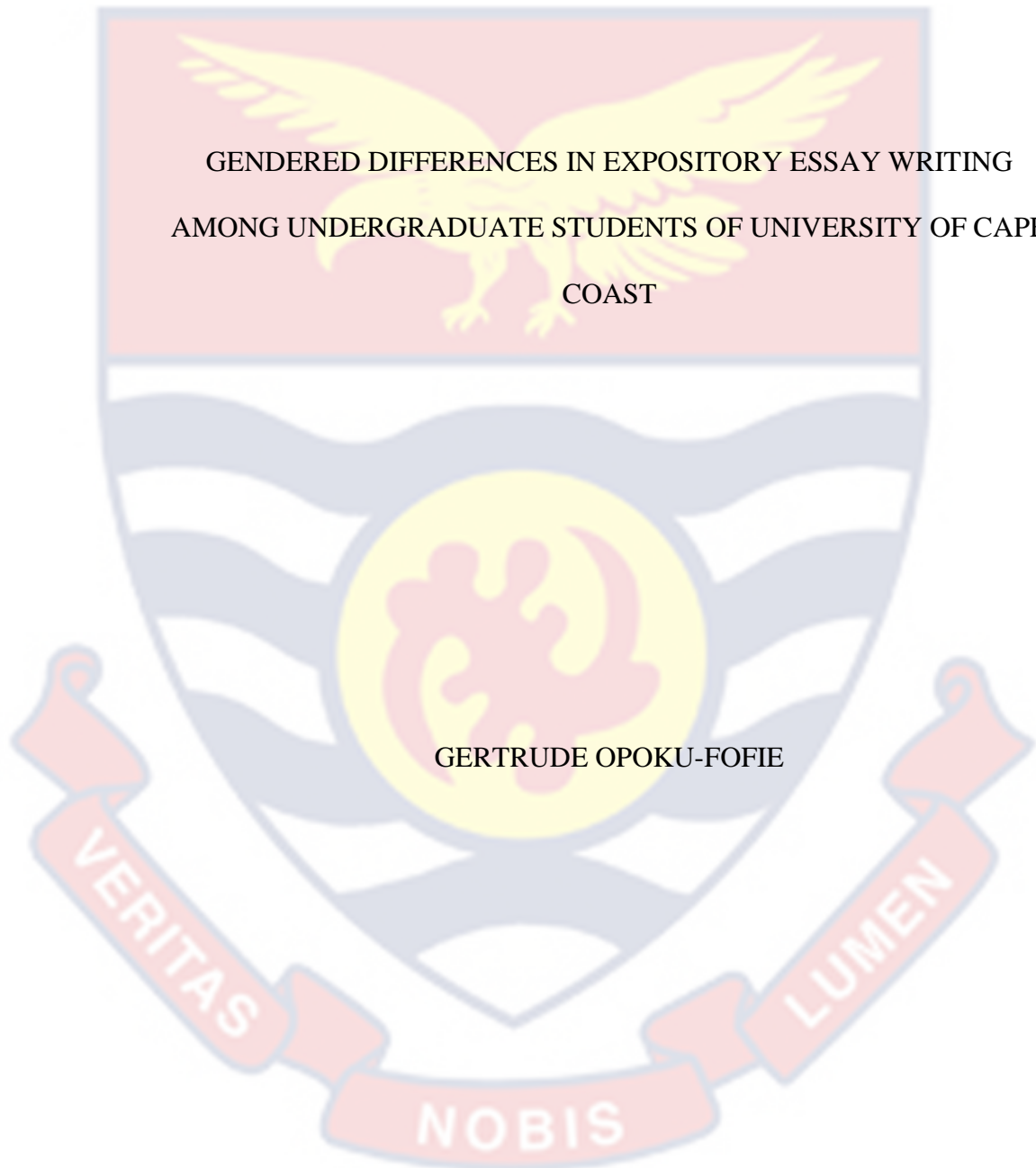
AMONG UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS OF UNIVERSITY OF CAPE

COAST

GERTRUDE OPOKU-FOFIE

2023

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BY

GERTRUDE OPOKU-FOFIE

Thesis submitted to the Department of Communication Studies of College of

Humanities, University of Cape Coast, in partial fulfilment of the requirements

for the award of Master of Philosophy Degree in Teaching Communicative

Skills

OCTOBER 2023

DECLARATION

Candidate's Declaration

I, hereby, declare that this thesis is the result of my own original research and

that no part of it has been presented for another degree in this university or

elsewhere.

Candidate's Signature:……………………………..   Date……………….

Name: Gertrude Opoku - Fofie

Supervisor's Declaration

I, hereby, declare that the preparation and presentation of the thesis were

supervised in accordance with the guidelines on supervision of thesis laid

down by the University of Cape Coast.

Supervisor's Signature: …………………   Date………………..

Name: William Kodom Gyasi, (PhD)

          Associate Professor

ABSTRACT

The present study explored gendered differences in expository essays written by undergraduate students of the University of Cape Coast. Using cluster quota-sampling techniques, the researcher sampled 215 written essays of level 100 students of the Department of Communication Studies, University of Cape Coast. Guided by systemic functional linguistic theory and *Expository Essay Quality Checklist* (2EQC), the researcher analyzed the sampled data to discover the gendered differences. First, the study revealed that male and female undergraduate students did not differ significantly in their expository essay writing competence. Secondly, the study showed that male and female undergraduate students did not differ significantly in their writing productivity as measured by word and paragraph analysis. Finally, there were no structural differences in how first year female undergraduate students structured their paragraphs. Based on these findings, the researcher recommended that there is the need to expand writing research in Ghana to include other factors that have been shown to mediate gender differences in writing productivity such as socio-economic factors, motivation, and among others.

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Last but not least, my family has been very supportive. My husband Mr. Samuel Atto Brown, my dearest and adorable mum, Madam Grace Esi Arthur, and my adorable Kings and Queen: Jo'Eku Mannoh, Papa Atta Nkum (aka Blessing Acheampong), Victoria Maud Maame Adjoa Akyeabea Brown and Bishop Joseph Atto Brown Jnr. I love you to the max. God bless you.

DEDICATION

To my Kings and Queen, without whom life is meaningless:

Jo'Eku, Papa Atta, Akyeabea and Joseph (aka Bishop).

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Introduction

This chapter sets the tone for the rest of the thesis by discussing the background of the study, in which background the writer introduces writing as essential to academic performance among undergraduate students, and defines expository writing. The researcher reviews some works on gender differences in writing, identifies the research gap by means of the statement of the research problem, and presents the research goal and objectives. Thereafter, the researcher discusses the significance of the study to theory and practice. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the delimitations of the study.

Background to the Study

English language is relatively one of the most used languages in Ghana as a medium of communication. As far back as 1970s, Sey (1973) described the use of English language in Ghana as characterized by the use of learned and archaic forms with flamboyant prose style and frequent cases of hypercorrectness. The evolution of English language use in Ghana has experienced what Adika (2012) described as "travelling the delicate expansionist path of innovation, adaptation, and maintenance of standards over the years" (p.156). This implied that English language is adapted to our local context yet maintaining the foreign standards (Nkansah, 2016; Taylor, 2016). The localization, yet standardization of the English language to fit the Ghanaian context, is largely achieved through the teaching and learning of English language at all levels of the education cycle (Taylor, 2016).

Being mindful of the paradigm shift of language instruction from error analysis tradition to the needs approach, Gborson, Afful, Coker, Akoto, Twumasi and Baiden (2015) echoed the need to adapt English language teaching (communicative skills) to meet needs of students in real life situation and industry.

This clarion call for needs approach teaching and learning of English for Specific Purpose course like Communicative Skills requires the assessment of variables that mediate students' learning such as gender. This is because the ability to communicate with good effect, such as by reading and writing, is crucial to correspond in personal and formal settings. The ability to put together formally organised and coherent written material is indispensable to one's capacity to converse, and it is a skill upon which much stock is placed in educational, professional, and personal settings (De Smedt et al., 2018). In educational contexts, reading and writing are crucial to students' understanding and acquisition of knowledge in various knowledge domains (Lea & Street, 1998). That is, students need the skills of reading and writing in order to achieve learning of content matter in their various subjects of study. At the university level, students' aptitude in formal, long-form writing is the bedrock of their academic success; to succeed, university students must possess text composition skills (Ellis & Yuan, 2004; Geiser & Studley, 2002; Krause, 2001; Thesen, 2001). Expository writing is one type of essay that university students are called on time and again to submit as part of their assessment in various courses of study.

Expository writing, a genre of academic writing, is writing that presents facts. Expository texts are written purposefully to expose truth

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and to educate. Such texts are not written with the intent to entertain or persuade. Instead, they are clear, concise, and organised fact-based texts that focus on explaining a phenomenon or issue and doing so efficiently. Expository essays often feature support for the ideas being exposed in the form of examples and evidence (Boutelier, 2021). Such texts are not subjective authors' opinions, and unlike persuasive writing, are not designed to convince a reader that a certain position on a matter is the right position. The purpose of their factual, logical, and often linear format is to inform readers (Kramer, 2021). Expository writing is generally neutral and value-free, in contrast with, for example, reflective journal writing (Shield & Galbraith, 1998). With writing being a complex activity that requires an author to deftly synchronize many cognitive and linguistic processes and resources (Hayes, 2000; Kellogg, 2001), the practice of writing expository essays, and indeed the writing process in general, helps students to acquire the ability to obtain stratagems, such as synthesis, analysis, and inference, that they need for successful learning (Bacha, 2002).

Furthermore, expository writing is among the various forms of writing that academic instructors rely on for assessing learning among students (Ellis & Yuan, 2004). The ability to write high-quality expository essays is, therefore, important if students are to cope with university life and to succeed in their studies, and later, in professional life. For this reason, good writing is often taught early in university life in order to help fresh students integrate into the academic terrain. In a deliberate effort to aid freshmen by easing their transition and integration into higher education academic environment, universities in Ghana, including the University of Cape Coast, invariably

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mount Communicative Skills courses as core areas of study for all undergraduate students.

Integration is defined by Krause (2001, p. 148) as "essentially involve[ing] bringing together of parts to make a whole." In the circumstance of transitioning first-year university students, integration involves weaving together or connecting aspects of fresh undergraduates – including their academic and social requirements, their backgrounds, their capabilities, and their educational ambitions – to various requirements of the university, such as the academic regime. It becomes obvious, then, that integration of fresh students into the university environment occurs in several planes and in an array of ways (Krause, 2001). In the present work, the focus is on academic integration.

It is crucial that fresh students are able to develop a healthy disposition toward their academic and social environment in a university. Nora (1993, p. 235) contends that university freshmen need to build a "strong affiliation" with the formal learning environment and the outside-of-class social milieu in order to succeed in becoming academically integrated into the university context. This connection with their environment is promoted through freshmen's academic interactions with instructors and fellow students (Krause, 2001). The significance of social interactions to learning among university students is supported by empirical evidence (Bruffee, 1999). The quality of student-student and student-faculty interactions in academic settings influences student outcomes, such as ability to successfully navigate personal academic development (Bruffee, 1999). Further, the quality of such academic interactions is likely to aid fresh university students to develop sense of self-

efficacy (Nagda et al., 1998). Building students' academic interaction skills, and thereby enhancing their integration into the university environment, should be a deliberate enterprise (Nora, 1993). And the effort should be made early in students' university life, that is during the transition phase. This is because the early phase of a student's university career is when they are prone to academic and social distress (Levin & Levin, 1991).

In recognition of this need to deliberately help freshmen integrate into the academic life of a university, the University of Cape Coast's Communicative Skills course builds fresh students' capacity for good academic communication and connection by instructing them in effective listening, speaking, and presentation, as well as in grammatically sound and cognitively sensible written composition. In order to assess freshman students' learning in Communicative Skills, Communication Studies faculty of the university use a combination of tasks, including an end-of-semester examination. In these examinations, students are offered the choice of writing essays.

There has been abiding academic interest in differences in writing capacity among diverse groups of people. A spectrum of higher-level characteristics has been connected with individual variability in writing performance (Al-Saadi, 2020a; Kormos, 2012). There is abundant research to support the supposition that writers differ in their writing competence, and it seems, according to cognitive and linguistic capacities, motivation, self-efficacy, anxiety, age, and even gender (Al-Saadi, 2020a; Kormos, 2012). Studies on gender-based differences in writing competence and related factors have considerable representation in the academic literature (Adams &

Simmons, 2019; Al-Saadi, 2020a; Beard & Burrell, 2010; Berninger & Fuller, 1992; Cordeiro et al., 2018; De Smedt et al., 2018; Jebreil et al., 2015; Jones & Myhill, 2007; Olinghouse, 2008; Özçalişkan & Goldin-Meadow, 2010; Pajares et al., 1999; Pajares & Valiante, 2001; Salikin, 2019; Troia et al., 2013; Zhang et al., 2019). The extant studies, and ongoing study of gender differences in writing, are justified because, as averred by Kormos (2012), it is necessary to understand individual differences and how they relate to writing ability in order to successfully teach all genres of writing, including expository writing.

Statement of the Problem

Gender as a predictor of writing quality has been given considerable academic attention. Acknowledging that female children seemed to have an advantage over their male counterparts in writing development, Adams and Simmons (2019) tested whether gender differences in early writing competence could be explained by differences in cognitive skills such as handwriting or phonological processing. The researcher observed that boys tended to produce shorter compositions with higher counts of spelling errors, thereby composing texts of inferior quality to those of their female counterparts. In that study, gender predicted writing quality to a statistically significant degree. Likewise, Cordeiro et al. (2018) observed in a formal study that female children consistently performed better than their male mates in spelling, text length, and text quality when the children were tested with narrative and opinion essays.

In an earlier study, Beard and Burrell (2010) found generally better writing competence attainment among girls over boys when a sample of nine-

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to ten-year-old children took a standardised text twice at a one-year interval. The findings of Beard and Burrell (2010) seem to support those of Berninger and Fuller (1992) who found a consistent advantage of girls over boys in writing quality markers such as numbers of words and clauses in expository and narrative compositions. Similar results were reported by Malecki and Jewell (2003): who found consistently higher performance of girls in writing fluency over males across several grade levels.

The findings that females perform better than males are consistent in other studies, such as Olinghouse (2008), Pajares and Valiante (2001), and Troia et al. (2013). Even when the writing environment is moved online and measured with technological writing markers, it appears that females continue to perform better at tasks than their male counterparts. In one study, it was found that females outperformed boys in an online essay writing task; females scored better on essays and also showed better performance in terms of editing written work, fluent text entry, and pausing to plan what to write (Zhang et al., 2019).

However, the foregoing findings, taken without discretion, could be misleading. It appears that other researchers have found no gender differences in writing ability, or have otherwise found rather nuanced differences. Adams and Simmons (2019) noted that not all studies have reported female advantage in writing performance. Adams et al. (2015) investigated gender differences in the associations between working memory and alphabet transcription and text composition abilities of children. They found that "predictors of writing fluency differed with verbal working memory skills predicting boys' writing fluency and visuo-spatial short-term memory predicting writing fluency in

girls" (Adams et al., 2015). However, the Adams et al. (2015) appear to have concluded that no significant differences in writing ability were detected between males and females. Williams and Larkin (2013) found in their study that while boys produced less written text than girls, the former's writing quality was no poorer than the latter's. Similarly, drawing on a large-scale exploration of the written linguistic competences between secondary-age boys and girls, Jones and Myhill (2007) found only small differences between males and females.

In trying to explain the lack of a broad consensus on gender differences in writing ability, some scholars have suggested the discrepancies in findings found in the raft of studies that have been reported may be due to differences in assessment methods. What is often presumed in terms of assessment is that gender differences in achievement may not be plausibly attributable to overt gender discrimination in assessment. This assumption is premised on the fact that works submitted for final examinations in universities are submitted with neutral student identity numbers, and therefore, they are marked blind. In the face of this reality, any gendered differences in writing achievement scores could be explained by other factors, such as inherent gendered differences in ability, or the application of gendered criteria (which reward certain traits in writing) to assessment without consideration for gendered differences in writing (Francis et al., 2001).

So, Adams and Simmons (2019) noted the proposal that whether females were found to outperform boys or vice versa could be attributed to the assessment being based on production-dependent indicators (such as amount that it written or writing productivity) or on production-independent markers

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(such as the perceived communicative value of the written text). For example, Fearrington et al. (2014), while reporting gender differences in overall writing ability favouring females, emphasised that the most marked differences were in writing quantity more than in writing quality. Other studies have also reported differences between males and females in writing quality and productivity (Babayiğit, 2015; Kim et al., 2015). Yet, some other scholars reported differences only in productivity indicators or failed to find differences based on quality measures (Adams et al., 2015; Jones & Myhill, 2007; Malecki & Jewell, 2003; Williams & Larkin, 2013). The reported inconsistencies indicate the need for studies that will assess writing performance using productivity markers and quality markers simultaneously or as a combined methodology.

It appears that gender differences in performance in writing persist as a subject of interest in the literature. However, a scoping review of the literature shows that most of this extant evidence is from European and American contexts. Further, more of the studies have focused on populations that speak English as their first language (L1) and less on English as Second Language (L2) contexts. Moreover, most studies have focused on children. These gaps are confirmed by a declaration by Al-Saadi (2020) in his recent paper. The purpose of the present study is, therefore, to contribute to the knowledge base by conducting an examination of gender differences in writing performance among learners who are older than the demographic mostly represented in this line of research. The study is further set apart from the existing related works by the author's simultaneous use of production-dependent measures (number of paragraphs and number of words) and a quality index.

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Research Purpose and Objectives

Goal of the Study

The broad goal of this work is to explore whether writing competence, measured as expository essay quality in English as a Second Language (ESL or L2), of UCC undergraduate students vary by gender.

Objectives of Study

The specific objectives of the study were:

1. To determine gender differences in the writing quality of University of Cape Coast undergraduate students in writing expository essays using 2EQC.

2. To examine gender differences in writing productivity (paragraph count and word count) of University of Cape Coast undergraduate students in writing expository essays.

3. To explore gender differences in the paragraph structure of expository writing of University of Cape Coast undergraduate students.

Research Questions

The study answers the following research questions:

1. How do female undergraduate students differ in their expository essay quality from their male counterparts?

2. How do male undergraduate students compare to their female counterparts in writing productivity on an expository essay task?

3. What differences in paragraph structure are discernible between male-generated and female-generated undergraduate expository essays?

Hypotheses

This study involved using inferential statistics to compare the outputs of male and female undergraduate students of the University of Cape Coast on an expository essay task. For the purpose of guiding the statistical inference tests, and being guided by the conclusions in the literature, the following hypotheses were set for Objectives One and Two.

Objective One

H_0: There is no statistically significant difference in the expository essay writing quality between male undergraduate students and female undergraduate students.

H_1: There is a statistically significant difference in the expository essay writing quality between male undergraduate students and female undergraduate students.

Objective Two

Regarding Objective Two, two sets of hypotheses were formulated. Writing productivity was operationalized as paragraph count and as word count. For each of these variables, a hypothesis was formulated.

H_0: There is no statistically significant difference in the expository essay paragraph count between male undergraduate students and female undergraduate students.

H_2: There is a statistically significant difference in the expository essay paragraph count between male undergraduate students and female undergraduate students.

H_0: There is no statistically significant difference in the expository essay word count between male undergraduate students and female undergraduate students.

H_3: There is a statistically significant difference in the expository essay word count between male undergraduate students and female undergraduate students.

Significance of the Study

Writers differ in terms of cognitive and linguistic talents. Age, gender, motivational factors, interest levels, gender role socialization, self-efficacy, performance anxiety, among others are all known to influence writing ability. Meanwhile, compositional ability is crucial to success in the academic discourse community. That is why academic writing is taught to fresh undergraduates in Ghana's universities. In fact, some universities have writing labs that are available to students of all levels. However, to successfully teach writing, it is necessary to identify and understand individual and group differences and the effects of these differences on writing performance. Such insight would make for significant input in pedagogical design. The present study adds to knowledge on the subject while supplying contextually relevant evidence on gender differences in writing in Ghana and Africa. Furthermore, as a mixed-methods study, the present study opens up another frontier for research on gender differences in writing while also strengthening the methodological rigour of the evidence base.

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Delimitations of the Study

It is acknowledged in the extant literature that several other factors may have an interactional effect on the relationship between gender and writing ability. Some of these have been identified as self-efficacy, motivation, interest, socio-economic backgrounds, etc. However, the scope of this study was restricted to a straightforward analysis of whether students' performance on an expository essay would show differences in terms of gender. While informed speculations may be made regarding findings of this study, the researcher makes no representation that these findings are generally applicable to all populations and contexts.

Limitations of the Study

The present study, as with most academic research, suffered from a number of limitations. These limitations in no way invalidate the research findings. However, a statement of them provides a useful context regarding the rigour and applicability of findings of this work.

The first limitation acknowledged relates to objectivity. This is the ethical requirement of positivist research that requires research design and interpretation to be free of undue influences. Objectivity in the present may have been undermined by the inherently subjective nature of essay assessment. As convincingly explained by Tuckman (1993), essay assessments are inherently subjective; different assessors under the same circumstances are likely to score the same essays differently; and, the same assessors under different circumstances might score the same essays differently. An antidote to this challenge is to train multiple assessors in order to coordinate their expectations, to let them score the essays, and then to test for interrater

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reliability using statistical techniques. Due to time, resource constraints, and the difficulty in finding and training additional assessors, the researcher had to use data from a single assessment in this work. This fundamentally challenges the objectivity of the essays scores that were assigned, even though the scores were given according to well-defined variables and indicators.

Another limitation to note concerned sampling procedures used in this study. The essays used for the study were written by students who had elected to answer the essay question from a number of proffered options. In essence, the data collected from this study were from a self-selected sample. Individuals in a self-selected sample may have common underlying characteristics that may not be present in those elements in the population that did not self-select. The potential consequence is a bias in the results of a study. Regardless of the reasonably large sample size, there is likelihood that self-selection may have introduced an element of bias into this study. An attempt was made to mitigate some of this effect by means of non-parametric statistical techniques. Nevertheless, the researcher advises caution in the interpretation of the findings of this study; findings of this study may suffer from threats to external validity.

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CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This chapter presents an overview and synthesis of relevant literature in order to provide an academic backdrop to the present study. The chapter opens with a discussion of various concepts that guided the formulation of the research idea, the formulation of research objectives and hypotheses, and the choice of methodological approach. Other theoretical and some conceptual discussions on the development of writing as a skill, writing style, gendered issues in cognition and writing, among others are discussed. Finally, a brief review of empirical works on the subject of gendered differences in writing and writing achievement is presented.

Conceptual Review

This section reviews some concepts and issues that are relevant to the study. Each concept contributed in a different way to the development of the research idea and objectives, and to the choice of a research approach. Some of the concepts reviewed are Butler's (1990) Gender Performativity module and Swale's Discourse Community.

Gender

In ordinary everyday language, "sex" and "gender" are often thought of as synonymous. The two terms are, therefore, often used interchangeably. However, in formal academic usage, there is a lively debate about the distinction between the two. Formally, one definition of gender is that it is "the set of behavioural, cultural, psychological, and social characteristics and practices associated with masculinity and femininity" (Buchanan, 2018).

Buchanan's definition appears to be consistent with the second-wave feminist definition of gender as a distinct construct from sex (Buchanan, 2018; Mikkola, 2022); it can be noticed that Buchanan's definition lacks an explicit reference to physiological or anatomical characteristics. Second wave feminists adopted the term "gender" as distinct from "sex" in order to separate the socially constructed, behaviour-based notion of gender from the biological determinist conceptualization of sex that held that "cultural attitudes" were determined by anatomical and physiological features of individuals (Buchanan, 2018). Even so, there are still active debates, even among feminist theories, concerning the meanings of "sex" and "gender," with neither being easy nor straightforward to define (Mikkola, 2022).

Historically, the dominant thesis in the discussion of male and female humans and their perceived differences was founded on positivist biology. Such thinking was exemplified by the theory of Geddes and Thompson in 1889, which theory the social, psychological, and behavioural characteristics and differences between males and females were attributable their respective to metabolic states. These theorists posited that women tended to be anabolic (conserving energy) and thus were generally more sluggish, passive, uninterested in politics and strife, and conservative. On the other hand, men were ketabolic (burning energy) and so were generally vivacious, unpredictable, and actively interested in politics (Mikkola, 2022; Ullah & Ali, 2012). These arguments were used as the basis for denial of women in political participation as it was presumed that their natural dispositions would make them averse to, and quite inept at, political maneuverings (Mikkola, 2022; Ullah & Ali, 2012). About a century from the time of Geddes and

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Thompson, biology-based explanations were still used as basis for disqualifying females from roles, such as piloting aircraft (Rogers, 1999). And close to the end of the 20ᵗʰ Century, it seems that empirical research supplied evidence that neurological differences accounted for gendered variations in visual-spatial tasks, among other things, thereby lending credence to the biologically determined differences competences between males and females (Gorman, 1992).

A foremost proponent of contemporary gender theory is Judith Pamela Butler, an American philosopher and gender pundit whose work has been immensely influential in discourses in the fields of third-wave feminism, political philosophy, ethics, literary theory, and in other post-structural discourses that challenge heteronormativity. In Judith Butler's seminal work, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, she established herself as a prominent global voice shaping gender discourse. Butler is particularly credited with propounding the idea that gender is performative, an idea first espoused in an earlier essay, *Performative Acts and Gender Constitution* (1988), and furthered in *Gender Trouble*. Gender performativity is the post-modern/post-structural notion that gender is a socially constructed reality that is established via behaviour and, therefore, it is possible to construct different genders by means of different behaviours. This radical idea, based on Butler's ideas, adds to and enforces that side of the feminist school of thought that propounds a distinction between sex and gender. These current notions of gender are reactionary responses to the long-hegemonic notions of gender as a binary construct that is rooted in the biologically deterministic categorization of sex.

With the explosion of feminist thought in the 1970s, the biological deterministic view of male-female traits was seriously questioned by feminists. The contention was that any behavioural and psychological differences observed between male and females were due to socialization; males and females had been, deliberately or not, socialized to internalize prevailing gender roles and to fit into established gender-biased social structures (Buchanan, 2018; Mikkola, 2022). This thought is typified by the declaration by the French philosopher, feminist activist and novelist, Simone de Beauvoir (1908-1986) that "*On ne naît pas femme: on le devient*," (De Beauvoir, 1953) which is translated as "One is not born but becomes woman" (Bergoffen & Burke, 2023). Therefore, it seems that the most popular critical theorist position is that traits and behaviours are fluid as regards gender, that these traits and behaviours are shaped more by nurture than by nature, that gender is influenced by strong cultural isomorphic forces, and that the gender/sex differentiation is merely an artifact of language (Buchanan, 2018).

However, the idea of gender being founded on sex, and that differences between males and females are based in biology and are, therefore, inherent, persists. In fact, with increasing socio-political pushback of so-called conservatism and religious fundamentalism against liberal progressivism (within which are firmly encamped feminist, critical, gender, and queer theories) (Belsie, 2023; OHCHR, 2018; *Opinions: A Conservative Pushback on Socially Conscious Investing*, 2023), biological determinism as an explanation for the differences between males and females is enjoying resurgence as a mainstream idea. At great risk to careers and political legitimacy, some voices are beginning to emerge to champion the cause

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against a total discarding of biological basis for sex differences as the foundation for gender differences. For example, in the book *The End of Gender: Debunking the Myths about Sex and Identity in Our Society*, the Canadian neurologist, former sex researcher, columnist and self-acclaimed former feminist Debra Soh attacks some of the foundations of feminist and gender-queer thinking which served as the intellectual sparks for most of the current radical ideas and praxis of gender, including transgenderism and androgyny (Carr, 2010; Soh, 2020).

In the present work, the researcher adopted a positivist, biological deterministic view of the sex-gender debate. For this reason, the researcher adopted the sex-based, dichotomous conceptualization of gender. The researcher acknowledges that such a viewpoint is considered sexist – with a derogatory meaning – by some in gender discourse (for example, see Carr, 2010). However, this dualist approach to gender is not alien to research of this kind. As illustrated in an empirical review later in this chapter, operationalization of gender as a dichotomous variable – consisting of female and male – is widespread.

Discourse Communities

The development of discourse community as a theoretical construct and area of research is often attributed to the work of John Swales. But, the term "discourse community" first appeared in sociolinguist Martin Nystrand's *What Writers Know: The Language, Process, and Structure of Written Discourse* (1982). John Swales conceded that his introduction to the term "discourse community" was in a talk delivered by Lillian Bridwell-Bowles in 1986 (Swales, 2016). Nevertheless, Swales admitted to recognising that the

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concept of discourse community was germane to the socio-rhetorical study of academic genres (Swales, 2016). In fact, in 1990, John Swales published his work *Genre Analysis: English in Academic and Research Settings*, in which he expounded the then more widely known concept of discourse communities as a related concept to genre and language learning tasks (Flowerdew, 2015; Swales, 1990a). *Genre Analysis* has been significantly influential on writing pedagogy in the English for Specific Purposes (ESP) field, particularly in the academic and research-associated fields (Flowerdew, 2015; Paltridge, 2014). In 1998, John Swales published the original version of *Other Floors, Other Voices: A Textography of a Small University Building* in which Swales presented his empirical observations from a study that people from different academic disciplines or departments and textual life histories were different in formal discourse contents, structures and patterns. Swales' observations showed not just what texts people wrote, but also why they wrote them. This latter work supplied empirical support to Swales' conceptualisation of discourse community (Swales, 2018).

In everyday social interactions, people communicate with individuals or groups of people. In applied linguistics, these groups of people are clustered into communities for the purposes of discussion and analysis; the concept of discourse community arises as a convenient placeholder for the purpose of discussing and analysing written communication within such a community (Borg, 2003). By definition, a discourse community is a group that shares some goal(s) and pursue same by means of communication (Borg, 2003; Swales, 1990b). A discourse community shares a set of abstracts artifacts – values and assumptions – in relation to their written communication. By

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"community," sociolinguists mean a "social aggregate" that does not necessarily refer to an "empirically describable object in the world," but perhaps to "an abstraction or idealization" (Irvine, 2006, p. 689).

Discourse community is conceptually different from speech community (Hymes, 1972) and interpretive community (Fish, 1980), which are older concepts (Borg, 2003; Swales, 1987). Let us begin with what speech community is. Firstly, speech community has been defined by shared linguistic rules (Irvine, 2006; Swales, 1987). However, many sociolinguists and language anthropologists have countered that language does not predict some sort of affinity such that people who share a language naturally form a social aggregate that can be thought of as a community (Irvine, 2006). Secondly, a speech community comprises people who share functional rules on what constitutes proper elocution, as illustrated by consistencies in how speech is used (Swales, 1987). Thirdly, speech community has been defined beyond mere linguistic considerations to considerations for shared socio-cultural artifacts, such as culture, values, and beliefs (Swales, 1987). By integrating these definitions, Hymes (1972) derives a more constrained definition of speech community (Swales, 1987), which could be, for example, a guild of artisans in a craft village; such a guild would likely evaluate their language use as different from others'. Consequently, Guadeloupeans, for example, would consider their Creole as different from the Guianese's, and inner-city youth might find their use of Pidgin to be different from that of suburban youth. And these social aggregates or communities, thus defined, would be bound, in a manner of speaking, by speech.

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A discourse community, on the other hand, is held together by its writings. Membership in a discourse community is on the basis of writings (Swales, 1990a). However, like a speech community, a discourse community does not have spatial and temporal limitations (Swales, 1987). In terms of difference, Swales summarised things thus: "In a speech community, the community creates the discourse; in a discourse community, the discourse creates the community" (Swales, 1987, p. 3). This is an important point that illustrates that membership in a discourse community is a choice; by choosing to participate in the discourse and by observing the discursive conventions of the community, a person can become a member of a discourse community. This is different for a speech community. Further, "in terms of the fabric of society, speech communities are centripetal (they pull people in), whilst discourse communities are centrifugal (they set people, or parts of people, apart) (Swales, 1987, p. 4). The efforts to distinguish discourse communities from speech and interpretive communities are a tacit recognition that discourse community would have criteria that would allow identification.

Originally, Swales offered six criteria for the identification of a discourse community (Swales, 1987, 1990b). Over two decades later, Swales upon reflections on the development and use of the theory offered a reconsidered and expanded set of defining characteristics of a discourse community; eight criteria were offered (Swales, 2016). The defining criteria of discourse communities are presented here below.

1. A discourse community has a generally agreed set of goals. These goals, which Swales described as "potentially discoverable" may not be immediately, or they may be public; they may be largely or only

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partly recognised by members of the community; they may be formed be agreed upon, or they may be related but contested (Swales, 1987, 1990b, 2016). It is apparent that this criterion for a discourse community allows for a clash of ideas between members who otherwise have common goals, so that even members of the community could have adversarial relationships. Not all writers agree that discourse communities have shared goals. For example, Johns (1997) advanced that discourse communities could have shared interests, but not necessarily a communality of goals. Therefore, there could be either academic discourse communities, or discourse communities within the academy (Borg, 2003). Johns (1997) put forward that the lack of consensus on the matter of shared goals or interests had led to the creation of the less fuzzy (but more sociocultural than linguistics (Borg, 2003)) concept of *community of practice* to replace *discourse community*. However, despite that a *public discourse community*, such as a generalized academic discourse community may not have collective goals or genres (Borg, 2003; Johns, 1997), it appears that discourse community as a concept has not been discarded. In fact, the theory of discourse community has been useful to studies in academic writing, but also beyond. Discourse community theory has been used to support writing for specific purposes as well. To illustrate, the theory found early use in studies of business communications contexts in works such as Killingsworth and Gilbertson (1992), Olsen (1993) and (Orlikowski & Yates, 1994). The theory is alive and well as illustrated by works such as Joan Cutting's

Analysing the Language of Discourse Communities (Cutting, 2000) and Anita Jóri's *The Discourse Community of Electronic Dance Music* (Jóri, 2022). Perhaps, discourse analysts perceive the distinction between "shared goals" and "shared interests" as little more than pedantic, semantic nit-picking. At any rate, in Swales' revised criteria, the contentious issue of goals and interests appears to be largely unaddressed (Swales, 2016).

2. A discourse community has some sort of medium or media for intercommunication among members. They may communicate via bulletins, meetings, emails, tweets, blogs, some online forum (such as Reddit), or traditional mail correspondence, among others (Swales, 1987, 1990b, 2016). Swales (2016) emphasizes that without any form of communication, the community does not exist. However, merely having attributes in common, such as subscription to a periodical, will not constitute subscribers into a discourse community (Swales, 2016).

3. A discourse community leverages the two aforementioned attributes to provide information and feedback. By means of participatory structures and processes, the discourse community exchanges information that is used to initiate actions and activities in pursuit of recruitment into, change, growth and development of, and exit from the community (Swales, 1987, 2016).

4. A discourse community possesses and continues to develop an evolving set of discoursal expectations, or genres, that it uses to further its goals and as way to illustrate its participatory structures and processes. According to (Swales, 1987, p. 6), the discoursal

expectations may involve "appropriacy of topics, the form, function and positioning of discoursal elements, and the roles texts play in the operation of the discourse community." The discoursal expectations or genres may to evolve over time and may be specific to a community; however, a community may not hold any such genre as proprietary (Swales, 2016).

5. A discourse community will also possess or develop and ever-evolving communal lexis or more or less esoteric vocabulary (Swales, 1987, 2016). This attribute is a consequence of the preceding attributes and can be manifest in the form of shorthand, jargon, abbreviations and codes.

6. According to Swales (1987, 1990b, 2016), the discourse community will also possess a minimal membership volume that retains a suitable degree of pertinent communicative and content proficiency, and either a clear or fuzzy structure or hierarchy that enables moderation of admission into and advancement within the community. People enter the community with little of the discoursal and content proficiency that characterises the community, and exit the community in a variety of (mostly involuntary) ways. The community survives if it maintains a balance between critical masses of both neophytes and experts (Swales, 1987, 1990b, 2016). The discourse community is, therefore, not static in its composition.

7. A typical discourse community comes to possess what Becker (1998, p. 186) calls "silential relations." These are tacit understandings of communicated meanings that are transmitted without the necessity of

actually speaking or writing in detail. It seems that this attribute, which is one of those introduced in Swales' expanded discourse community criteria (Swales, 2016), overlaps the fifth criterion about the development of special lexis. The fifth and seventh attributes of a discourse community fuse to create what I call "insiderspeak" – lexicon and communicative conventions that are readily understood by members of the community, but which may completely befuddle the uninitiated.

8. Finally, Swales posits that a discourse community "develops horizons of expectation, defined rhythms of activity, a sense of its history, and value systems for what is good and less good work" (2016).

These criteria generally apply to every discourse community. However, they do not constitute a rigid framework; they can be applied with some flexibility. In that sense, each of the three types of discourse community identified by Swales (2016) will have each of these criteria. However, different specific communities will meet each criterion to varying degrees.

Furthermore, Swales offered a number of disclaimers (Swales, 1987). First, the mere sharing of common characteristics or interests do not make groups into discourse communities. Second, individuals may belong to multiple discourse communities, and individuals will vary in the number of discourse communities they belong to, and therefore in the number of genres they are proficient in. As individuals move across discourse communities, they adapt their social behaviour and communicative patterns accordingly; this, though, does not suggest that individuals adopt new personalities or that they have multiple personalities. Instead, same people bring to the fore different

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genre proficiencies and cultural sensitivities that allow them to fit into changing environments (Swales, 2016). Continuing with Swales' disclaimers, membership in a discourse community does not prescribe a high degree of personal involvement among members; discourse communities without strong interpersonal relationships can still thrive. Discourse communities will vary in the degrees to which their norms evolve or stagnate. And finally, a discourse community does not necessarily have to revolve around issues and activities that are central to the lives of its members (Swales, 1987).

Types of discourse community

Swales identified three general types of discourse community in academic settings: Local, focal, and "folocal" (Swales, 2016, pp. 5–7). These communities are distinguished by their origins, the extent of their localisation, and what activities underlie their being (Swales, 2016). At least two of the categories of community have sub-categories, while the third category is a hybrid of the other two. They are discussed immediately hereafter.

Local discourse community

Local discourse communities are collections of people who have an occupation in the same defined geographical space (Swales, 2016). A discourse community could therefore be, for instances, a university department, or all public relations practitioners in a town. Local discourse communities may be sub-categorised according to residence, vocation, and occupation. Regardless of their sub-type, each one is characterised by a more or less esoteric register and lexis that foster speedy communication among members, but which those outside of the discourse communities might not be able to readily understand (Swales, 2016). Local discourse communities

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acquire outlooks and behavioural patterns that are characteristic of those communities, and which organize their routine community-related activities. Eventually, tacit value systems emerge as the basis for collective judgment of good work and poor work (Swales, 2016).

Focal discourse communities

According to Swales (2016), focal communities are in many ways the antithesis of local communities. Focal discourse communities have broader reach and likely to have a more diverse membership base (Swales, 2016). They are typically associations with regional, national, or even international reach. Their organisation may be more or less formal, and they may have more rigidly encoded and explicitly declared membership conditions, such as the payment of membership dues.

Like local communities, focal communities may also develop and use shared specialised languages that make intra-community communication efficient and yet serve to distinguish members from non-members. Even though focal communities usually have more diverse memberships, those members are bound either by professional or by recreational affiliation. Specific examples of focal communities are University Teachers Association of Ghana (UTAG).

"Folocal" discourse communities

"Folocal" discourse communities are a hybrid of local and focal communities (Swales, 2016). "Folocal" is a portmanteau devised by Swales to capture the essence of discourse communities whose members have dual, and occasionally split, allegiances because they have to deal with the challenges of negotiating the demands of their local community memberships, and those of

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their focal community memberships (Swales, 2016). In other words, members of "folocal" communities find themselves facing forces that draw them into both their local and focal communities, and therefore force them to split their time, attention, and resources between both communities. The forces that draw them into their focal communities draw them away from their commitments in their local communities, and vice versa. An example of a "folocal" community is an academic department in a university. Members of this faculty will have their local demands as members of their local discourse community (the department), which demands they have to negotiate in view of the demands imposed on them because of their membership in and commitments to external scholarly associations.

Freshmen as neophytes of University of Cape Coast discourse community

In the larger scheme of things, students of the University of Cape Coast are initiates in a discourse community. The University constitutes a discourse community – at least, the academic side of the institution comprises a discourse community. Students form members of this community along with their academic instructors as they together pursue the goals and interests of knowledge generation and exchange. In this community, freshmen and freshwomen constitute initiates who must be acculturated to the academic discourse by the experts, their instructors.

While the instructors are more or less a stable set of experts, the composition of the student body fluctuates annually with new ones admitted into the community as seniors exit, thereby maintaining a reasonably stable balance of novices to the academic writing genre and experts. While speech is used in teaching and learning, thereby nudging the community towards the

characters of a "place discourse community" (Borg, 2003, p. 399; Jóri, 2022, p. 40; Swales, 1998, 2018), there is no doubt that the bigger part of intercommunication between members of this community, at least in terms of academic work, is the written text. This written text – the main medium of communication – must follow the discursive rules and conventions of formal writing in order to be considered acceptable.

As Martin (1985) put it, "genres are how things get done, when language is used to accomplish them." Therefore, the written notes and assessment prompts, along with student-produced essays, articles, and examination scripts, constitute a genre as they together use language to accomplish the shared community goal of knowledge exchange. These tokens of communication are expected to hold up to rigorous – even if not always explicit – standards of discourse quality, and the failure to meet such requirements is considered poor performance.

Essay writing instruction in the first year of life at the University of Cape Coast is based on a shared expectations of what "good writing" should look like, and these shared expectations are evident in the course design of and instructional materials for Communicative Skills. It is on the basis of the foregoing that Swales' theory of discourse communities has been adopted as part of theoretical lens through which this study is prosecuted. In fact, the overarching goal of this study is to ascertain whether different sections of the community differ from each other in terms of the discursive quality of that is expected of academic writing.

The researcher gives attention to a review of the literature on the concepts, constructs and variables that are at the foundation of this present

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work. The researcher begins the sub-section with a brief discussion of how humans learn to write and the cognitive and language processes involved in writing. Then, the author links the conceptual review to one of the main constructs of this study by discussing gender and its relationship to writing. Thereafter, the author gives thought to genre and its relation to academic writing in second-language settings.

The Development of Writing Skills and Writing Production

There are three dimensions of writing, according to Manchón (2011). These dimensions are: 1) acquiring writing skill in another language, 2) leveraging writing to learn the desired language, and 3) writing for the purpose of gaining knowledge in a specified content area. All these dimensions are germane to language learning and usage in the Ghanaian context, considering that the English language is a second tongue to almost all Ghanaian students. However, in this present study, the focus was delimited mostly to acquiring skills in another language, and more particularly, to the individual differences in the processes of writing in a second language. Furthermore, the present work took a cognitive rather than sociocultural approach to second-language writing. This choice is explained by the fact that the objects of this study were the products of individual writing processes, and research that focuses on individual differences largely concern individual writers and their writing process (Hyland, 2011).

What is involved in writing? According to the authoritative model postulated by Kellogg (1996), writing comprises three major processes that recur and interact. The processes are: formulation, execution, and monitoring. When a writer engages in formulation, they plan the composition; they plan

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what they wish to write and how they will make ideas into words. Planning involves recovering thoughts or ideas from long-term memory, or from the instructions in the writing prompt, and placing these thoughts or ideas into a logical or reasoned sequence. Converting thoughts into words involves three processes: "retrieval of lexical items, syntactic encoding of clauses and sentences, and expression of cohesive relationships in the text" (Kormos, 2012, p. 391).

The second process in Kellogg's model is execution. This process involves the transmission of the ideas formed into visible text, whether on paper (handwritten) or on a screen (typed). Execution is, therefore, a reference to the physical writing task. The third process in Kellogg's model is monitoring, which involves the writer assuring that the written or typed text has fidelity to the cognitive formulations in the first step of the writing process. If the writer finds discrepancies with what is formulated and what is written, they revise the text. Therefore, monitoring represents the proofreading and editing process in writing. Kellogg's model is so influential that it has been used by several researchers, such as, Andringa et al. (2011), Manchón et al. (2009), and Schoonen et al. (2009), in inquiries into writing processes in second-language contexts.

It is instructive to note that Kellogg's model mirrored an earlier model in Duckworth & De Bevoise's (1986) report on the processes involved in writing at the secondary level of education. Duckworth & De Bevoise (1986) identified the writing processes as: planning, translating, reviewing and revising. The first two processes of Duckworth and De Bevoise's model map neatly unto Kellog's. The monitoring process in Kellogg's model, however,

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straddles the reviewing and revising processes in Duckworth and De Bevoise's model.

Some researchers have reported that gender influences in, at least, some of the aforementioned processes in writing. Early empirical research pointed to gender-based differences in cognitive tasks, such as planning and execution or translating. Naglieri & Rojahn (2001) found such a statistically significant difference between males and females in terms of planning and attention. Ardila et al. (2011) found gender differences in specified cognitive domains.

However, while Weber et al. (2014) acknowledged in a study that gender-based cognitive differences did exist, they demonstrated these were not innate male-female differences, and that these differences began to shift or even disappear with changing socio-cultural and economic developments, such as increased access to formative education for females. Still, Kormos (2012) acknowledged that cognitive factors and motivation might be positively related to planning or formulation processes in writing. It stands to reason to hypothesize, in agreement with Fearrington et al. (2014), that because planning is necessary to coherent writing, gender differences in the cognitive processes that underlie the planning process could potentially affect development and demonstration of writing abilities.

Genre and Second-Language (L2) Academic Writing

In ESP genre work, GENRE refers to a class of communicative
events, such as academic essays, research articles, theses and
dissertations. The discourse structures of texts in ESP genre
studies are typically referred to as MOVES, which may include

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a number of STEPS. In systemic functional work, genres are more often described in terms such as DESCRIPTIONS, PROCEDURES, RECOUNTS or EXPOSITIONS. These MICRO GENRES combine with each other to form part of larger texts or MACRO GENRES, such as academic essays or research reports. (Paltridge, 2014, p. 303)

Rhetorical genres have been defined in various ways, including similarities in strategies or forms in the discourse, similarities in audience, similarities in modes of thinking, and similarities in rhetorical situations (Miller, 1984). The diversity among the definitions of genre presents a problem for theorists and critics because it makes it difficult to establish a stable and useful concept of genre. Without a clear and agreed-upon definition, it becomes challenging to classify discourse accurately and promote critical agreement and theoretical clarity (Miller, 1984).

Interestingly, there have been arguments that have sought to downplay the importance of the aforementioned problem by criticizing genre criticism. For example, John H. Patton and Thomas M. Conley argue that genre criticism requires too much critical distance between the text and the reader, which leads to assessments that are not fully responsible. They contend that genre criticism invites reductionism, rules, and formalism, resulting in "critical determinism of the worst sort" according to Patton (Patton, 1976, p. 5), and leading to "tiresome and useless taxonomies" according to Conley (Conley, 1979, p. 47). Nevertheless, efforts to define and categorise genre have not been given up on, as such efforts are useful to theory and practice. For example, Miller (1984, p. 165) argues that genres "can serve both as an index

to cultural patterns and as tools for exploring the achievements of particular speakers and writers." Meanwhile, there exists in rhetorical genre studies a social constructivist view in which genre both responds to and plays a part in the composition of social contexts and to the socialization of people (Artemeva, 2008; Freedman & Medway, 2005; Miller, 1984). In support of this view, Miller (1984, p. 165) contends that genres "serve as keys to understanding how to participate in the actions of a community" and that the failure to understand genre as social action turns activities such as writing instruction from "what should be a practical art of achieving social ends into an act of making texts that fit formal requirements." This socialization view of genre is useful to genre-focused pedagogy (Paltridge, 2014). Genre, referring to the organisational configurations of written communication, belong to and shape discourse communities (Borg, 2003; Swales, 1990a).

Genre analysis in English for Specific Purposes is a discourse analysis of academic genres, involving the shifting of emphasis from lexicogrammatical features to rhetorical moves, and subsequently to rhetorical contexts. As applied to writing pedagogy, this thinking and praxis seems to have gained prominence in reaction to process writing pedagogy, which was insufficient to convincingly prepare students for writing academic texts (Horowitz, 1986; Paltridge, 2014). Paltridge (2014) credits Swales with the introduction of the term "genre" into the field of second-language (L2) learning, and subsequently into the ESP arena. According to Paltridge (2014), this pivotal occurrence happened in the 1980s UK when Swales conducted research into the introduction sections of research articles. Other important proponents of the necessity for genre in L2 academic writing pedagogy have been Tony Dudley-

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Evans (a long-time British linguist, ESP expert, and a leader in the development of the contemporary notion of genre, who now serves as a jazz adviser and promoter), Ann Johns (Professor Emerita of Linguistics and Writing Studies), and Ken Hyland (a professor of applied linguistics in the field of academic discourse, second language writing, and English for Academic Purposes). There are other important works that have defined the development and furtherance of modern genre theory and analysis. A useful timeline spanning four-and-a-half decades is presented in Paltridge (2014). Naturally, this timeline begins with John Swales' 1981 *Aspects of Article Introductions*, republished in 2014.

Academic Writing as a genre and "Essayist Literacy"

Just as the case is for other specific contexts, academic writing has distinct characteristics and conventions. Academic language is a component of an intricate cultural protocol that students must adopt in order to attain higher levels of success in their academic careers (Bartholomae, 1985). The character of academic language reflects, and helps to perpetuate, specific notions of the academic "project," "the peculiar ways of knowing, selecting, evaluating, reporting, concluding, and arguing" that are distinctive of the discourse in academia (Bartholomae, 1985, p. 134). Mastering the implied conventions of academic writing is crucial to the academic success of a university student (Robson et al., 2002). As Ballard and Clanchy (1988, p. 8) aver, "becoming literate in the university involves learning to 'read' the culture, learning to come to terms with its distinctive rituals, values, styles of language and behaviour." Academic writing has four specific attributes that university students must recognise and master: germaneness and sufficiency to the topic,

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proof of extensive and analytical reading, exhibition of reasoned claims and propositions, and skilled presentation (Ballard & Clanchy, 1988). Reasoned claims and propositions are particularly valued by examiners of student-produced essays (Ädel, 2010; Robson et al., 2002).

The ability to produce text in the manner required for academic purposes is termed "essayist literacy," a proficiency that is expected to be gained with increasing levels of education, and which is therefore associated with educated persons (Farr, 1993; Scollon & Scollon, 1981). As university students are initiated into the academic discourse communities related to their disciplines (through readings, discussions, lectures, etc.), it is on the basis of their written discourse that their work in their discourse community will be adjudged as sufficiently demonstrating mastery of subject matter; therefore, essayist literacy as a student characteristic is singularly germane to evaluation of the academic success of university students (Cumming, 2013; De Smedt et al., 2018; Ellis & Yuan, 2004; Geiser & Studley, 2002; Hu, 2009; L.-S. Huang, 2013; Krause, 2001; Lea & Street, 1998; Leki, 1995; Norton & Starfield, 1997; Thesen, 2001).

Essayist literacy does not come easily even to native English speakers; in fact, it has been claimed that academic writing in the English level at higher levels of learning perplexes students who have English as their first language (L1) (Hu, 2009). This challenge is more pronounced among ESL graduate candidates – students who are from non-English linguistic and cultural backgrounds (Hu, 2009). Research has shown that writing is generally the most difficult aspect of education for ESL or L2 graduate students (Burke & Wyatt-Smith, 1996; L.-S. Huang, 2013; B. Lee et al., 2013; Phakiti & Li,

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2011; Srikrai et al., 2016). In fact, it is well documented that university students, particularly in L2 and English as a Foreign Language (EFL) settings, tend to be anxious and apprehensive about writing essays as opposed to answering multiple-choice questions (Abdel Latif, 2015; Al-Shboul & Huwari, 2015; Aloairdhi, 2019; Badrasawi et al., 2016; Barwick, 1995; Faismaul & Mahbub, 2023; Fakeye & Ohia, 2016; Fitrinada & Fiftinova, 2018; Gibriel, 2019; Hartono & Maharani, 2020; Jawas, 2019; Kurniasih, 2017; Martinez et al., 2011; Phillips, 1986; Rasuan & Wati, 2021; Rehelmi, 2020; Sommer & Sommer, 2009).

Difference causes for the difficulties L2 higher education students face in writing have been reported in the literature. Kaplan (1966) and Silva (1992, 1993) attributed the difficulties to the wide dissimilarity between English and native languages. Others have attributed the difficulty to the disparity between the English learnt earlier in education, which focused more on structural knowledge, and the English that is necessary for competent academic writing (Qian & Jingxia, 2016; White, 1998). And yet others have it that differences in English and native culture make L2 students struggle with academic writing in English (Ballard & Clanchy, 1988; Bloch & Chi, 1995; Cadman, 1997). Perhaps another challenge to L2 students' essay output is related to confidence. In the discourse community that is the University, the knowledge gap between students and teachers may be overwhelming (Read et al., 2001). Higher education students may struggle to understand and analytically engage with a specified knowledge area, while also contending with the challenge of finding and competently employing the proper language or discursive codes to communicate their engagement with the subject (Read et al., 2001). Against

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this backdrop, even a peripheral acknowledgement of the knowledge gap between students and their audience (their teachers) may further erode students' confidence to exhibit essayist literacy. Furthermore, students may struggle with essayist literacy due to the higher cognitive load that is inherently required to respond to open-ended prompts in contrast to the effort required to recognise an answer from a multiple-choice battery (Sommer & Sommer, 2009; Tuckman, 1993). Research into these difficulties in L2 writing is justified because of the potentially catastrophic consequences they may have on the well-being of higher education students (Hu, 2009).

In the University of Cape Coast, students are initiated into the academic discourse community via an acculturation process that involves learning the proper discourse style. The freshman Communicative Skills courses are designed to build the essayist literacy of students in order to elevate their chances of success in the community. Both male and female fresh undergraduates receive the same amount of Communicative Skills instructional content, their successful learning of which is tested by means of essay-writing tasks in the second semester of the freshman year. While there certainly is interest in the degrees to which all students improve in their communicative competence, an interest in gendered differences in this communicative competence is justified given the acknowledgment in research that male and females may differ in their writing aptitudes. If such differences exist, then further research would be justified in order to understand the sources of these gender variations, and what interventions may help to bridge the gaps.

Essays in Academia

Essays are commonly assigned forms of writing that students enrolled in higher education will encounter during their academic tenure. Students write essays as answers to free response questions that may either be questions or open-ended prompts. Students' responses are then scored for factual accuracy, persuasiveness, articulacy, argumentation, style, and exhibited command over the subject matter. In formal education settings where sophisticated reasoning and writing form the bases of performance-based evaluations of learner gains (Pinter et al., 2014), essays have come to be mainstays of academic assessment. It is therefore imperative that students become well acquainted with, comfortable with, and reasonably competent at producing these forms of intellectual expression early on in their academic journey.

An essay is a brief, academic prose that an author uses to treat a particular subject (Harmon & Holman, 2000; Holman, 1980). They offer an outlet for an author's own arguments, thoughts, reflections, positions, etc. While the preceding definition seems to capture what is most generally accepted as what an essay is, some works have been called essays whose characteristics fall outside the very simple, generic definition offered here. For example, in terms of brevity, Thomas Malthus's 1798 classic, *An Essay on the Principle of Population* defies the definition given in this paragraph. Also, some works written in verse have been named essays. An illustration of this is the classical work *An Essay on Criticism* (1711) by Alexander Pope (1688-1744). Furthermore, not all works called essays are deemed academic, in the serious sense of the word; essays may be formal or informal, with sharp

distinctions between the two not always possible or practical (Holman, 1980). Essays that university students most often are required to write are of the academic sort. The attributes of academic essays are: "seriousness of purpose, dignity, logical organization, [and] length" (Holman, 1980, p. 169).

Producing an essay can be both a gratifying and perplexing intellectual enterprise regardless of how it is assigned. It may be assigned to be composed at take-home exercises, in which case students have the luxury of a reasonably extended period of time to explore the subject, read available literature, draw an outline of the essay, and then the produce drafts of the essay. On the other hand, an essay may be assigned to be executed in class or in an examination, in which case prior preparation, the ability to think on one's feet, imaginativeness, and confidence are necessary to produce a good quality piece within the constricted length of time assigned. Regardless of how essay tasks are assigned, confidence as well as a good degree of familiarity with and competence at mustering the language required to prosecute the task will make a difference in producing what can be judged by more expert members of the academic discourse community as 'good work' (Farr, 1993; Read et al., 2001; Scollon & Scollon, 1981; Swales, 1990a; Swales & Feak, 1995). The discomfort of writing essays may to be mitigated to some extent if students understand the main genres of essays and their requirements.

Essay genres

Generally, an exhaustive classification of essays has been elusive. According to (Holman, 1980, p. 169), essays may be classified as: "moralizing, critical, character, anecdotal, letter, narrative, aphoristic, descriptive, reflective, biographical, historical, periodical, didactic, editorial,

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whimsical, psychological, outdoor, nature, cosmical, and personal." In formal academic setting, however, it appears that the number breadth of classification is more constrained.

According to Purdue OWL® (the Purdue University Online Writing Lab), four main essay genres are recognised in academia: narrative, descriptive, argumentative (persuasive), and expository (Purdue OWL®, 2022). The different genres of essays have distinct characteristics that student essay writers must illustrate recognition of and mastery over.

The descriptive essay

This is an essay genre in which the author's primary goal is to describe a phenomenon – person, object, place, situation, experience, emotion, event, etc (Purdue OWL®, 2022). A descriptive essay is not meant to provide an exposition on a subject, and it precludes the author taking a position on a subject and defending same.

In terms of register, the descriptive essay typically lacks the formality of expository and argumentative essays, as it allows for more artistic expression and perhaps an insertion of self into the discourse. However, it may have a serious tone than a narrative essay. The point of a descriptive essay is to invite and allow the reader to share, to as high a degree as possible, in the author's experience of the phenomenon under description. Toward this goal, the author must use clear and concise language; unnecessary verbiage may dilute the experience of the reader. The author of a descriptive essay is expected to use vivid language that evokes the senses and stimulates the imagination of the intended audience. When writing expository essays, students are expected to leave their readers with a sense of having become

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well-acquainted with the author's experience of the phenomenon described (Purdue OWL®, 2022). Regardless of the above, writing a descriptive essay is not a chaotic presentation of an author's frenzied cascading of sentiments and senses; it is an organised exercise.

The narrative essay

The narrative essay tells a story. It is often a personal story, an anecdote, or some account of an experience. Students writing narrative essays are generally allowed the greatest artistic freedom among all essay writers. Hence, narrative essays do not call on the intellectuality of authors as much as argumentative and expository essays do. In fact, this genre of essay is often less formal than even descriptive essays. An indication of the author's place in the story is allowed and even encouraged.

Regardless of the less restrictive structural requirements of narrative essays, they are not supposed to be disjointed and/or unnecessarily windy accounts. While embellishments and other linguistic adornments are allowed, these must serve the purpose of the story. Meanwhile, all necessary parts of the story must be present. These are: an introduction, characters, a plot, a setting, a narrative high point, and a conclusion (Purdue OWL®, 2022). Most importantly, the narrative must have a theme, which must be clear to the reader at some point in the account. And the author must give evidence of organisation of ideas.

The argumentative (persuasive) essay

The argumentative essay as a genre of academic writing requires an author to review evidence on a subject and to present such review in prose. In this manner, argumentative essays are like expository essays in their

presentation of facts. However, argumentative essays differ in one important way: the author is required to take a stance or a position on the matter and to craft the discourse to convince the reader that the author's position is the right or correct one. Further, argumentative essays often require more extensive research about a subject than do expository essays.

In their structure, argumentative essays are similar to expository essays. Argumentative essays have the same general three-part structure as expository essays: introductory paragraph, body paragraphs, and a conclusion (Van Geyte, 2013). The introductory paragraph contains a background to the treatment of the subject, and more importantly, a clear thesis statement along with a declaration of the author's position. In the introduction, the author should also explain the relevance of the debate and why the reader should care.

The body paragraphs are given to the discussion of evidence in support of the author's position. Each body paragraph should discuss one main point that supports the author's stance on the subject, along with the evidence from research to support that point. It is good form in argumentative writing to show that the author has given careful consideration to opposing viewpoints. These dissenting ideas should be presented in the essay, not with derision, but with respect. Then, the author must show how the research evidence does not support those divergent notions. In argumentative essays, the author may also seek to hedge their own position, and to undermine dissenting positions by attacking their logic. This means that writers of an argumentative essays would do well to avoid logical fallacies in their own rhetoric.

In the conclusion to an argumentative essay, the author is expected to state the importance of the debate, to summarise and synthesise the evidence discussed in the body paragraph(s), to review how strongly the evidence supports the authors position, to summarise the flaws in opposing arguments, and to project the thesis of the argument. As with expository essays, it is not acceptable to introduce new ideas in the concluding paragraph of an argumentative essay.

The expository essay

The expository essay is a genre of essay that requires the student to investigate an idea, evaluate evidence, expound on the idea, and set forth an argument concerning that idea in a clear and concise manner. This can be accomplished through comparison and contrast, definition, example, the analysis of cause and effect, etc. (Reid, 1982).

Expository writing, a genre of academic writing, is writing that presents facts. Expository texts are written purposefully to expose truth and to educate. Such texts are not written with the intent to entertain or persuade. Instead, they are clear, concise, and organised fact-based texts that focus on explaining a phenomenon or issue and doing so efficiently. Expository essays often feature support for the ideas being exposed in the form of examples and evidence (Boutelier, 2021). They may also feature definitions, cause and effect analysis, contrasts and comparisons (Purdue OWL®, 2022). In order to write expository essays, students are often required to research a subject, assess available evidence, and explain the idea or subject (Purdue OWL®, 2022). Such texts are not subjective authors' opinions, and unlike persuasive writing, are not designed to convince a reader that a certain

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position on a matter is the right position. The purpose of their factual, logical, and often linear format is to inform readers (Kramer, 2021). Expository writing is generally neutral and value-free, in contrast with, for example, reflective journal writing (Shield & Galbraith, 1998). With writing being a complex activity that requires an author to deftly synchronize many cognitive and linguistic processes and resources (Hayes, 2000; Kellogg, 2001), the practice of writing expository essays, and indeed the writing process in general, helps students to acquire the ability to obtain stratagems, such as synthesis, analysis, and inference, that they need for successful learning (Bacha, 2002). Furthermore, expository writing is among the various forms of writing that academic instructors rely on for assessing learning among students (Ellis & Yuan, 2004). The ability to write high-quality expository essays is, therefore, important if students are to cope with university life and to succeed in their studies, and later, in professional life. For this reason, good writing is often taught early in university life in order to help fresh students integrate into the academic atmosphere. The essays evaluated in the present study were expository essays on the subject of small-scale and illicit gold mining in Ghana.

Expository essays have a three-part structure (Purdue OWL®, 2022; Van Geyte, 2013): the introductory paragraph, body paragraph(s), and a concluding paragraph. Beside these, there are other important features that make a good expository essay. The following is a concise description of the structure and its features.

Thesis statement: This is a serious, clear, straight-to-the-point statement that organises and puts forth the central idea of the essay. The thesis statement

ideally occurs in the introductory paragraph of the essay. However, for stylistic and dramatic purposes, authors may defer their thesis by locating their thesis statements close to or at the end of the essays. The deferred thesis approach may build suspense and intrigue among the author's audience; nonetheless, approaching an essay in that way presents the risk of losing a reader's interest.

Introductory paragraph: The introductory paragraph usually contains the thesis statement. It also sets the background of the essay.

Body paragraph(s): these are devoted to developing the ideas in the essay. Each paragraph is devoted to one idea that supports the thesis statement. The supporting ideas may be anecdotal, factual, statistical, logical, etc. Each body paragraph must have a logical relationship with the introductory paragraph, and particularly, the thesis statement.

Concluding paragraph: this is usually a summary of the essay. It is not merely a restatement of the organising idea of the essay; instead, it provides a synthesis of the supporting ideas in the essay and concisely shows how the ideas support the thesis statement. The information in the concluding paragraph must flow logically from the discussion executed in the body paragraph(s). No fresh ideas should be interested.

Transitions: These are logical connectors between the various paragraphs and ideas in the essay. As binding agents, transitions allow the author to achieve a development and succession of thought

The features expounded above are the basic form – the bare bones – of the expository essay. However, in the academic discourse community, the goodness of an expository essay is further judged by these characteristics:

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cohesion, coherence, relevance, exposition, quantity, unity, wording, and grammaticality (Smadi & Al-Haq, 1995). These features of an expository essay are expounded upon under Data Collection Instrument in Chapter Three.

Gender Differences in Cognitive Abilities

The scientific community is fascinated by the nature and origins of the differences in individual human intelligence and in the remarkable range and variety of intellectual abilities (Barbey, 2018). For years, researchers have been interested in the differences between the cognitive abilities of male and female *Homo sapiens* (Weber et al., 2014). The efforts to identify such differences have at various times been driven by different prevailing thoughts and philosophies regarding the relative places of males and females in organised human societies. Researchers and political actors continue to be fascinated by the origins, patterns, magnitudes and explanations for any possible differences in cognition between males and females (Barbey, 2018; Weber et al., 2014).

Even though there remains controversy and caution over measurements of intelligence (Richardson, 2002; Sternberg et al., 2001), and it seems that operationalisations of the most popular intelligence indicators may have shifted over time (Must et al., 2009), the literature acknowledges that many nations saw remarkable improvement in cognitive ability in the 20th Century and perhaps beyond (Baker et al., 2015; Flynn, 1984, 1987, 2012; Flynn & Weiss, 2007; Lynn & Hampson, 1986; Neisser, 1997; Williams, 2013). This phenomenon was dubbed the Flynn Effect[1] – it was named after James Robert

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[1] Several studies have reported a reversal of the Flynn Effect in recent decades (see for examples Dutton et al. (2016); Pietschnig and Voracek (2015); Teasdale and Owen (2005, 2008))

Flynn (1934-2020) who extensively studied and described the phenomenon in the 1980s.

Researchers attributed the Flynn Effect (FE) to a variety of factors. Some researchers found positive relationships between changed living situations (health, macroeconomic shifts, household sizes, etc.) and FE (Lynn, 2009; Sundet, 2014; Sundet et al., 2008). Other studies found a link between increased brain use, for example, through education as correlating to FE (Rönnlund et al., 2013; Schneeweis et al., 2014).

The literature suggests that the evidence on cognitive gender differences is nuanced. And rightly so, considering that the research covers various stages of the human life course, human conditions, and measuring various aspects of cognition. In a study published in (1987), Vogel and Walsh found gendered differences in cognitive abilities among college-able persons with learning disabilities; males demonstrated higher visual-spatial ability, while females performed better at verbal conceptualisation.

When Hedges and Friedman (1993), conducted an analytic evaluation as a follow-up to another author's study, they found that out of 28 cognitive ability scales, males dominated the upper score distribution tails of 22 scales, including even three scales on which females had higher overall mean scores than males. Huang (1993) used 11 standard tests to study gendered cognitive abilities among Grade 11 students. Female students did better than their male counterparts on Word Knowledge and Word Span tests as well as in a computational accuracy test. Huang found that while males outperformed females on composite spatial tests, the reverse was true for composite memory

and verbal tests. Using longitudinal data from medical school admission tests, Stumpf and Jackson (1994) ran 15 analysis of cognitive differences. In all 15 tests, the researchers found that females outperformed males in memory tasks, while males outpaced females on reasoning tasks. Quite importantly, Stumpf and Jackson found that these differences were stable over the nine years for which data was analysed. In another longitudinal study, but this time of gendered differences in cognitive decline, Aartsen et al. (2004) found that adult females were superior to adult males in memory functioning. Brain imagery showed that with age, men's brains tended to atrophy faster than women's; however, this faster rate of atrophy did not predict significant male-female differences in cognitive decline.

In a study by Jorm et al. (2004), the researchers tested gendered cognitive differences on a large sample between ages 20 and 64 using a battery of tests. These included a Digital Spin Backwards tests (in which a respondent repeats a series of numbers backward from the order in which the numbers were presented), the Symbol-Digit Modalities Test (used to test mental processing and also motor speed), the California Verbal Learning Test, and others. Jorm and colleagues reported that "males performed better on Digit Span Backwards and on reaction time, while females were better on recall and Symbol–Digit Modalities Test." The researchers found that pulmonary function, pattern of alcohol use, sedentary lifestyles, education, depressive symptoms, intense cannabis consumption, and even linguistic background all mediated the observed differences.

However, when these mediating variables were controlled for, male advantage on tests seemed to disappear while female advantages seemed to

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become more prominent. Another study found that while at the individual level "gendered differences in cognitive functioning and achievement do not always favour one sex," it was quite recognised that males generally scored better than females on visuo-spatial and mathematical tasks while females excelled over males on tasks that test memory and language use (Downing et al., 2008, p. 4). Ardila et al. (2011) concluded that gendered differences during the period of cognitive development appeared in only a limited range of cognitive tests and were minimal. This conclusion was drawn from the results of a study 788 monolingual children with ages ranging from five to sixteen.

Gendered differences were found in oral language expression and comprehension, spatial aptitudes, visual and tactile perceptual exercises; boys generally outscored girls on all tasks, except on tactile ones (Ardila et al., 2011). Ardilla et al.'s finding concerning linguistic skills is particularly interesting because it seems to contradict findings of most studies; as the present empirical review has shown so far, females are generally better than males at language tasks.

The evidence base suggests that gender has an effect on cognitive ability, but the nature of this effect is complex and varies depending on specific cognitive ability being measured, and also on environmental factors. Such a conclusion is borne out by more recent scholarship on the subject. For example, Kim and Park (2017) found that gender differences in cognitive function disappeared when education was controlled, suggesting that education level is an important factor. Weber et al. (2014) found that gender differences in cognitive ability vary across different cognitive tasks, birth cohorts, and regions, and that societal improvements in living conditions and

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educational opportunities can lead to increased gender differences favoring women in some cognitive functions and decreases or elimination of differences in other cognitive abilities. Li & Singh (2014) notes that sex differences in cognitive function may have their basis in both organizational and activational effects, and that the rate of cognitive decline with aging is different between the sexes. Finally, Reilly & Neumann (2013) found in a meta-analysis that gender-role identity is associated with mental rotation performance, with masculinity being positively associated with mental rotation performance in both men and women.

In a more recent meta-analysis, the author concluded that "among both children and adults, females perform equally to males on mathematics assessments. The gender difference in verbal skills is small and varies depending on the type of skill assessed." (Hyde, 2016, p. 53) Overall, the papers suggest that gender is an important factor to consider when studying cognitive ability, but the nature of the effect is complex and varies depending on the specific cognitive ability being measured. It appears that more recent scholarship does not offer sufficient evidence to support the stereotypes that males perform better on mathematical and visuo-spatial tasks, while females show greater aptitude on language tasks (Scheiber et al., 2015). If this is true, then the recent scholarship supports the Gender Similarities Hypothesis. This hypothesis states that males and females are equal on most but not all psychological tasks and competences (Hyde, 2005).

The importance of the preceding review lies at the intersection of cognitive ability and writing ability. Writing requires significant cognitive exertion, particularly in linguistic composition processes (Ardila et al., 2011;

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Kormos, 2012; Naglieri & Rojahn, 2001; Weber et al., 2014). Because planning is necessary to coherent writing, gender differences in the cognitive processes that underlie the planning process could potentially affect development and demonstration of writing abilities (Fearrington et al., 2014).

An empirical review: Gender and Writing

There has been abiding academic interest in differences in writing capacity among diverse groups of people. A spectrum of higher-level characteristics has been connected with individual variability in writing performance (Al-Saadi, 2020a; Kormos, 2012). There are abundant of researches to support the proposition that writers differ in their writing competence, and it seems, according to cognitive and linguistic capacities, motivation, self-efficacy, anxiety, age, and even gender (Al-Saadi, 2020a; Kormos, 2012). The study of gendered differences started three decades ago with emphasis on the gendered differences in terms of performance in academic task.

In a study of the influence of mode of discourse, experiential demand, and gender on the quality of the essays of eighth-graders, Engelhard (1992) used robust inferential statistical analyses to show that gender, along with the other two independent variables were significant predictors of writing quality. Across 18 writing tasks given, Engelhard (1992) found that females received consistently higher ratings over males. A similar finding was reported when statewide assessments in Georgia (Atlanta, USA) were studied. In this study, 31 writing tasks were administered to 170, 899 eighth-grade students over the course of three years. Using a multivariate analysis of variance the authors found, among other things, that females composed better essays than males

(Engelhard et al., 1994). It seems that females not only outperform males on writing tasks, but that females also seem to be more confident in their ability to write. An example of this phenomenon was observed in a study of over 300 elementary school children (Pajares et al., 1999). When writing quality is operationalized as writing fluency, females seem to continue to outperform males. This was confirmed by the finding in a study by Malecki and Jewell (2003).

In a study of student- and instructor-level predictors of narrative essay output quality, Olinghouse (2008) found statistically significant differences between male and female third grade pupils on the variable used to measure writing ability. In that study, the indicator of writing ability was compositional fluency, which was operationalized as the number of words produced within fifteen minutes. It did not matter that words were illegible, misspelt, or used incorrectly; if they were written, they counted. Olinghouse found that compositional fluency was significantly predicted by handwriting fluency, advanced planning ability, and also gender. In 15 minutes, girls on average wrote 16 more words than did boys, and it was not because females had greater handwriting fluency as this was controlled for in the statistical model used in the analysis (Olinghouse, 2008). Olinghouse's work, therefore, added further evidence to support the fact of female advantage in writing when they are compared to males.

Beard and Burrell (2010) studied gendered differences in writing attainment among 9- to 11-year-old pupils using two writing genres, narrative and persuasive. Beard and Burrell's study is one of the most reliable reviewed for the present study. This is because of their comprehensive description of the

assessment rubrics used in scoring the children's essays, and in their overall methodological rigour. Of the five constituents of writing on which each essay was assessed[2], girls consistently outperformed boys in four and in statistically significant ways. Girls did better than boys on text length, literacy Impact scores, and text-level features of narrative texts (Beard & Burrell, 2010).

In terms of writing productivity (quantum of words), Beard and Burrell's finding agrees with that of Williams and Larkin (2013) who studied sixty-four 9- to 12-year-olds using a series of reading, writing, and cognitive ability tests; girls wrote more text than boys. However, unlike in Beard and Burrell (2010), the boys in Williams and Larkin's work were not found to be inferior in written language competence. In that specific respect, Williams and Larkin's finding stands out from what is reported in the literature. For example, Williams and Larkin's finding of no gendered difference in written language competence contrasts with Fearrington et al.'s (2014) finding that girls demonstrated significantly better Correct Writing Sequence (a measure of written language expression and, hence, of language competence) than boys. However, Fearrington et al.'s (2014) findings agree with those of Beard and Burrell and also Williams and Larkin in one respect: girls wrote significantly more words than did boys. Fearrington et al.'s study was of 1,240 children from Grades 3 through 8 (2014).

Troia et al. (2013) found in their study that girls in Grades 4 through 8 outperformed boys in their classes on a fiction writing task. The essays were scored on five attributes: "conventions, sentence fluency, word choice, organization, and ideas" (Troia et al., 2013, p. 25). Using advanced inferential

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[2] 1) Purpose and organisation, 2) grammar, 3) vocabulary and style, 4) punctuation, 5) spelling, 6) handwriting

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statistical techniques, Troia et al. (2013) found that girls seemed to have higher motivation towards writing and engaged in more writing activity in and out of school. While it is not clear that Troia et al. (2013) intended to draw a link between motivation and writing activity on one hand, and writing performance, it appears that the authors' findings supply a subtle notion of such a link. If that is true, then it would explain better female performance over their male counterparts, and such a conclusion would be in agreement with published works.

In one uncommon study of more matured writers – undergraduates – females performed "above average" while males performed "below average" on an assessment in a Process Writing class (Veloo et al., 2015, p. 46). In another uncommon study, in which 159 of both L1 and L2 primary school students were studied, girls outperformed boys on holistic quality of essays, written vocabulary, and compositional fluency (Babayiğit, 2015). Interestingly, in terms of how well their essays were organised, girls did not outperform boys (Babayiğit, 2015). Still, the study supports the notion that girls do better at language and written skills. And it appears that such gendered differences in language skills and writing may begin to manifest at an early age. In a literacy skills study in which the authors controlled for socio-economic status of kindergartners, it was found that even among different socio-economic strata girls seemed to manifest an advantage over boys (Lee & Otaiba, 2015).

While recent scholarship seems to lend limited credence to the proposition that males and females differ in their cognitive abilities, it appears that gendered differences persist in writing performance and in other writing

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variables, which are mostly products of cognitive processing. And these gendered differences seem to persist across different genres of writing. However, some studies suggest performance differences in performances on writing tasks may be explained by gendered socialization and stereotyping, and not by gender per se. In a study involving over 400 middle school students, Pajares and Valiante (2001) found that when gender-stereotypic beliefs were controlled for, females performance on writing tasks did not differ, in a statistically significant way, from the performance of boys.

Additionally, according to the Simple View of Reading Theory, learners who did not pick up reading competence early enough would in the future likely be poor writers. So, with some studies showing that writing competence differences may apparent as early as in kindergarten (Lee & Al Otaiba, 2015), it might just be that males in general pick up reading competence later than females, thereby showing up later as disparities in writing competence. From a cognitive psychology viewpoint, this hypothesis makes sense; studies in development science have demonstrated that boys are likely to fall behind girls of similar age in the onset of sentence construction ability (Özçalişkan & Goldin-Meadow, 2010).

Other possible explanations for gendered differences in writing performance have been considered by researchers. For example, Jebreil et al. (2015) found that males tended to have higher levels of writing anxiety, and perhaps writing apprehension than females, and this showed in results from tests of writing performance. There are also considerations for motivation as a differentiator between good writers and poor ones (Meece et al., 2009; Preckel et al., 2008). Troia et al. (2013) give attention to motivation in their study. Still

other researchers have pointed to a 'genderised' filter through which essays may be evaluated, with "prioritization of gendered characteristics" of essays (Robson et al., 2004, p. 217). This is an interesting thought that could significantly deconstruct the gender and writing evidence base if found to be consistently true. It is not in the purview of this thesis to explore the reasons why gendered differences may exist in the writing of L2 undergraduates.

A few key gaps can be identified in the empirical literature on gender influence on writing. One is that most studies on the subject tend to target young learners, particularly those in elementary school. There is little evidence of how such gender differences play out among adult writers, and whether such differences exist at all in the demographic. Furthermore, it appears that most writing assessment tests focus on narrative and persuasive texts. Additionally, there appears to be limited longitudinal evidence that tracks how gendered differences in writing competence evolve over time. This thesis hopefully adds to knowledge to address the first two gaps.

Paragraphs

A primary building block of any essay is the paragraph. "A paragraph is a group of sentences about one topic or one idea" (Folse et al., 2014, p. 4). It is a coherent "series of sentences that develop an idea" (Reid, 1982, p. 8). Each sentence in a paragraph is required to be relevant to the idea to which the paragraph is devoted. The diagram below illustrates, from bottom to top, the relationship between an essay and its building blocks.

Essay

↑

Paragraphs

↑

Sentences

↑

Words

↑
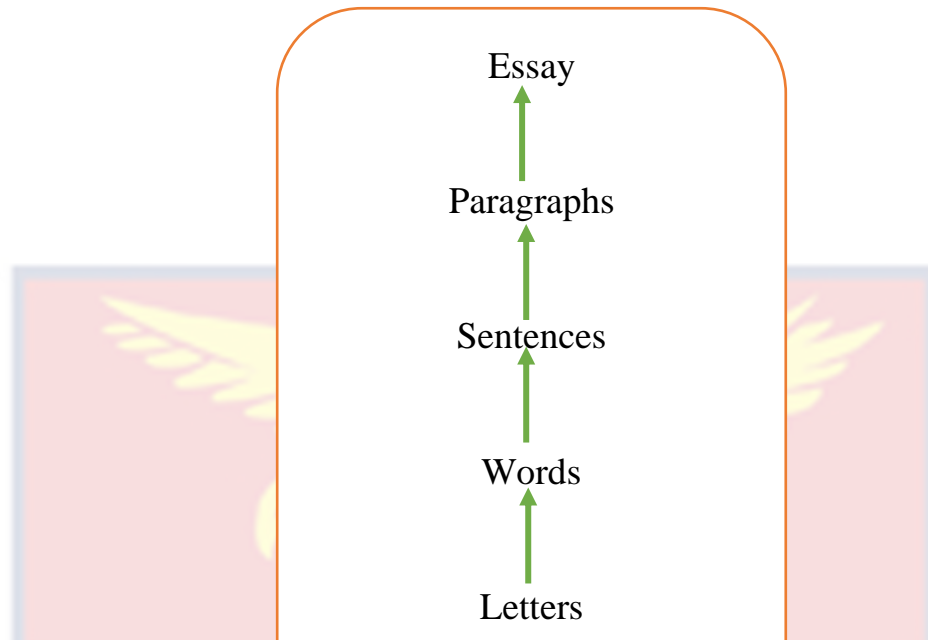
Letters

Figure 1: The building blocks of text

At the top of the hierarchy in

Figure 1 sits the final structure – the essay; at the bottom of the hierarchy is found the most basic blocks of any text – letters (Folse et al., 2010). The focus of this section of the literature review is on the penultimate structure – the paragraph.

Features of a Paragraph

Generally, a paragraph has these four main features (Folse et al., 2010, 2014):

A topic sentence: Just as a thesis statement is the organising idea of an essay, the topic sentence is the organising idea of a paragraph. In the topic sentence, the author sets forth what the paragraph is about. This sentence is often found at the beginning of the paragraph. However, a topic sentence may not always begin a paragraph (Stern, 1976). Moreover, not all paragraphs may contain a topical sentence; sometimes, paragraphs serve not as rhetorical moves on their

own, but serve to support preceding or succeeding paragraphs (Stern, 1976; M. Williams & Stevens, 1972).

A paragraph is organised around one idea: a paragraph is usually about one topic or idea, and all sentences in that paragraph served to develop and support that idea. These are the support sentences that give details. They supply answers to the *why*, *where*, *what, who*, *when*, and *how* (Folse et al., 2010, 2014). A supporting sentence may define, explain, supply reasons, supply facts, describe, illustrate, or give examples (Folse et al., 2014; Reid, 1982). These are called the techniques of support, and each topical sentence in an essay may be supported by one or multiple techniques (Reid, 1982). Supporting sentences may be arranged according to temporal logic (chronologically), spatial logic (arrangement of ideas in space), or according to importance of ideas (Reid, 1982). However the arrangement, supporting sentences are required to have a logical relation to the topic sentence or main idea. Any sentences that do not contribute to the main idea of the paragraph are considered superfluous and a sacrifice of concise expression.

The beginning of a paragraph has a clear marker: The marker signals the start of a paragraph, and delineates one paragraph from surrounding ones. In *The History of the English Paragraph* (1894), Edwin Herbert Lewis (1886-1939) traced the origins of mechanical paragraph markings in English all the way back to the works of classical scribes of the Hellenistic era. *Figure 2* illustrates how paragraphs have been marked through history. Readers of this this thesis will no doubt recognise item 38 in the Figure. In Microsoft Word®, that figure represents the "Show/Hide formatting marks" command in the Home tab.

In modern writing, indentation is the commonest way to signal where a paragraph begins (Folse et al., 2010, 2014; Wali & Madani, 2020). Indentation is achieved by moving the beginning of the first line to the right by approximately 1.27cm (0.5 inch). When writing in a word processor, indentation is achieved by moving the beginning of the first line to the tab stop position (Folse et al., 2010, 2014). An alternative to indentation is to leave space between adjacent paragraphs (Van Geyte, 2013). Indentation has been the paragraph marker of choice in this thesis.
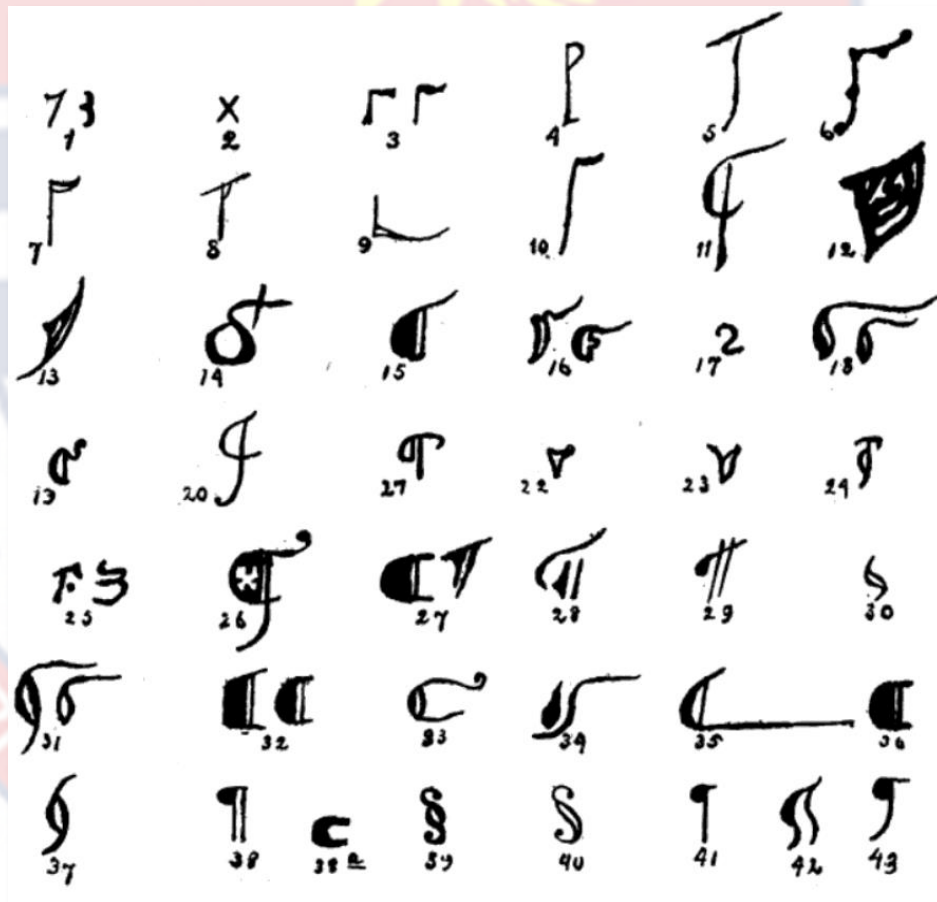

Figure 2: Paragraph marks. Source: Lewis (1894, p. 11)

The last sentence in the paragraph is a logical conclusion to the discussion in the paragraph: This sentence may recap the main point of the paragraph. To tie the concluding sentence to the topic sentence, a key phrase from the latter may

appear in the former (Folse et al., 2014). On the other hand, the concluding sentence is where the author may make a recommendation, state a position, or make a prediction (Folse et al., 2014). Some authors use the concluding sentence to supply a segue into succeeding paragraphs.

Theoretical framework

This present study moves from the dominant gendered study exploration of performance differences among females and males to examining the quality of the academic output that makes one gender outperform the other. The study therefore, considers the Systemic Functional Linguistic Theory as useful in making sense of the quality of the output of gendered writing since SFL is formed on the basis that language is a social system (Halliday, 1985).

Systemic Functional Linguistic Theory

Michael A. Halliday propounded the Systemic Functional Linguistic (SFL) theory. According to Figuiredo (2010), SFL serves dual functions in that it is both a theory of language and methodology for analyzing texts and their context of use. SFL considers language as a system of choices that serve a specific purpose or purposes (Figuiredo, 2010). According to Halliday (1978), language performs three metafunctions, which are ideational, interpersonal and textual, even though these functions can occur simultaneously.

The ideational metafunction refers to how language is used to communicate experiences of the speaker about the physical, psychological and social world (Halliday, 1978). It is usually achieved through the use of systems of transitivity which involves the process (verbal group), participant (nominal group) and circumstances (adverbial group). The interpersonal metafunction involves the relationship among speaker and their addressees. It

is usually achieved through the mood system and modality (Figuiredo, 2010). The mood system is used to give or exchange goods and services; while the modality is used to indicate the speaker's conviction about his or her representations. The last metafunction is textual which refers to the way text is organized in relation to its context and message (Halliday, 1978, 1995). Through textual analysis, discourse analyst can decipher the hidden interest of the speaker (Figuiredo, 2010).

One aspect of Halliday's ideas on SFL that is significant in teaching and learning of language, and for that matter the current study is the assertion that language is best understood within its environment of use, the context. As Lock (1996) put it: the systemic functional perspective does not focus on the distinction between grammatical and ungrammatical linguistic forms, but rather on the appropriateness of each lexico-grammatical choice for a particular communicative purpose in a particular social context.

To the second language learner especially, analyzing grammatical forms and structures is not enough except it includes description of the linguistic resources and how they are used in social interaction, and that is the main focus of SFL (Lock, 1996). In essence, SFL provides a language learner a description of language that will help him or her not only appreciate the grammatical forms and structures but also how the linguistic resources are used in daily social interaction. This extension of language analysis to the context bridges the gap to make a language proficient and possess the communicative competence they seek from language (Figuiredo, 2010).

Context is therefore, the environment in which language is used in social interaction (Halliday, 1995). Context is divided into two: context of

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situation and context of culture. Context of situation refers to specific texts and their components, and how they relate to the social process in which, they occur. The context of culture refers to the lexical and grammatical categories used in the texts (Figuiredo, 2010). To Figuiredo, (2010), the linguistic elements of a text and the context have a systemic relation. Halliday (1978) argues that context of language is important in determining whether language is functioning as substance, instrument or object in the learning process.

Language is functioning as a substance when it is the ultimate goal of the learning process, thus it is what the learner learns at the end. Language function as an instrument when it is used as a medium of instruction for imparting or sharing knowledge in all levels of education. Finally, language is used as an object when the learning of language bothers on grammar, genres, registers among others. As Figuiredo (2010, p. 126) summarized:

> "Language plays a three-fold role in language education: in linguistic terms, it is the 'substance' of what is being learned, it is what we have to master in order to perform; in extralinguistic terms, it is the 'instrument' through which we learn, and in that sense it constitutes a resource for learning; and in 'metalinguistic' terms it is the object of learning, the content we have to learn about."

The context of situation refers to the relationship of a text and the social processes within which it is produced (Figuiredo, 2010). It is defined by three components: the tenor, mode and field. In explaining these three concepts, Halliday (1978) connected how these three concepts of language achieve the concept of register. This is termed as the triadic framework that explains register variations (Lawendowski, 2010). Tenor refers to the relationship

between the addressor and the addresses (1978). Through the relationship between or among the interlocutors, the appropriate register will be used to establish the relationship. For instance, author of textbook will communicate in a manner where he or she relates with the reader as a guide or dictator of knowledge that is transferred. The field refers to the setting of the communication, thus where the communication takes place as well as the purpose and subject matter of the communication. This in textbook context could be the author being considerate of the cultural, social, political and physical realities of the Ghanaian setting and citing examples or activities that the reader could relate with. Aside this, the subject matter as well as purpose of the textbook could determine the register that is been used in the textbook. The final variation is the mode, which involves the medium used to communicate the information. It could be written or speech. In a textbook context, the medium is written or printed meaning the channel is permanent (Biber & Conrad, 2001).

Martin (2001) explored the concepts of register and genre from the SFL perspective. The author conceded Halliday's ideas that register and genre are products of situation of context and situation of culture respectively. However, Martin (2001) expanded the argument to add that the language structures and forms are used to achieve register and register in turn determines the genre. The register, according to Martin (2001), is a product of the linguistic choices of the text producer. Through the linguistic choices, the text producer is able to aid the text reader to identify and relate with the text register. Martin (2001) distinguished the probalistic realization and indexical realization. Probalistic realization refers to how the text producer make certain

linguistic choices much more than others in order to establish context of situation; whereas, the indexical realization is the process where by a text producer uses small number of linguistic choices that identifies the text register to the reader. As Martin (2001) pointed that the linguistic structure 'once upon a time' is an indexical realization in storytelling, while the relational clauses that indicates what happened establish the probalistic realization of storytelling register. Figuiredo (2010, p. 126) concluded Martin's argument by saying that "register corresponds to the context of situation, and genre to the context of culture."

SFL is critiqued for being linguistic biased in that the theory eulogizes language as a prime means of sharing meaning (Figuiredo, 2010). Moreover, metalinguistic resources are included in the systems of transitivity of SFL (Hyland, 2006). Nonetheless, the strengths of SFL remains unparalleled in dissecting language as a social system. Moreover, SFL has become the basic analytical framework and theory for understanding language in action (Figuiredo, 2010). Other linguistic and non-linguistic theoretical frameworks such as Kress and van Leeuwen (2010) multimodal framework, drew inspiration from the theoretical exegesis of Michael Halliday. The present study found this theory useful in this study for three main reasons.

First, the theory provides a framework for understanding the language of expository essay writing. The notion of systems of transitivity in SFL, it is easy for a researcher to understand the nominal, verbal and adverbial groups that are combined by students to produce meaning and communicate their thoughts to examiners. The researcher is therefore, with the aid of SFL to

interpret composition of students from not only lexico-grammatical rules perspective, but also the systemic functional theory perspective.

Second, the concept of context provides a broader view for appreciating each essay by the students. As Figuiredo (2010) rightly put, SFL is both a theory and analytical framework. As an analytical framework, it is easy to understand how gendered students within the context of their writing compose ideas in their writing. The context extends the interpretation of the texts to setting, purpose and subject as well as understanding of the relationship and medium of communication. Moreover, the context as a function of whether language is used as a means of instruction, end goal or grammatical rules is important for the researcher in this study.

Finally, the SFL theory provides layers of analysis of a text. The first layer of course deals with the textual layer where the elements composed in the essay are important to the researcher. The second layer is the interpersonal where the relationship between the writer and reader is important to the researcher. The last layer is the ideational where the understanding of the student's worldview or hidden interests is unearth to the researcher.

Formalism as a Theory of Writing

Formalism emerged as a dominant literary theory in the early 20th century, particularly associated with the Russian Formalists and later influencing structuralist and post-structuralist approaches. Rooted in the idea that the form of a literary work holds intrinsic value, formalism emphasizes the structural elements of texts over their extrinsic factors like authorial intent or historical context. This section of the literature review examines key texts and scholarly contributions that elucidate formalism as a theory of writing.

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1. Russian Formalism:

Russian Formalism, pioneered by scholars such as Viktor Shklovsky, Roman Jakobson, and Boris Eichenbaum, revolutionized literary criticism by focusing on the formal properties of literature. Shklovsky's seminal essay "Art as Technique" (1917) introduced the concept of defamiliarization (ostranenie), arguing that literature's primary function is to make the familiar strange, thereby invigorating perception. This notion underscores formalism's emphasis on the techniques and devices employed by writers to disrupt habitual modes of reading. Eichenbaum's essay "The Theory of the 'Formal Method'" (1926) further delineates formalism's approach, stressing the autonomy of literary devices and their role in shaping meaning independently of content or context.

2. Structuralism:

Formalism's legacy is evident in structuralist approaches to literature, notably elucidated by Claude Lévi-Strauss and Roland Barthes. Lévi-Strauss's work on myth, particularly in "The Structural Study of Myth" (1955), applies formalist principles to the analysis of cultural narratives, emphasizing the underlying structures that govern storytelling across diverse societies. Barthes, in "Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narratives" (1966), adapts formalist methods to examine narrative structures, foregrounding the interplay of codes and conventions in textual organization. These structuralist extensions of formalism underscore its enduring influence on literary theory.

3. Post-Structuralism:

Post-structuralist thinkers like Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault engaged critically with formalist principles while advancing new theoretical paradigms. Derrida's concept of deconstruction, articulated in works like "Of

Grammatology" (1967), interrogates the inherent instability of language and textual meaning, challenging formalism's reliance on stable structures. Foucault's archaeological method, outlined in "The Archaeology of Knowledge" (1969), eschews formalist notions of literary autonomy in favor of examining discursive formations within specific historical contexts. While diverging from formalism in important ways, post-structuralism nonetheless underscores the ongoing relevance of formalist concerns regarding the materiality and structure of texts.

4. Contemporary Perspectives:

Contemporary literary scholars continue to engage with formalist principles, albeit often in dialogue with other theoretical frameworks. Susan Sontag's "Against Interpretation" (1966) advocates for a return to the formal qualities of art, resisting the tendency to reduce works to mere vehicles for interpretation. More recently, scholars like Peter Brooks, in "Reading for the Plot" (1984), and Franco Moretti, in "Graphs, Maps, Trees" (2005), employ formalist methods to analyze narrative structures across different literary traditions and genres. These contemporary perspectives attest to the enduring significance of formalism as a theory of writing, even as it evolves in response to changing intellectual currents.

Formalism remains a foundational theory in literary studies, emphasizing the intrinsic value of formal elements in shaping textual meaning. From its origins in Russian Formalism to its influence on structuralist and post-structuralist thought, formalism continues to inform scholarly inquiry into the nature of literature. While subject to critique and revision, formalist principles persist as a vital framework for understanding the structural dynamics of writing across diverse cultural and historical contexts.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This chapter presents the methodological choices, processes and tools that were used in the conduct of this research. The chapter describes the study design, the study setting and population. Thereafter, the researcher describes the sample size, how it was determined, and how the sample was selected. Subsequent sections in the chapter present information on the research instrument, data collection and analysis procedures, and the ethical considerations that the researcher found germane to this study.

Research Design

This study employed a cross-sectional, descriptive or non-experimental design. Empirical researchers use cross-sectional designs to describe a population of interest at a defined point in time; these studies supply snapshots, as it were, of the characteristics of the population under consideration (Bhattacherjee, 2012; Cummings, 2017). Cross-sectional studies involve recording information; however, they preclude the manipulation of any of the characteristics of the population in order to record responses to such manipulation. Therefore, they are mostly useful for examining patterns or prevalence of defined conditions within a population or among subsets of it (Kumar, 2011). Nevertheless, cross-sectional studies may involve the comparison of different populations or subsets of a single population on variables of interest (Bhattacherjee, 2012; Cummings, 2017). In the present study, the researcher's motive was to simply describe the differences – or the

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absence of any – in essay writing between two groups of undergraduate students: male and female.

The researcher chose the mixed methods methodological approach to this study. Specifically, the Convergent-Parallel (Concurrent) variant of the mixed methodological approach was used. As a mixed methods study, the present project employed a combination of qualitative and quantitative data collection and analytical techniques in order to answer the proposed research questions. Mixed methods studies are a pragmatic and pluralist compromise that allows both quantitative and qualitative data and techniques to leverage in the pursuit of a research agenda (Saunders et al., 2019; Wilson, 2017). Concurrent mixed methods methodology emphasises both quantitative and qualitative data (QUAN – QUAL), and involves collecting both types of data and later combining or comparing information generated by the multiple data sources (Edmonds & Kennedy, 2017). In this approach, "different but complementary data are collected on the same phenomena" under study (Edmonds & Kennedy, 2017, p. 181).

In the present work, quantitative and qualitative data were collected on the same phenomenon, that is, essay quality as a marker of writing competence. The quantitative aspect of the study involved two efforts. The first was a subjective evaluation of the characteristics of the empirical materials (essays) according to a checklist, and the assignment of scores to these characteristics according to the evaluator's subjective assessment of the value of the essay authors' efforts in presenting each characteristic in their respective essays (this is what Saunders et al. (2019, p. 183) refer to as "quantitis[ing]" the qualitative data). The second effort involved a count of

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numbers of paragraphs and words as a marker of writing productivity. In essence, both these efforts may be described as consistent with content analysis; they involved pursuing a descriptive rather than an interpretative evaluation of the characteristics of students' essays and quantified the quality of those characteristics (Vaismoradi et al., 2013). The qualitative aspect of the present work involved an identification of the structure and internal organisation of paragraph in the essays as a subjective marker of writing competence.

Study Setting

This study was set in the University of Cape Coast (UCC), Ghana. UCC was established in October, 1962 as a University College with affiliate accreditation under the University of Ghana, Legon. On October 1, 1971, by an Act of Ghana's Parliament, the College was elevated to an autonomous University, with the authority bestow its own degrees.

The University of Cape is a full-fledged public university that was established with the core mandate to train teachers for Ghana's schools. Over the years, the UCC's mandate has expanded beyond its founding focus on teacher education, with the University currently offering a broad selection of undergraduate to doctoral programmes of study across multiple disciplines. UCC is organised into six main Colleges: School of Graduate Studies, College of Education Studies, College of Distance Education, College of Health and Allied Sciences, College of Humanities and Legal Studies, and College of Agriculture and Natural Sciences. Among them, the Colleges have a total of 17 Schools, and 106 Departments.

In order to prepare undergraduate students for the rigours of academic work in the University, UCC offers a number of core courses to fresh undergraduate students. These courses are designed to equip undergraduate students with critical skills that will prepare them for the rest of their academic lives, and other endeavours. All undergraduate freshmen are required to study courses such as Information Literacy and Communicative Skills (CS).

The latter is organised and taught by UCC's Department of Communication Studies under the College of Humanities and Legal Studies. The CS course content requires students to learn afresh or otherwise hone their reading and listening skills. They are also taught to take and make notes, outline and summarise texts, write correctly (punctuation and grammar), and to write responsibly (citation and plagiarism). Assessment in the CS course involves, among other things, the option for students to compose an essay on a contemporary issue in Ghanaian society.

Population

This study targeted undergraduate students who studied the core subject Communicative Skills across all disciplines at the University of Cape Coast in the 2021/2022 academic year. While the undergraduate students were the population of focus, the study was actually about their skills as expository essay authors. Therefore, the empirical materials were their final submitted and graded expository essays.

There was a total of 5,922 students across 80 classes. The maximum class size was 182, while the minimum was 37. The mean class size was 74 with a population standard deviation of 15.6. Assessment sheets with all students listed for all 80 classes were obtained from the Department of

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Communication Studies, University of Cape Coast. These were used together as the sampling frame.

Sampling Strategy

Sample size

From a population of 5,922 a sample size of 361 was determined based on a confidence interval (CI) of 95% and a tolerable margin of error of 5%. The sample size was determined from a sample size table generated by Krejcie and Morgan (1970) using the formula shown below.

$$s = x^2 NP(1 - P) \div d^2(N - 1) + x^2 P(1 - P)$$

Where, s = required sample size

x^2 = the table value of chi-square for 1 degree of freedom at 95% confidence level (3.841)

N = Population size

P = the population proportion (assumed to be .50 as this provides maximum sample size)

d = the degree of accuracy, otherwise known as the margin of error or alpha level (0.05)

For the purpose of this study, the population size was rounded up to 6,000 to obtain the sample size of 361. Then, for practical reasons that are discussed in the next section (Sampling technique), the final sample size used in the study was 385. An increase in the sample size has the advantage of increasing the statistical power of the study, 'power' being the capacity to find relationships or differences among compared samples (Plano Clark & Creswell, 2015). More participants meant that more data was collected, which

facilitated the arrival at more statistically robust conclusions, in line with Kumar (2011) and also Plano Clark and Creswell (2015).

Sampling technique

The researcher employed two different sampling techniques in this work. For the quantitative aspect of the work, the researcher selected the sample using a Cluster Sampling technique, a probability sampling approach. For the qualitative part of the work, the researcher used a Quota Sampling technique, which is a non-probability sampling approach. Generally, probability sampling approaches are preferred for quantitative studies due to the inherent need to generate broader insights about populations of interest from relatively large, representative samples (Cohen et al., 2018; Dawson, 2009; Gravetter & Forzano, 2018; Matthews & Ross, 2010; Plano Clark & Creswell, 2015).

On the other hand, non-probability sampling approaches are often used to take smaller samples for qualitative works; qualitative works generally require demand in-depth analyses that may prove taxing on researchers and their resources if probability approaches were used to select large, representative samples (Cohen et al., 2018; Creswell, 1998; Gravetter & Forzano, 2018; Matthews & Ross, 2010; Patton, 2015b, 2015a; Plano Clark & Creswell, 2015).

The researcher used Cluster Sampling as the technique to select subjects for the quantitative aspect of the present study. This technique was judged by the researcher to be the most efficient under the circumstances under which the researcher operated. An already existing sampling frame existed in the Department of Communication Studies in the form of

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assessment sheets for the Communicative Skills (CS) course. The students enrolled in the CS course were organised into groups, and each group had its own assessment sheet of students on roll. The implication is that the students were already in clusters, i.e., the groups. Cluster sampling allowed the random sampling of whole classes or groups, and saved the researcher the time and expense of using Simple Random Sampling to select and track down 385 individual essays from among a pile of 5,922 entries. Therefore, pragmatic considerations justified the researcher's use of the Cluster Sampling technique (Kelly, 2006).

Clusters may be listings of sampling units (administrative) or they may be areas on a map (geographic or area sampling). Often cluster sampling is a multi-stage process wherein higher-level clusters are randomly selected, and then lower-level clusters are further defined and randomly selected from the higher-level ones (Kelly, 2006; Zedeck, 2014). In the present work, after the first-tier cluster samples were randomly selected, all individual elements within those clusters were considered for inclusion in the study.

In this work, simple random sampling was used to select six clusters or classes of students whose essays were then collected as empirical materials for analysis. The 80 assessment sheets sourced were electronic files labelled G1 through G80. A database was created in the Microsoft Excel application. Each record in this database consisted of a file label and the corresponding total number of students for that class. Then, the RANDBETWEEN function was used to generate random numbers between 1 and 99 for the records. Using the Data Analysis add-on in Microsoft Excel, six classes were randomly selected whose essays were sourced and analysed (Table *1*). Using these whole classes

necessarily increased the sample size from 361 to 385. An easy-to-follow tutorial for the random selection process described heretofore may be found on the video-hosting website, YouTube, at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mOd79NOje4k. This video served as a useful resource for this work. Table *1* shows the files/classes/clusters randomly selected and their corresponding class sizes.

Table 1: Information on Original Study Sample

File Name	Number of students	Number of male students	Number of female students
G4	53	18	35
G15	102	56	46
G30	73	45	28
G53	52	33	19
G57	64	38	26
G77	41	19	22
Totals	**385**	**209**	**176**

In Table *1* can be seen the gender breakdown of the original sample. The COUNTIF function in Microsoft Excel was used to automate total for male students (M), and female students (F).

The final sample size used in the study was 215. The reduction occurred due to self-selection. The Communicative Skills exams is set up such that students had the option to write an expository essay on a predetermined subject or to answer any one of a number of alternative questions. The consequence for the present study was that those students in the original sample who elected to write the expository essay essentially self-selected themselves into the final sample. Information on the final sample is presented in Table 2.

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Table 2: Information on Final (self-selected) Sample

Gender	Sample size	Percent
M	116	54.0
F	99	46.0
Total	215	100.0

In *Table 2* can be seen the gender breakdown of the final sample. The COUNTIF function in Microsoft Excel was used to automate total for male students (M), female students (F). The researcher segregated the sampled essay scripts according to gender after the essays had been evaluated using 2EQC (see the section, Data Collection Instrument). The segregation was not done prior to the evaluation in order to avoid possible bias in the scoring process. This means that during the evaluation, the researcher could not identify scripts as belonging to males or to females.

For the qualitative aspect of the study, the researcher used a Quota Sampling technique. According to Privitera (2017, p. 285), "[a] quota sample is selected based on known or unknown criteria or characteristics in the target population. Researchers use quota sampling to ensure that the characteristics upon which subjects or participants are selected are represented in a sample." Using a Simple Quota Sampling approach, five essays written by male undergraduates, and five essays written by female undergraduates were selected for qualitative analysis. The sample size chosen for the qualitative analysis was not derived by any mathematically or empirically established method. Nevertheless, it was chosen with careful thought for theoretical considerations published in literature.

Malterud et al. (2016) propounded a model for selecting sample sizes for qualitative studies with consideration for what they termed "information

power" (p. 1753). According the model, five criteria should guide the selection of an appropriate sample size in a qualitative study. The criteria are: a) the purpose of the study, b) sample specificity, c) use of established theory, d) quality of dialogue, and e) analytical strategy. Based on these criteria, Malterud et al. (2016) established the model represented in Figure *3*.
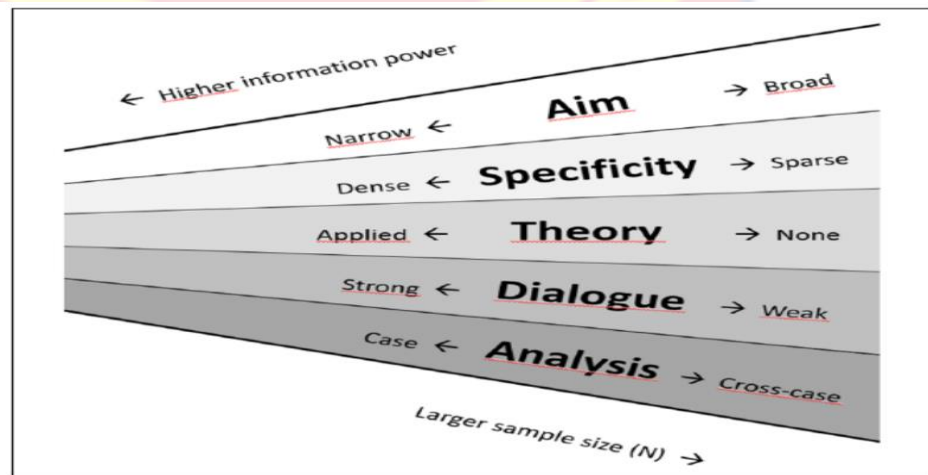
Figure 3: Information Power -- Items and Dimensions. Source: Malterud et al. (2016, p. 1756)

According to Malterud et al., a study with a narrower aim would require a relatively small sample size. This the authors explained to be because the issue under study would be less comprehensive. Malterud et al. hinted that transferability of findings was a consideration in defining the aim of a study as narrow or broad. In the present study, the researcher desired to be able to achieve a subjective measure of transferability to the population the conclusions regarding the samples. Therefore, the researcher considered a relatively large sample would be appropriate.

On the second criterion, sample specificity, Malterud et al. recommended consideration for the specificity of the property among the participants being studied. Extensive samples offer less sufficient information

power, while specific samples offer greater information power. In the present study, based on standard deviations on quantitative scores for essay quality, the researcher judged that within group variations in terms of essay writing competence were not wide for either male or female undergraduates. For this reason, selecting a limited sample would still supply sufficient information power.

The third criterion in the model of Malterud et al. regarded whether a sufficient theoretical background existed for the study or otherwise. According to Malterud et al., studies grounded in limited theoretical perspectives required broader samples. In the present study, the research is grounded in extensive theoretical discussions about gender differences in writing quality and quantity. Therefore, the researcher made the qualitative determination that a larger sample size was not required.

The researcher did not find the third criterion of Malterud et al.'s model relevant to the present study. It seems that the criterion, quality of dialogue, was conceptualised with interview data collection methods in mind, focusing on the quality of the dynamic interaction between *conversants*[3] in the interview event. The empirical materials used in this study were not collected via face-to-face dialogue.

Selection of Empirical Material

While the undergraduate students served as the units of study, their examination scripts served as the empirical materials for study and analysis. Data was collected on these scripts.

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[3] This use of "conversants" is acknowledged in Volume 1 (1909) of the seven-volume *A Modern English Grammar on Historical Principles*, by Otto Jespersen.

The Communicative Skills end-of-semester examination scripts of the sampled students were formally requested for and collected from the Department of Communication Studies, UCC. In the examination, the expository essay question was optional. Therefore, the researcher and one assistant proceeded to skim through all the scripts in order to identify those students who attempted to answer that question. This screening process further reduced the size of the sampled empirical materials to 215 (*Table 2).*

The researcher acknowledges that this screening resulted in a form of self-selection and a possible sampling bias, which threatened external validity of the study's findings. Self-selection bias is an error that may result from individuals being allowed to decide to participate in a study or otherwise (Kumar, 2011). It is a form of non-probability sampling. In this work, students unwittingly chose to make their scripts tenable to the study by their choice to answer the expository essay question on the examination. The possible bias and resultant threat to generalizability of findings is explained by the fact that those students who wrote the expository essays might differ significantly from those that did not, and therefore the former group might not be representative of all undergraduate students in terms of expository writing capabilities (Davidson, 2006; Kumar, 2011).

Regardless of the limitation described above, non-probability samples can still be subjected to inferential statistics, albeit non-parametric equivalents. Parametric statistics make assumptions regarding the characteristics of samples and data. These assumptions include sampling according to probability, homogeneity of variance in sample, and normality of distribution of the characteristics of the sample. Where these assumptions are not met,

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researchers seeking to undertake inferential studies fall on non-parametric equivalents of the parametric statistical techniques (Cohen et al., 2018). It has been argued by some, such as Pallant (2016), that with sufficiently large sample sizes (such as samples of over 30 participants per comparison group) the potential challenges with violation of the normality of distribution assumption may be mitigated. However, it appears that most researchers are more inflexible on the matter (Cohen et al., 2018). The assumptions tests for the present study are described in a later section of this chapter (page 90).

Data Collection Instrument

A data collection instrument was adopted from Smadi & Al-Haq (1995). For the purpose of this study, the instrument is given the name *Expository Essay Quality Checklist* (2EQC). The original instrument was designed and validated by Al-Haq and Ahmed (1994) for assessing argumentative essays. In adapting the original instrument to be used for studying expository essays, Smadi & Al-Haq (1995) replaced a 6-item argumentative essay component of the original scale with a 6-item/question expository essay component. The adapted scale thus retained the 24-item, 9-component structure of the original instrument (see Table 14 in Appendix 1).

A description of the nine components of 2EQC, and their respective operational definitions as put forth by Smadi & Al-Haq (1995), follows.

Thesis statement and paragraph development: The thesis statement is that prime statement that declares the purpose of the essay. Often occurring in the introductory paragraph of an essay, it generally the most forceful and succinct statement that declares a position that can be further expounded, clarified and supported with examples in body paragraphs (Smadi & Al-Haq, 1995). After

the introductory paragraph, the body paragraphs that follow should each have a topic sentence. Generally, this is the principal sentence, and it contains the controlling idea(s) for its respective paragraph. The subsequent sentences in the paragraph serve to define, support, prove, illustrate, or explain the paragraph's controlling idea (Reid, 1982).

The following questions guided evaluation on the thesis statement and paragraph development component of 2EQC:

1. *Clarity:* Did the essay author successfully express the thesis statement? Was the statement explicit or implied? Was the statement worded in an adequate manner? Was the statement expressed such that its idea merited further development?

2. *Qualification:* Was the thesis statement made in absolute or relative terms? Did the thesis require qualification or modification?

3. *Indication of further development:* Did the thesis statement cue further development of its principal idea? Did the statement encourage further reading or research?

4. *Support for thesis statement:* Was the thesis statement supported with data, first-hand experiences, examples, and other facts?

5. *Clarity of topic sentences:* Were these clearly stated? Were they implied or explicitly stated?

6. *Qualification of topic sentences:* Were topic sentences stated in absolute or relative forms? Did they require further modification or qualification?

7. *Topic sentences indicate further development:* Did the topic sentences hint at further development through expansion, explanation or discussion?

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8. *Support for topic sentences:* Were topic sentences sufficiently supported with statistics, experiences, facts, illustrations, and examples?

Relevance: the question guiding evaluation on this point was: To what extent was development of ideas and discussion in the essay germane to the subject under consideration?

Coherence: This component of the 2EQC concerned the consistency and lucidness with which an author treated the subject of the essay. An author builds coherence in an essay by means of devices such as discourse markers, repetition of pronouns and key words, repetition of controlling ideas (that is, the use of paragraph hooks), and soundness of ideas. Other devices include level of informativeness and pertinence of ideas to the communicative situation (De Beaugrande & Dressler, 1981; Halliday & Hasan, 1976; Reid, 1982). The guiding questions for evaluating coherence were: to what degree was the entire essay coherent? Did preceding ideas lead naturally to subsequent ones?

Cohesion: Cohesion in writing is a reference to between-sentence (intersentential) and within-sentence (intrasentential) relationships. An author uses lexical and syntactical juxtapositions, along with cohesive connectives, to achieve cohesion (Halliday & Hasan, 1976). Cohesive connectives include conjunctives, substitutions, ellipsis, and reference (Halliday & Hasan, 1976). In the use of the 2EQC in the present work, the guiding question for evaluating cohesion was: Does the author make efficient use of discourse markers and transitional words and phrases to weave sentences together?

Exposition: The aim of an expository essay is to submit a stance or viewpoint on a subject, and then to explain, clarify, and illustrate that position. An

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expository essay is not argumentative, but informative. The exposition component of 2EQC was designed to judge the aforementioned characteristics of undergraduates' essay in this work. The judgment of the expository value of the essays were guided by a number of sub-components, the judgment for each of which was in turn guided by some guiding questions. The sub-components are presented hereafter.

1. *Development of exposition:* To what extent did the author attempt to capture the engagement of the reader? To what extent did the author succeed in the use of methods of development, such as definition, comparison, cause-effect, contrast, process, classification, among others?

2. *Support of discussion:* Was the thesis of the essay supported sufficiently with facts, examples, etc.?

3. *Organization of discussion:* Was there clear organisation of ideas? Chronologically? Logically? Spatially? According to importance?

4. *Degree of exposition:* To what degree was the entire essay expository instead of narrative, persuasive, or descriptive?

5. *Logicality of presentation/treatment:* Was the treatment of the subject logical? To what extent?

6. *Degree of informativeness:* How well did the author do in the attempt to enlighten the reader?

Quantity: The *Quantity* component of 2EQC measures the degree to which an expository essay exhausts the discussion of a subject matter. The guiding questions for evaluating quantity include the following: How complete is the discussion of the subject? Are controlling ideas fully expounded? Does the author strive for balance in the presentation of ideas?

<u>Unity:</u> By this component, the 2EQC evaluates how well the author stays on their subject. Does the author divagate from the core subject?

<u>Wording:</u> This component of the 2EQC concerns the adequacy of word use. Guiding questions for this evaluation include: How precisely did the author use diction?

<u>Grammaticality:</u> Guiding questions for this component focused on the evaluation on errors in construction that potentially worked against intelligibility, errors in spelling, and errors in punctuation.

Validity of data collection instrument

The researcher subjected the adopted research instrument to evaluation for measurement validity. Measurement validity concerns the extent to which a measurement process or tool measures the variable that it is purported to measure (Gravetter & Forzano, 2018; Saunders et al., 2019). Validity is important to judging the quality of quantitative research in the social sciences (Saunders et al., 2019). According to Gravetter & Forzano (2018, p. 58), "[t]he question of validity is especially important whenever an operational definition is used to measure a hypothetical construct." The checklist that was used to assess the essays in this study was supposed to measure the competence of freshmen at composing expository essays.

Competence in this instance was not considered a construct that could be directly measured (hypothetical construct), hence, the competence checklist served to indirectly measure the construct using a bank of components. In turn, each component was measured by a question/item or a number of them. There was, therefore, the need to assess the validity of checklist, even though being an adopted instrument from published studies; it could be presumed to be

validated. The researcher focused on two subtypes of measurement validity: face and content validity.

Face validity, being the most superficial and least rigorous of the various tests of measurement validity, is about the face value of the measurement procedure or instrument (Gravetter & Forzano, 2018). It concerns an assessment of whether by subjective judgment, that is on its face, an instrument captures the concept or construct it is meant to measure (Gravetter & Forzano, 2018). According to (Martinez, 2017, pp. 1823–1824), a data collection instrument with face validity will be found to be "visibly relevant to the concept it is intended to measure." For this reason, checking for face validity is a rapid way to assess that an instrument is appropriately designed to capture the concept under measurement.

The face validity of the expository essay competence checklist was confirmed by the researcher's supervisor. The supervisor has PhD in linguistics and has several years of experience teaching and researching in linguistics and communications.

Content validity is a reference to the degree to which a measurement instrument, which in this study is the expository essay competence checklist, covers adequately the range of investigative questions or items (Saunders et al., 2019). The more adequately the instrument covers the investigative questions, the greater the instrument is said to capture all the facets or full meaning of a concept (Martinez, 2017). Content validity is often assured with a thorough review of literature on the concept in order to carefully define it, and also with discussions with persons knowledgeable on the concept (Martinez, 2017; Saunders et al., 2019). Content validity may also help the

researcher to trim the measurement instrument by identifying and eliminating items or questions that are not necessary (Saunders et al., 2019). In this work, the researcher endeavoured to assure content validity of the 2EQC as a measure of competence by means of a review of the features of good writing as expounded in De Beaugrande and Dressler (1981), Halliday and Hasan (1976), and Reid (1982). Further, the researcher sought the judgment of the research supervisor, who has extensive training and teaching and research experience in composition and discourse analysis.

Data Collection

The researcher used a different method to collect data for each of the three objectives of the study. For Objective 1, the 2EQC was used to evaluate and judge each student essay. For Objective 2, the number of words and the number of paragraphs were counted for each essay. For Objective 3, the researcher conducted a qualitative examination of the paragraph structure for the sampled essays.

With regards to Objective 1, data collection involved the researcher evaluating each essay submitted using the 2EQC instrument. One set of copies of the examination scripts were made, and the original scripts were returned to the Department of Communication Studies. The researcher entered assessment scores into a Microsoft Excel Workbook created for the purpose.

For Objective 2, the researcher conducted a word and paragraph count for each essay. The researcher did not count crossed out words. These were considered to have been discarded by the essay author. The researcher reasoned that if crossed out words were counted, then it would be imperative to count whole cancelled paragraphs as well. While studies similar to the

present one that use keylogging techniques may count even deleted or corrected words for the purpose of observing writing fluency as well as revision and editing behaviour (see, for example, Al-Saadi (2020), such objectives and techniques were outside the scope of the present study. Each essay's word and paragraph counts were entered in separate Microsoft Excel Worksheet columns against the record for the respective student.

For Objective 3, the researcher made visual observations of each essay. For each essay, the researcher made analytical memos of their observations concerning how the various paragraphs had been constructed. The framework for analysis was based on Chapter 2 of Joy Reid's *The Process of Composition* (1982). That chapter of the book comprehensively discusses how a paragraph should be organised and constructed. The analytical framework was based, additionally, on a functional discussion of paragraphs, their types, and their features.

To prepare the essays for paragraph analysis, the selected pieces were typed out in Microsoft Word in order to obtain digital copies of those empirical materials. The researcher took care to preserve the layouts of the essays as they were written by the students. Furthermore, the researcher endeavoured to preserve the original constructions of the students; errors related to grammar, punctuation, capitalization, modification, concord, etc. were preserved as much as possible. The effort at preservation was to give readers of this thesis a first-hand feel of students' compositional skills. After the digitization effort, a coding scheme was applied to the essays. This scheme was based on Chapter 2 of Reid (1982).

Data Analysis Procedures

Being a mixed methods study, quantitative and qualitative analytical procedures were applied to make meaning of the data, according to respective research objectives. All quantitative data were originally entered into a Microsoft Excel database for data organisation, cleaning, and preliminary analysis.

For Objective 1, mean total scores from the 2EQC evaluation were computed separately for male-generated essays and for female-generated essays. This step produced raw scores for the two groups. However, it was necessary to conduct inferential statistics on the data in order to establish that whatever difference in performance was observed was real and not due to chance. For the next steps to be executed, the 2EQC scores entered in Microsoft Excel were exported to IBM® SPSS®. In SPSS, the researcher conducted normality of distribution and homogeneity of variance tests. These tests are requisite in inferential statistical tests as they determine whether the appropriate statistical analyses should be parametric or non-parametric.

For parametric tests to be run, three assumptions must be met: 1) the samples should have been chosen by probability, 2) the data for each group in the comparison must follow a normal distribution, and 3) the variances within the groups must be equal, that is, the two groups under comparison must have a similar distribution of scores around their respective means (Cohen et al., 2018). The first assumption was violated because self-selection made the final sample non-random. To test the second assumption, the Shapiro-Wilks test of normality was conducted. To the test the third assumption, Levene's test of

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homogeneity of variance was conducted. Results for the two tests are presented in Tables 3and 4 respectively.

Table 3: Results of test for normality of distribution of total 2EQC scores

Gender	Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	*df*	*Sig.*
M	0.974	116	0.025
F	0.974	99	0.046

Table 4: Results of test for homogeneity of variance between male and female total 2EQC scores

Levene Statistic	*df1*	*df2*	*Sig.*
0.824	1	213	0.365

From *Table 3*, we note an alpha of 0.05, neither the scores for males nor those for females were normally distributed. In the case of males, the alpha is 0.025, which is lower than 0.05. Likewise, the alpha for the female essay scores (0.046) was lower than 0.05. These figures indicate that the second assumption to allow the conduct of parametric analyses on the 2EQC data was violated.

Table 4 shows that the third assumption was not violated. With a significance value greater than 0.05, the indication was that the distributions about the means did not differ significantly between the two groups under comparison. With two out of three assumptions for parametric tests violated, the researcher used an equivalent non-parametric statistical technique to test for statistically significant differences between the 2EQC scores for males and females. Because the comparison was between two independent samples, the Mann-Whitney U Test of the equality of means was conducted on the 2EQC data.

Objective two of the present study concerned differences in writing productivity between male and female undergraduate students. Writing productivity was operationalized to involve two variables: paragraph count and word count. To collect this data, the researcher physically counted every word and every paragraph for each essay. The data was entered first into Microsoft Excel. Then, after cleaning and verification, the data was exported into IBM® SPSS® Statistics for inferential statistical analysis. Just like data for Objective 1, the researcher conducted tests for the assumptions for parametric analyses. Table 5 and Table 6 present the results of these tests.

Table 5: Results of tests for normality in writing productivity scores

	Gender	Shapiro-Wilk		
		Statistic	df	Sig.
Paragraph Count	M	0.436	116	0.000
	F	0.441	98	0.000
Word Count	M	0.954	116	0.001
	F	0.868	98	0.000

Table 6: Results of test for homogeneity of variance between male and female writing productivity scores

	Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
Paragraph Count	0.454	1	212	0.501
Word Count	3.044	1	212	0.082

As seen in Table 5, in terms of Paragraph Count neither the scores for males nor for females were normally distributed, at an alpha of 0.05. In each case, the significance level was lower than 0.05. A similar finding was made for Word Count. Therefore, for both variables the assumption of normality of data distribution was violated. The homogeneity of variance assumption was violated for neither Paragraph Count nor Word Count (Table 6). This implies

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that data for both males and females showed similar variability in the case of Paragraph Count and also in the case of Word Count. Consideration for these findings, as well as for the non-probabilistic manner in which essay samples were procured, led to the researcher choosing non-parametric statistical techniques for the analysis of the quantitative data in the present work.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations are important to modern research. This is because of the felt need to treat participants and subjects of research in ways that are compatible with the principles of the prevailing humanistic zeitgeist. Those who participate in research need to be treated with respect and dignity, and in a manner that keeps them safe from undue pain, embarrassment, injury, material cost, and death (Emanuel et al., 2015; Social Research Association, 2001; The National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioural Researh, 1979; Walford, 2005).

While the present work did not directly involve human participants, with the exception of the researcher, thesis supervisors, and statistical consultants, the work still involved potential exposure of students' personally identifiable information, such as their names, student identification numbers, and examination scores. For this reason, it was imperative that the work be done in accord with accepted ethical guidelines.

In preparation to deal with potential ethical requirements, the researcher conducted an extensive review of published material on research ethics. The published reviewed included *A Code of Practice for the Safety of Social Researchers* (Social Research Association, 2001), *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research Ethics* (Iphofen & Tolich, 2018), *The Belmont Report:*

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Ethical Principles and Guidelines for the Protection of Human Subjects of Research (The National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioural Researh, 1979), and *Research Ethics: How to Treat People Who Participate in Research* (Emanuel et al., 2015).

The most important ethical considerations relevant to the present work were student anonymity, confidentiality on the part of the researcher, safety of original empirical materials, and academic integrity. The empirical materials used in this research were student examination scripts, which are protected by the archival laws of Ghana and the University of Cape Coast. These laws stipulate that such records be maintained for a specified number of years before they can be disposed of.

The implication for the present study was that the materials from which data were collected needed to be protected by the researcher from all physical harm. For this reason, the researcher made photocopies of the relevant portions of the selected scripts and returned the original copies to the Department of Communication Studies (DCS), UCC. However, making photocopies of the scripts presented the danger of exposing the personally identifiable information of students along with their examination scores.

To counter this risk, the researcher arranged with a commercial service provider to make copies of the scripts one early morning so that the copy task could be executed at a time when there was not likely to be other parties present. Upon completion of the task, the researcher ensured that all scanned copies retained in the digital photocopier used were deleted completely from the machine. Beyond the researcher, no other parties were allowed access to copies of the scripts. The researcher also ensured that electronic assessment

sheets obtained via email from the DCS, which contained student names and identification numbers, were stored in a hidden folder on a single password-protected personal computer to which the researcher restricted physical access during the course of the research.

Even after an instance of research ends, it is imperative that applicable ethical principles continue to be practised. At the end of the present study, the copies of examination scripts were destroyed by fire with only the researcher in attendance. For the purpose of possible future need for verification of the data underlying this study, the electronic assessment sheets which had been modified to hold scores from the study were stored in an encrypted folder in password-protected private cloud account.

The present work received ethical approval from the Institutional Review Board of the University of Cape Coast. Such approval is required for all research work in the University.

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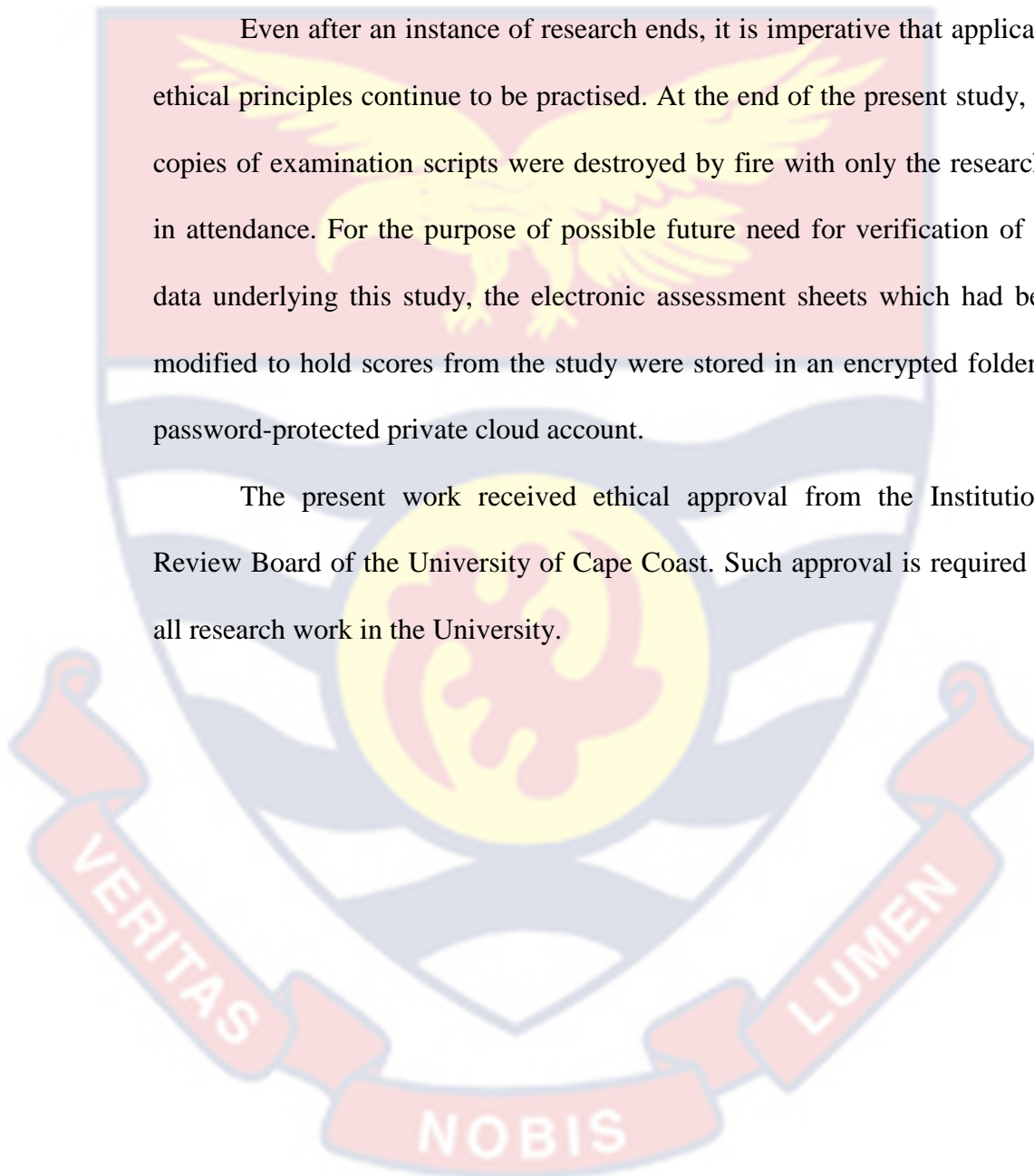
CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Introduction

This study was aimed at assessing gendered differences in the writing competence of undergraduate students of the University of Cape Coast. The end-of-second semester Communicative Skills essay examination scripts for the 2020/2021 academic year were collected with the view to determine gender differences in writing quality, in writing productivity, and in paragraph structures. The results of the data collection and analysis are presented and discussed in this chapter.

Gender differences in expository writing competence among undergraduate students

Writing competence was operationalized as essay writing quality as measured by a 9-part, 24-item tool the researcher named *Expository Essay Quality Checklist* (2EQC). This tool was adopted from (Smadi & Al-Haq, 1995). The tool was a composite assessment of various components of essay quality, to wit, thesis statement, relevance, coherence, cohesion, exposition, quantity, unity, wording, and grammaticality. For each essay, competence was assessed by summing the 24 scores on the individual items. It was not within the objectives of the study to drill down and compare gendered differences in performance on each of the nine parts. The results of the writing competence analysis are presented in this section of the chapter.

Table 8 presents summary statistics of the general performance of students on the essay assessment. The table shows that 116 essays written by males and 99 written by females were assessed.

Table 7: Performance statistics of students on 2EQC Assessment

Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
M	116	65.48	13.162	1.222
F	98	66.81	14.067	1.414

As seen from Table 7, the average total assessment score for males was 65.48 out of a total 94. The average total assessment for females was 66.81 out of the maximum score of 94. These scores mean that, generally, students performed better than the mid score. However, the standard deviations computed, 13.162 for males and 14.067 for females, suggest wide variability among the test groups. The standard deviations are indicative of the highest lowest scores for each comparison group.

It would seem as if females performed only slightly better than males in the assessment. However, there was the need to conduct inferential statistics in order to arrive at robust conclusions about differences in performance. The choice between the two groups of inferential statistics – parametric and non-parametric – requires that the data being analysed meet a number of requirements. Apart from random sampling, all the other requirements were tested by statistical means. Specifically, the Shapiro-Wilk Test for normality of distribution, and Levenne's Test for Homogeneity of Variance were conducted on the data (see Table *3* and Table 4). Some of the assumptions for parametric statistical techniques were not met. Therefore, the Mann-Whitney U Test, the non-parametric equivalent of the t-Test, was used to test for

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differences in the mean assessment scores). The results are presented in Table

9.

Table 8: Performance statistics of Students on 2EQC Evaluation

Gender	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
M	116	105.94	12289.00
F	98	110.41	10931.00
Total	214		

Table 9: Result of Non-parametric Test for Equality of Means of 2EQC Scores

Test Statistics[a]	
	Total score on 2EQC
Mann-Whitney U	5503.000
Wilcoxon W	12289.000
Z	-.526
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.599
a. Grouping Variable: Gender	

The results presented in Table *9* indicate that there was no significant difference between the 2EQC scores of female undergraduate students and male undergraduate students [z = -0.526, *p* = 0.599]. This means that, on average and as assessed with 2EQC, the writing quality of the essays of male undergraduates was about similar to the writing quality of essays composed by their female counterparts. In other words, females did not outperform males in terms of writing quality. Therefore, the null hypothesis for Objective One fails to be rejected.

This finding contradicts what the prevailing trend of findings reported in the literature is. Gender or sex has been an enduring, important predictor variable in studies of writing performance (Al-Saadi, 2020b; Kormos, 2012).

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This trend has been so because there has been a persistent belief in the idea that females are better at language and language-related tasks such as writing, while males were more adept at visuo-spatial tasks, even though in most cases, these differences were mediated by other variables, such as memory (Aartsen et al., 2004; Downing et al., 2008; Hedges & Friedman, 1993; Stumpf & Jackson, 1994). The basis for such belief was in cognitive science studies that sought to find differences in cognitive ability between males and females (Barbey, 2018; Weber et al., 2014). However, it appears that current research suggests that gender has an effect on cognitive ability, but the nature of this effect is complex and varies depending on specific cognitive ability being measured and how that measurement is being conducted, and also on environmental factors, such as education, socio-economic situations, and gender-role socialization (De Smedt et al., 2018; Hyde, 2016; Kim & Park, 2017; Li & Singh, 2014; Reilly & Neumann, 2013; Weber et al., 2014).

It might be reasonable to expect that the evolution of knowledge in cognitive science as regards male-female differences would reflect in the field of writing research. Such an expectation would be excusable because writing requires considerable cognitive ability and activity (Ardila et al., 2011; De Smedt et al., 2018; Kormos, 2012; Naglieri & Rojahn, 2001; Weber et al., 2014), and gendered differences in cognitive function could affect the writing process and output (Fearrington et al., 2014). The Gender Similarities Hypothesis has been developed to assert that male and females do not differ significantly on most psychological tasks and abilities (Hyde, 2005; Scheiber et al., 2015). But it seems that cognitive processes associated with writing might be the exemption that the Gender Similarities Hypothesis makes room

for (Gelati, 2012). This is illustrated in the many studies that point to females having an advantage over male counterparts in writing competence (Beard & Burrell, 2010; Cordeiro et al., 2018; De Smedt et al., 2018; Engelhard, 1992; Engelhard et al., 1994; Fearrington et al., 2014; Malecki & Jewell, 2003; Olinghouse, 2008; Pajares et al., 1999; Pajares & Valiante, 2001; Troia et al., 2013).

The finding of the present study is that male and female undergraduates do not differ in their writing competence, in contradiction to the finding that prevails in the literature. One possible explanation could be that most of the population represented in the literature is elementary school pupils. However, the plausibility of this reason accounting for the present findings is undermined by the fact that other studies of more adult writers also report female advantages over males in writing tasks. For example, Veloo et al. (2015) in a study of learning approaches and writing output found females outperformed their male counterparts, even when the former used surface approaches to learning.

In fact, in studies of EFL undergraduate students, Jebreil et al. (2015) and Salikin (2019) found that male students tended to have significantly higher writing anxiety levels, which ostensibly is not conducive to writing performance (Cheng, 2004). The findings of Jebreil et al. (2015) and Salikin (2019), and indeed findings similar to theirs suggest that holding all other factors constant, gendered differences in writing anxiety levels alone should translate into corresponding gendered differences in writing output. As a study of pre-written essays, it was not possible in the present study to test the writing anxieties of students as they composed the essays assessed, and no

concrete conclusions are drawn on that matter. Nevertheless, could it be that males did not suffer greater writing anxiety than their female mates so that they performed similarly on a writing task? It is unknown, but plausible. And that opens up a new avenue of research. In the interim, as other studies have illustrated, it is possible that gendered differences in writing output persists among learners even to the university level.

Another plausible explanation for the findings of this study contradicting much of the literature could be differences in definitions and operationalizations of writing quality. In this study, the assessment tool was adopted from Smadi & Al-Haq (1995) who originally developed the tool for the purpose of learning about the discoursal challenges in expository writing that Malaysian students faced who were studying Arabic as a foreign language. The tool is a bundle of a number of variables some of which other authors have used as standalone variables in studies. For example, the tool used in the present study bundles assessments on grammaticality with others on unity and thesis statement, etc.

Grammaticality itself comprises scores on structural elements, such as grammar, punctuation and spelling. However, in some studies spelling is a standalone variable (Adams & Simmons, 2019; Cordeiro et al., 2018). The researcher conjectures that it is likely that different components of Smadi and Al-Haq's tool may have balanced out each other in the present study so that any gendered differences in performances on any specific components were lost in the composite assessment score generated. The researcher arrives at this proposition based on a review of Williams and Larkin (2013), whose findings agree in part with those of the present study. The researcher noted that

Williams and Larkin (2013) used a battery of assessment tools in their study and came to the conclusion that males did not display weaker linguistic ability than females. Perhaps, the scale used in the present work can be thought of a composite of a number of sub-scales that detected effects that might have been detectible had the scores from them not been combined into one. The researcher submits that such conjecture will need to be confirmed in subsequent research using primary or secondary data.

Moreover, from SFL perspective, the context of culture predicts that writers usually consider the purpose and setting. In the case of previous studies, the tasks assigned were usually for research purpose, and therefore, students approach writing task with the research purpose in mind. In the present study, the purpose of the essays written by the students was to test their understanding of the course and adjudged their qualification to the next stage of the programme. This purpose is pressing since failure means referral or if overwhelming failure, withdrawal from the university. Within the context of culture, it is easy to point out the lost in gendered differences in performance is due to the shared motivation of each gender to excel in the examination and move to the next stage of their academic pursuit.

Gender differences in writing productivity among undergraduate students

The second objective of this study was to test for gendered differences in measures of writing productivity. Writing productivity was measured by number of words and number of paragraphs produced. Each word and paragraph in each of the 214 essays used were counted manually, and the

counts were recorded. The results of statistical analysis of the data are presented and discussed here.

Table *10* is a tabular representation of the numeric description of writing productivity on the whole sample. As the table shows, undergraduate students wrote approximately two paragraphs, on average, on the expository essay task, and with little variability in the scores (SD= 0.99).

Table 10: Descriptive statistics on general writing productivity

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Paragraph Count	214	1.00	9.00	2.35	0.99
Word Count	214	18.00	691.00	236.76	88.81

Still from Table *10*, it can be seen that mean Word Count was approximately 237. However, the Word Count data showed keen variability (SD= 88.81). In fact, while one sample essay contained 691 words, another contained only 18. Generally, it appears that writing productivity is rather low among the undergraduate students. Perhaps, time constraints and examination anxiety negatively impacted productivity. It has been found that students may "choke under pressure" when test anxieties overwhelm them (Baumeister, 1984; Mesagno et al., 2011, 2012; Mesagno & Beckmann, 2017).

Students who are highly anxious about their performance on assessment tasks tend to experience performance pressure as they worry about the tasks and the consequences of performance. Their worrying occupies some of the working memory that should otherwise have been available to work on the task at hand. If situation-associated anxieties disrupt the ability of working memory to focus on the task at hand, performance on the task can be impaired (Beilock et al., 2004; Beilock & Carr, 2005; Cadinu et al., 2005). This

argument is borne out by the results of a recent study among Iraqi University English as Foreign Language (EFL) students. In the Iraqi study, a significant negative correlation was found between writing anxiety levels and writing performance (Sabti et al., 2019). This means that students with higher writing anxiety levels tended to perform significantly poorer on writing tasks. In a study involving a number of robust experiments, researchers found that getting to students to write essays about their writing anxieties enables them to engage with their apprehensions with the result that they begin to perform better on writing tasks (Ramirez & Beilock, 2011). Therefore, it is reasonable to propose that performance on the examination essay among students whose scripts were used in the present study may have suffered due to performance anxiety. Future studies in the University of Cape Coast could focus on measuring testing anxieties using any number of the existing tools.

The generally poor performance in writing productivity in the present study might also have been because writing fluency is not highly developed among the batch of students whose essays were assessed. These reasons make sense considering that the essays were produced by amateurs in the academic discourse community.

A discourse community possesses and continues to develop an evolving set of discoursal expectations, or genres, that it uses to further its goals and as way to illustrate its participatory structures and processes. According to (Swales, 1987, p. 6), the discoursal expectations may involve "appropriacy of topics, the form, function and positioning of discoursal elements, and the roles texts play in the operation of the discourse community." According to Swales (1987, 1990b, 2016), the discourse

community will also possess a minimal membership volume that retains a suitable degree of pertinent communicative and content proficiency, and either a clear or fuzzy structure or hierarchy that enables moderation of admission into and advancement within the community. People enter the community with little of the discoursal and content proficiency that characterises the community, and exit the community in a variety of (mostly involuntary) ways. The community survives if it maintains a balance between critical masses of both neophytes and experts (Swales, 1987, 1990b, 2016). The discourse community is, therefore, not static in its composition. Swales also posits that a discourse community "develops horizons of expectation, defined rhythms of activity, a sense of its history, and value systems for what is good and less good work" (2016).

As an academic discourse community, the University of Cape Coast possesses a set of discoursal expectations, as expressed in academic texts, and value systems for evaluating which text compositions are good or poor work. As fresh undergraduate students, the students whose essays were assessed in the present work may not have acquired sufficient compositional skill and experience to meet the stringent genre composition requirements for peak performance in the essay task. Perhaps, continued training and experience in the community will improve their discoursal competences. Such progression in competence can be tested in future longitudinal studies that in which assessments on composition tasks are assessed yearly until senior year of university.

Moving on to Objective Two of this study, the outcome is that the null hypothesis of Objective Two fails to be rejected. The results are summarised in Table *11* and Table *12*.

Table 11: Descriptive statistics for male and female writing productivity scores

	Gender	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
	M	116	110.87	12860.50
Paragraph Count	F	98	103.52	10144.50
	Total	214		
	M	116	109.56	12708.50
Word Count	F	98	105.07	10296.50
	Total	214		

Table 12: Result of Non-parametric Test for Equality of Means of writing productivity scores

Test Statistics[a]		
	Paragraph Count	**Word Count**
Mann-Whitney U	5293.500	5445.500
Wilcoxon W	10144.500	10296.500
Z	-1.286	-.528
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.198	.597

a. Grouping Variable: Gender

As shown in Table *12*, there was no significant difference between the paragraph counts of female undergraduate students and male undergraduate students [$z = -1.286$, $p = 0.0.198$]. Also, the results in Table *12* indicate that there was no significant difference between the word counts of female undergraduate students and male undergraduate students [$z = -0.528$, $p = 0.597$]. These results mean that the data as analysed in this study failed to supply evidence based upon which null hypotheses two (H_2) and three (H_3) would have failed to be rejected; instead the null hypothesis failed to be rejected (that

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is, it was accepted). The outcome of this failure is that male and female undergraduates did not differ in writing productivity, as measured by Paragraph Count and Word Count.

This finding contradicts what the prevailing trend of findings reported in the literature is. In the extant literature, the trend reported is that females tend to be more productive writers than males. Berninger and Fuller (1992, p. 363) reported that girls in their study "consistently outperformed boys on the number of words and the number of clauses produced in narrative and expository composition," and that in early development of writing ability, boys might suffer significantly. It was found in another study that even though males did not seem to exhibit inferior written language competence, they still tended to produce less text than their female contemporaries.

Similarly, in a study of over 1200 male and female students across several school grade levels, it was found that females produced more total words written than males. And regardless of grade level or the text genre on which they were tested, girls exhibited a consistent advantage over boys in text length among a number of other composition variables (Cordeiro et al., 2018). Moreover, in another study, while "no significant advantage for girls was identified in their vocabulary, letter knowledge or phonological processing skills, proposed as cognitive underpinnings of writing," girls still produced longer compositions than boys.

The foregoing studies illustrate the evidence in literature regarding writing productivity. This raises the question of what accounts for the lack of significant writing productivity differences between males and females in the present study. A key thing to note is the difference in the population used in

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the present study and in the populations used in much of writing research. In the literature examinations for gender differences in writing ability seem to use mostly primary school children. Could it be that such writing differences as observed in early years of schooling are related to differential cognitive developments and that these differences even out as learners grow and mature? This is plausible; however, it cannot be said for certain that the case is so in the present work.

Besides, other factors are known to mediate writing productivity: motivation, writing anxiety, interest, gender socialization, etc (Gelati, 2012). It is plausible that such factors might have had an interactional effect of how gender predicts writing productivity in this work. Perhaps further research could shed more light on the phenomenon. This requires a theoretical and manual analysis to understand what accounted for the slight differences in write-up of students. The third research question focused on the qualitative aspect of the research.

Gender differences in the paragraph structure of expository writing of University of Cape Coast undergraduate students

A qualitative analysis applied to the essays of selected essays. The purpose of the analysis was to conduct a content examination of the paragraph structures in the essays and to find any subjective gendered differences in how paragraphs were constructed. The content analysis involved identifying paragraph types and their presence. Furthermore, the researcher looked for the presence and placement of thesis statements. Additionally, the content analysis involved identifying the presence of topic sentences, the types of body

paragraphs employed, and the types of support sentences used in body paragraphs.

Paragraph types

From the essays, it was observed that students generally appeared to have a healthy idea of paragraphs and how they are used in writing. Each of the ten essays analysed contained more than one paragraph: an introductory paragraph and, at least, one body paragraph. In all cases, adjacent paragraphs were marked off from each other by means of indentation. This is illustrated in Figure 4. Also note the examples in Figure 5 and Figure 6.

DANGERS OF UNREGULATED MINING IN GHANA.

Gold contributes significantly to Ghana's economy and small scale mining is an important mean for livelihood of many low-income Ghanaians households. Unregulated mining (small scale mining) produces about 30 percent to Ghana's total gold output. Known locally as galamsey, in a phrase "gather and sell" which Ghanaians means small scale gold mining. Unregulated mining by Chinese migrant has had devastating effect on Ghana's properties. Some dangers which are to be discuss here are destruction of land and forest, contamination of water bodies and poor farming system.

The destruction of land and forest is one major danger which threatens Ghana's economy. The destruction of land has effect on foods commodities. Each year, cocoa strips down 20 billion tons which affect the economy of Ghana and due to destruction of forest, now Ghana has to implant new trees which are also use for making books, pencils and so on.

On the contamination of water bodies, water has two major main relation to the small scale mining or unregulated mining. Thus, the heavy water which washes to remove the minerals and the alluvial gold. When this is done, since they used chemicals which also help them in washing, they left chemicals like mercury in it. This prevent people drinking from streams, river, and so on and other source of drinking.

Lastly, people in local communities or villages, especially the young men has resorted from farming to the unregulated mining since it is quick to bring money to them. With this, it is very difficult for the farming system to be effective.

Figure 4: Sample plate illustrating paragraph indentation. Source: author.

Dangers of Unregulated Mining in Ghana.

Unregulated mining is the acti of mining without the government approval. Which in order words "Illegal mining". Illegal mining has become the major cause of the destruction of natural properties. Ghana has been experiencing illegal mining for so long. From the years 2016 – 2022, illegal mining has become soo rampant in our community. Unregulated are done in many communities in Ghana. In this essay, I would be discussing four (4) dangers of unregulated mining in Ghana. The following are some dangers of unregulated mining in Ghana: Loss of lives, Pollution of water bodies, land pollution and air pollution.

To start with, unregulated mining has become soo dangerous to the people operating in the unregulated mining, in search of minerals, such as gold, diamonds etc. The operators are orderd to dig as deep as they can on the land creating a very big hole on the land. This makes part of the land weak, which collapse on the worker or operators inside the hole in search of minerals and cause the loss of lives leading to low population of Ghana.

Figure 5: Sample plate illustrating paragraph indentation. Source: author.

THE DANGERS OF UNREGULATED MINING IN GHANA.

The issue of unregulated mining in Ghana has one again come up for public discussion. This time around, it focus on how it effect the country in General. Unregulated mining refers to the form of mining without a check by the government whereby individuals who engage in such act use machines that not meant for mining to extract mineral resource at the expense of the country. According to Section 87(1) of the Mining Act of 2004, a private individuals who seek to engage in mining activity in Ghana must have a permit. Subsection 2 of Section 87 of the Mining Act state the procedures the individuals who seeks to mine in Ghana are to follow. Among the criterias stipulated in Subsection 2 is the use of Appropriate methods and the use of proper machines for mining etc. However, since most citizens cannot afford what it takes to have a permit, it is on this basis that the unregularities comes in. In this write-up, it is intended to Discuss the dangers of unregulated mining in Ghana starting with; loss of revenue, followed by Distruction of farm lands and ending with shortage of food in Ghana.

To begin with, one of the Dangers of unregulated mining in Ghana is less of revenue to the government. As aforesaid in my introduction, since most people or individuals cannot follow the dictate of Section 87 of the Mining Act of 2004, they choose to hide and extract the mineral resources in Ghana at the expense of the country. Most people who engage in this activity are foreigners who have no sympathy for humanity. Since they hide and extract these mineral resource, they dont pay taxes to the government. Now if such people who sneak and extract mineral resources were to pay their taxes, the government would have gotten much tax revenue from them, but since they don't pay, it effect our revenue generation target which will in turn effect the government developmental projects, the government intend to pursue in the country, and this is very bad.

Figure 6: Sample plate illustrating paragraph indentation. Source: author.

The examination prompt in response to which students wrote the essay analysed in this thesis required the development of only one body paragraph in addition to an introductory paragraph. In the illustrative figures shown above, it is seen that essay authors understood that a paragraph should be devoted to each key idea in an essay (Cohan, 1976; Folse et al., 2014), the authors marked these paragraphs out appropriately. Further, the researcher found no gendered variability in these observations among the analysed essays.

Thesis statements and statements of intent

A thesis statement states the controlling idea in an essay. That presents the general theme of the essay, and it is in support of this theme or controlling idea that the topic sentences in the various paragraphs are designed to support. In most of the introductory paragraphs analysed, a clear thesis statement could be identified. The following are excerpts illustrate the thesis statements identified in the essays.

Illegal mining has become the major cause of the destruction of natural properties. M/ES/GERT/002

Unregulated mining by Chinese migrant has had devastating effect on Ghana's properties. F/ES/GERT/004

In order for us to obtain these resources, they must be mined. But what happens when the mining of these resources is not regulated? Unapproved mining methods are used, prohibited locations for mining are used etc. This causes more harm than good to our country. M/ES/GERT/005

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This practice has unfortunately started breeding adverse effects which may affect the country and its unborn generation in the long run. M/ES/GERT/006

The thesis statements were generally not the first sentences in the introductory paragraphs (see sentences highlighted in cyan in Figure 7, Figure 8, Figure 9, and Figure 10). As the figures show, the thesis statements in most of the analysed essays usually followed after the authors had offered definitions or some other background information. A good thesis statement is usually expected to be clearly identifiable (Folse et al., 2014; Reid, 1982). However, in two of the analysed essays, there did not appear to be explicit thesis statements. One of the essays was authored by a male student, while the other was authored by a female student. Consequently, it is not easy to tell from this qualitative analysis whether inexplicit thesis statements are typical of either gender.

M/ES/GERT/002

Dangers of Unregulated Mining in Ghana.
Unregulated mining is the acti of mining without the government approval. Which in order words "Illegal mining". Illegal mining has become the major cause of the destruction of natural properties. Ghana has been experiencing illegal mining for so long. From the years 2016 – 2022, illegal mining has become soo rampant in our community. Unregulated are done in many communities in Ghana. In this essay, I would be discussing four (4) dangers of unregulated mining in Ghana. The following are some dangers of unregulated mining in Ghana: Loss of lives, Pollution of water bodies, land pollution and air pollution.
       To start with, unregulated mining has become soo dangerous to the people operating in the unregulated mining, in search of minerals, such as gold, diamonds etc. The operators are ordered to dig as deep as they can on the land creating a very big hole on the land. This makes part of the land weak, which collapse on the worker or operators inside the hole in search of minerals and cause the loss of lives leading to low population of Ghana.

Figure 7: Plate illustrating placement of thesis statement

F/ES/GERT/004

<u>DANGERS OF UNREGULATED MINING IN GHANA.</u>

Gold contributes significantly to Ghana's economy and <u>small scale</u> mining is an important mean for livelihood of many low-income Ghanaians households. Unregulated mining (small scale mining) produces about 30 percent to Ghana's total gold output. Known locally as galamsey, in a phrase "gather and sell" which Ghanaians means small scale gold mining. Unregulated mining by Chinese migrant has had devastating effect on Ghana's properties. Some dangers which are to be discuss here are destruction of land and forest, contamination of water bodies and poor farming system.

The destruction of land and forest is one major danger which threatens Ghana's economy. The destruction of land has effect on foods commodities. Each year, cocoa strips

Figure 8: Plate illustrating placement of thesis statement

M/ES/GERT/005

<u>THE DANGERS OF UNREGULATED MINING IN GHANA.</u>

"God bless our homeland Ghana and make our nation great and strong", these are some iconic words from our national anthem. We sing these words with so much passion and vigour anytime the need be but it is our people (Ghanaians) who still practice harmful acts, specifically unregulated mining which destroy our vegetation, lands, waterbodies etc. The yellow colour in our national flag symbolizes our great natural mineral resources including gold, diamond, bauxite and many others. In order for us to obtain these resources, they must be mined. But what happens when the mining of these resources is not regulated? Unapproved mining methods are used, prohibited locations for mining are used etc. This causes more harm than good to our country. The dangers of unregulated mining are discussed below.

Figure 9: Plate illustrating placement of thesis statement

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M/ES/GERT/006

DANGERS OF UNREGULATED MINING

Ghana is a country that has been blessed with rich mineral deposits. These rich minerals, such as gold and bauxite, is a huge boost to enable Ghana to be a self-sustaining country by the extraction and processing these minerals into secondary products to increase value for export and generate income for the nation. Sadly, the extraction of these minerals has become an issue of concern as a result of unregulated mining, locally known as 'galamsey'. This practice has unfortunately started breeding adverse effects which may affect the country and its unborn generation in the long run. I will like to pinpoint some of the dangers unregulated mining poses to the country.

One of the dangers of unregulated mining is the high possibility of the destruction of water bodies. In Ghana, most unregulated mining activities are done closer to water bodies

Figure 10: Plate illustrating placement of thesis statement

In Figure 7, the essay author places the thesis statement early on in the introductory paragraph and distal from the statement signaling the development of the rest of the essay. However, this was not always the case in other essays analysed. For example, in Figure 8, Figure 9, and Figure 10, the authors placed their thesis statements proximal to the end of the introductory paragraphs.

In all essays but one of the ten essays, a statement of intent concluded the introductory paragraph. A concluding sentence in a paragraph is a mark of good writing (Folse et al., 2014). In the case of the analysed essays, the statements of intent signaled what the author sought to achieve with the essay (see sentences highlighted in yellow in Figure 11, Figure 12, and Figure 13).

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F/ES/GERT/009

DANGERS OF UNREGULATED MINING IN GHANA.

The extraction of minerals is one of the most important sector which contributes to the economic growth of the nation. Mining can be done on a large or small scale. Both provide employment for many Ghanaians reducing poverty level in Ghana. It also provides revenue for the government which is used in developing the country. In order for mining to occur on a particular piece of land, permits must be granted but some corporations and individuals do so unregistered and illegally. This type of mining, also known as "galamsey", not only causes harm to the individuals surrounding these places but the nation as a whole. This article therefore seeks to elaborate on the dangers of unregulated mining in Ghana.

Pollution of our water bodies occur as a result of unregulated mining in Ghana.

Figure 11: Plate illustrating statement of intent

M/ES/GERT/006

DANGERS OF UNREGULATED MINING

Ghana is a country that has been blessed with rich mineral deposits. These rich minerals, such as gold and bauxite, is a huge boost to enable Ghana to be a self-sustaining country by the extraction and processing these minerals into secondary products to increase value for export and generate income for the nation. Sadly, the extraction of these minerals has become an issue of concern as a result of unregulated mining, locally known as 'galamsey'. This practice has unfortunately started breeding adverse effects which may affect the country and its unborn generation in the long run. I will like to pinpoint some of the dangers unregulated mining poses to the country.

One of the dangers of unregulated mining is the high possibility of the destruction of

Figure 12: Plate illustrating statement of intent

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M/ES/GERT/005

<u>THE DANGERS OF UNREGULATED MINING IN GHANA.</u>

"God bless our homeland Ghana and make our nation great and strong", these are some iconic words from our national anthem. We sing these words with so much passion and vigour anytime the need be but it is our people (Ghanaians) who still practice harmful acts, specifically unregulated mining which destroy our vegetation, lands, waterbodies etc. The yellow colour in our national flag symbolizes our great natural mineral resources including gold, diamond, bauxite and many others. In order for us to obtain these resources, they must be mined. But what happens when the mining of these resources is not regulated? Unapproved mining methods are used, prohibited locations for mining are used etc. This causes more harm than good to our country. The dangers of unregulated mining are discussed below.

To begin with, unregulated mining leads to pollution of water bodies. Our water bodies

Figure 13: Plate illustrating placement statement of intent

Further, in some concluding sentences, the authors signaled the progression of thought in the rest of the essay (see sentences highlighted yellow in Figure 14 and Figure 15). In most cases, the authors listed the main ideas that would be discussed in the body paragraphs to follow. In terms of thesis statements and statements of intent, no gendered patterns in terms of presence or placement were apparent to the researcher.

F/ES/GERT/004

<u>DANGERS OF UNREGULATED MINING IN GHANA.</u>

Gold contributes significantly to Ghana's economy and <u>small scale</u> mining is an important mean for livelihood of many low-income Ghanaians households. Unregulated mining (small scale mining) produces about 30 percent to Ghana's total gold output. Known locally as galamsey, in a phrase "gather and sell" which Ghanaians means small scale gold mining. Unregulated mining by Chinese migrant has had devastating effect on Ghana's properties. Some dangers which are to be discuss here are destruction of land and forest, contamination of water bodies and poor farming system.

The destruction of land and forest is one major danger which threatens Ghana's

Figure 14: Plate illustrating statement of essay development

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M/ES/GERT/001

THE DANGERS OF UNREGULATED MINING IN GHANA.

 The issue of unregulated mining in Ghana has <u>one</u> again come up for public discussion. This time around, it <u>focus</u> on how it effect the country in General. Unregulated mining refers to the form of mining without a check by the government whereby individuals who engage in such act use machines that not meant for mining to extract mineral resource at the expense of the country. According to Section 87(1) of the Mining Act of 2004, a <u>private individuals</u> who seek to engage in mining activity in Ghana must have a permit. Subsection 2 of Section 87 of the Mining Act state the procedures the individuals who seeks to mine in Ghana are to follow. Among the <u>criterias</u> stipulated in Subsection 2 is the use of Appropriate methods and the use of proper machines for mining etc. However, since most citizens cannot afford what it takes to have a permit, it is on this basis that the <u>unregularities</u> comes in. In this write-up, it is intended to Discuss the dangers of unregulated mining in Ghana starting with; loss of revenue, followed by Distruction of farm lands and ending with shortage of food in Ghana.

 To begin with, one of the Dangers of unregulated mining in Ghana is less of revenue to

Figure 15: Plate illustrating statement of essay development

Body paragraph analysis

Every essay analysed had at least one body paragraph. In most cases, body paragraphs were used to discuss one idea that supported the thesis statement. Generally, the body paragraphs began with topic sentences, as per usual practice in most writing (Folse et al., 2014; Reid, 1982). There was no ostensible gender variability in this regard. Note the topic sentences in these samples.

To start with, unregulated mining has become soo dangerous to the people operating in the unregulated mining, in search of minerals, such as gold, diamonds etc. The operators

The destruction of land and forest is one major danger which threatens Ghana's economy. The destruction of land has effect on foods commodities. Each year, cocoa strips

The first point to note is that unregulated mining leads to the destruction of the land and vegetation. This of great danger to the country because, almost seventy percent of the

Pollution of our water bodies occur as a result of unregulated mining in Ghana.

Some unregulated mining activities lead to the pollution of water bodies. Sometimes

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As can be noticed in the plates above, the essay authors had good competence at composing topic sentences. A good topic sentence is specific, contains one controlling idea, signals what the paragraph is about, and is not a statement of unassailable fact (Folse et al., 2014). These characteristics can be seen in the topic sentences sampled above. The sentences used the nominal and verbal groups to present the topic sentence of the paragraphs (Figuiredo, 2010).

Almost invariably, supporting sentences were used to support the topic sentences in the essays. Supporting sentences expand on the topic sentence by explaining, clarifying, illustrating, defining, giving reasons, presenting facts, and describing (Folse et al., 2014; Reid, 1982). Furthermore, there are major support sentences that directly support the topic sentence, and minor support sentences that support major support sentences.

The trend noticed in the essays was that students tended to use descriptive supportive sentences; most students described the mechanism by which illegal mining hurt a resource under consideration in the paragraph. These descriptions tended to be cause-and-effect progressions of ideas. The following plates show excerpts of text that illustrate the construction of supporting paragraphs in the analysed essays. The table that follows supplies a colour code for interpreting the deconstructions shown in FiguresFigure 16 through Figure 20.

Table 13: Features of a paragraph

Topic Sentence	Major support sentence	Minor support sentence(s)	Concluding/Summary Sentence	Irrelevant sentence(s)

F/ES/GERT/003

I argue for the motion that Government should stop illegal mining in Ghana. There are some effects of illegal mining that are in Ghana, so the Government need to stop the miners. Firstly, Pollution of water bodies. Illegal miners pollute water bodies because they do not use appropriate method for mining which can at least sustain our water bodies. Secondly, soil pollution. When mining it pollute the soil because miners do not use appropriate tools and equipment to keep the soil strong enough for use to get good foods. Additionally, lack of biodiversity. When illegal miners are mining, they do not use biodiversity for the soil or water to look clean and healthy. Last, Deforestation: illegal miners must use an appropriate method or appropriate tools and equipment for the mining, so that it does not create any problem for the environment.

M/ES/GERT/001

To begin with, one of the Dangers of unregulated mining in Ghana is less of revenue to the government. As aforesaid in my introduction, since most people or individuals cannot follow the dictate of Section 87 of the Mining Act of 2004, they choose to hide and extract the mineral resources in Ghana at the expense of the country. Most people who engage in this activity are foreigners who have no sympathy for humanity. Since they hide and extract these mineral resource, they dont pay taxes to the government. Now if such people who sneak and extract mineral resources were to pay their taxes, the government would have gotten much tax revenue from them, but since they don't pay, it effect our revenue generation target which will in turn effect the government developmental projects, the government intend to pursue in the country, and this is very bad.

Figure 16: Functional paragraph deconstruction 1

In the juxtaposition of deconstructed essays seen in Figure 16, the female-written essay is presented in the left plate and labelled F/ES/GERT/003, while the male specimen is presented on the right and is labelled M/ES/GERT/001. The female essay opens with an irrelevant sentence; it is a sentence that also signals a possible confusion on the part of the writer between an argumentative essay or debate and an expository essay. By "argu[ing] for [a] motion", the writer presents the essay as if it were an argument. This is an error. Regardless of this error, though, the rest of the essay is presented in an expository fashion. The author presents a clear topic sentence and supports that sentence with no less than four supporting ideas.

However, the author's construction of major support sentences breaks proper writing convention; the major support sentences are no sentences but phrases – incomplete thoughts. It appears that the author developed the essay from an outline, which is commendable practice. However, her failure to develop the phrases from her outline into complete thoughts is an error that detracts from the paragraph development. It can be seen though, that the author uses ordinal words to mark off the major support ideas.

In the juxtaposed paragraph of approximately similar length, I find that the male author develops one main idea in the paragraph. The male writer opens with a clear topic sentence. However, unlike in the case of the female essay whose topic sentence suggests a broader discussion perhaps encompassing a number of major support ideas, the male essay opens with a topic sentence that suggests that the paragraph will focus on just one major idea, which is then developed further with one major support sentence and a number of minor support sentences.

Qualitatively, this instance of comparison might suggest that the female author is better at generating multiple major ideas to support the topic sentence in a paragraph. This instance of seeming greater aptitude for ideation in a female author is again observed in the juxtaposition presented in Figure 20. In Figure 20, the female author, whose essay is labelled F/ES/GERT/004 is able to generate two major support ideas to support the topic sentence, whereas the male essay of comparable length contains only one major support idea.

However, this trend does not repeat in other comparisons presented. In fact, in the juxtaposition presented in Figure 19, it is the male essay, labelled M/ES/GERT/010, which demonstrates a greater aptitude for ideation. However, in that comparison in Figure 19, the female-written essay, labelled F/ES/GERT/009, demonstrates ability to further logically develop a major support idea to a cogent conclusion, even though the concluding sentence does not rationally flow from the string of thoughts that leads to it. In concluding paragraphs, authors may make a recommendation, state a position, or predict an outcome or event (Folse et al., 2014). The concluding sentence under consideration makes a prediction and might qualify as a concluding sentence. Yet, that sentence suffers from its embodiment of a *non sequitur* or perhaps an *ignorantico elenchi* fallacy. Ergo, that particular concluding sentence is characterised as irrelevant. On the other hand, the concluding sentence in the male-written paragraph in Figure 19 is relevant and logically follows the exposition that precedes it.

In terms of functional paragraph analysis, the rest of the comparisons presented do not yield a readily discernible gendered pattern in organisation

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and ideation. In Figure 17, both essays open with a topic sentence, which is followed by a major support sentence. Thereafter, minor support details are presented.

F/ES/GERT/002

To start with, unregulated mining has become soo dangerous to the people operating in the unregulated mining, in search of minerals, such as gold, diamonds etc. The operators are ordered to dig as deep as they can on the land creating a very big hole on the land. This makes part of the land weak, which collapse on the worker or operators inside the hole in search of minerals and cause the loss of lives leading to low population of Ghana.

F/ES/GERT/008

Thirty to thirty five percent of deaths have been traced to illegal or unregulated mining. Miners claim unwarranted access to homes, facilities, institutions in search of these prescious minerals. As if that is not enough, they fail to cover their footprints. Homes, factories and institutions are left with perforated grounds, rendering their once strong foundations weak. This exposes them to so much danger, as the buildings may collapse when they experience a greater force than they can hold.

Figure 17: Functional paragraph deconstruction 2

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A similar composition strategy is observed in both essays in Figure 18: in each exhibit in the Figure, the author opens with a topic sentence that clearly signals the idea to be developed in the paragraph, and then proceeds to support that topic sentence with a major support sentence. The major support sentence is subsequently supported with minor support sentences.

While it is good practice to organise essays as the authors whose works have been exhibited have done, a mere functional grouping of sentences is not sufficient to create a coherent essay that is pleasurable to read. To achieve coherence, authors need to link subsequent thoughts to preceding ideas in terms of time, comparison, sequence, contrast, cause and effect, place, concession, summary, conclusion, and repetition. Authors use transition words and phrases to achieve an effect of coherence in a paragraph, and indeed in a whole essay. Transition words and phrases bring logic to an exposition; they serve as signposts that guide the reader through an author's progression of thought. Therefore, transitions are essential to achieving organisation in a paragraph. Transitions may also be effected using clauses, especially dependent clauses that link the thoughts in a previous T-Unit to the idea in the main clause of a subsequent T-Unit. T-Unit is short for minimum terminal unit, that is, a unit of text that includes the main clause and any dependent clauses (Hunt, 1970).

Generally, the essays analysed did not demonstrate excellent use of transitions by the authors. In most cases, there are almost no transitions, or at least, none are clear. In many instances, demonstrative pronouns, especially "this," is used at the beginning of sentences, ostensibly to refer to the idea in a preceding T-unit, and to establish a consequential or cause-and-effect

relationship between the previous idea and the one that follows the demonstrative pronoun.

F/ES/GERT/007

The first point to note is that unregulated mining leads to the destruction of the land and vegetation. This of great danger to the country because, almost seventy percent of the country's population engage in farming activities. These unregulated mining activities can destroy the structure of the land, depleting the soil and killing useful micro and macro organisms in the soil that would contribute to increasing soil fertility and aiding in high crop yield. When the land is destroyed plants wont be able to grow and the vegetation will end being destroyed. Causing most farmers to lose their jobs and decreasing productivity in the country as well.

M/ES/GERT/006

One of the dangers of unregulated mining is the high possibility of the destruction of water bodies. In Ghana, most unregulated mining activities are done closer to water bodies. Since the extraction process of these minerals are unregulated, the chemicals such as cyanide used in the extraction are washed into these water bodies, making these water bodies very poisonous and unwholesome for human consumption. This deprives communities living around these water bodies good water and bumper fishing harvest; for communities that depend on these water bodies for their source of livelihood. In the end, aquatic life is destroyed, and the beauty of the water bodies is compromised as well.

Figure 18: Functional paragraph deconstruction 3

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F/ES/GERT/009

Pollution of our water bodies occur as a result of unregulated mining in Ghana. Chemicals such as mercury which are used in the mining process can wash away into our water bodies and contaminate them. Since there is no regulation of such mining processes, there is no accountability and as a result, individuals involved do not care about what happens as long as they obtain what they are looking for. These chemicals make water bodies unsafe for drinking and all domestic use. They also kill the fishes, reducing the food as we would have otherwise had. In the long run, we would have to result to importing fishes as well as water to drink. Slowly, Ghana would be a country where no one would want to stay.

M/ES/GERT/010

Some unregulated mining activities lead to the pollution of water bodies. Sometimes water from water bodies is used to sieve through soil to find precious minerals. This leaves dirt and chemicals in the water bodies. When animals and human beings drink from these water bodies, they may fall sick and die. This leads to loss of human resource and the extinction of some animal species. The pollution of water bodies also increases the effort and cost of purifying water for human use. This could affect the economy as a whole. Thus, the pollution of water bodies by unregulated mining affects so many aspects of our lives.

Figure 19: Functional paragraph deconstruction 4

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M/ES/GERT/005

To begin with, unregulated mining leads to pollution of water bodies. Our water bodies (the sea, river, lake) etc. are very essential to human beings and Ghana as a whole. Through our water bodies, we obtain drinking water, transportation medium, sources of food etc. so it is important we protect and preserve it. Unregulated mining causes soil from around the water bodies to pollute the sea, making it unsafe for the fishes, unsafe for drinking etc. It leaves the water bodies with a brown appearance as a result of the pollution.

F/ES/GERT/004

The destruction of land and forest is one major danger which threatens Ghana's economy. The destruction of land has effect on foods commodities. Each year, cocoa strips down 20 billion tons which affect the economy of Ghana and due to destruction of forest, now Ghana has to implant new trees which are also use for making books, pencils and so on. On the contamination of water bodies, water has two major main relation to the small scale mining or unregulated mining. Thus, the heavy water which washes to remove the minerals and the alluvial gold. When this is done, since they used chemicals which also help them in washing, they left chemicals like mercury in it. This prevent people drinking from streams, river, and so on and other source of drinking.

Figure 20: Functional paragraph deconstruction 5

In Figure 18, the essay labelled F/ES/GERT/007 uses an ordinal expression to link the body paragraph to the introductory one: the author opens with "the first point to note is that…". By using this expression, the author signals that there are more paragraphs to be developed to support the thesis of the essay. In the juxtaposed essay labelled M/ES/GERT/006, the author uses a numbered approach to signal the beginning of the key idea or topic sentence. The expression "one of the dangers…" is an ostensible indication that a number of dangers have been introduced in the preceding paragraph. In F/ES/GERT/007, the author proceeds to use demonstrative pronouns "this" and "these" to signal relationships between adjacent ideas. However, in the first minor support sentence (shaded mauve) supporting the major sentence (shaded yellow), the demonstrative pronoun "these" does not have a logical referent in the immediately preceding T-Unit.

In the essay labelled M/ES/GERT/006, on the other hand, the author uses only one instance of a demonstrative pronoun – in the second minor support sentence. However, that author uses the phrase "in the end…" to show how the preceding cascade of causal events hurts wildlife and the aesthetics of water bodies. However, it appears that the idea in the T-Unit that is introduced by the transition phrase "in the end," would have had a more cogent footing if that idea had proceeded immediately after the first minor support sentence. Therefore, while the use of the transition phrase in this instance is a commendable attempt, the phrase does not serve the logical purpose for which it was used.

There is no discernible gendered trend in paragraph organisation in terms of the use of transitions, and hence, in terms of coherence. The

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discussion of the use of transitions in the paragraphs in Figure 18 is applicable to the paragraphs in other figures; the paragraphs in Figure 18 are illustrative of the paragraphs in the other Figures. Consequently, other Figures could be substituted for Figure 18 and the ensuing observations would still apply.

The researcher did not find any gender-based trends and variations in how authors constructed their introductory and body paragraphs. This observation from the qualitative assessment of undergraduate essays lends support to the findings from the quantitative analyses reported in this work. It appears that, at least for the particular batch of students whose essays were assessed in the present study, female students and their male counterparts do not differ significantly in their writing competence. It would be instructive note, however, that such a conclusion is made with caution due to research limitations. Nonetheless, the findings of this study are interesting in that they are in contrast to what is mostly reported in extant literature.

Chapter summary

Chapter Four has reported on the results of the data analyses. The researcher has endeavoured to discuss the results in the light of the existing knowledge. Results from two quantitative analyses and one qualitative analysis did not support most of the conclusions drawn in the extant literature. In the quantitative analyses, there was no statistically significant evidence to support the rejection of the null hypotheses concerning essay quality and writing productivity. Moreover, in the qualitative analysis, no gendered trends in how undergraduate first year students presented their ideas, in terms of paragraphs and sentences were found in their expository essays.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

The recent scholarship in the field of cognitive science provides mixed conclusions about gendered differences in human cognition. A body of literature shows that males tend to have an advantage over females in visuo-spatial tasks while the reverse is true in terms of linguistic tasks. Nevertheless, there is also popular academic thought that challenges the notion that such differences are inherent; instead, several contemporary researchers argue, in line with the Gender Similarities Hypothesis, that males and females are not cognitively different in ways that matter. In this milieu, there has been much research in the psycho- linguistic and socio-linguistic fields that have demonstrated female superiority over males on writing and compositional tasks.

However, while there has been rigorous research in advanced nations, and even in some Asian EFL and L2 contexts, the knowledge base is thin in African contexts. The present study was, therefore, conducted to begin to build the knowledge base in the Ghanaian and African context. Research in this area will have important implications for pedagogical approaches in these contexts where English is often a foreign language or the *lingua franca*.

Based on a theoretical framework of gender and discourse communities, the researcher conducted a convergent mixed-methods study using conveniently available expository essays of 214 students who were undergraduate freshmen and fresh women of the University of Cape Coast in the 2021/2022 academic year. Non-parametric inferential statistics were used

to test two hypotheses, while content analysis was used to analyse the paragraphs structures of 10 purposively selected essays.

Conclusions

Based on the findings discussed in Chapter Four, the following conclusions are drawn in this study:

1. Male and female undergraduate students did not differ significantly in their expository essay writing competence as assessed using the 2EQC adopted from Smadi and Al-Haq (1995). The researcher's findings failed to confirm the hypothesis that male and females would differ in their compositional competence as measured by the named tool. This finding contradicts the conclusions of many existing studies that found that females had an advantage over their male counterparts in their writing tasks. However, the researcher notes that most of the extant empirical literature report on studies done among elementary school pupils. While many of these existing studies are reasonably robust in their methodologies, there is a clear population gap because adult writers are not sufficiently represented in the existing literature. Some studies have pointed out that gendered differences in cognition and compositional ability may even out in adulthood. Perhaps this evening out may have played out in the present study. However, a single incidence of research is not sufficient to support such a conclusion. Other cross-sectional studies and further longitudinal enquiries may serve to provide further evidence with implications for pedagogical design.

2. Male and female undergraduate students did not differ significantly in their writing productivity as measured by Word and Paragraph Counts. The researcher's findings failed to confirm the hypothesis that male and females

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would differ in their writing productivity as measured by the aforementioned variables. This conclusion contradicts the prevalent conclusions that males generally are disadvantaged in text length when compared to their female counterparts. Evidence has shown that even among adult writers, males tend to suffer greater writing task anxiety than their female counterparts, which writing anxiety tends to disrupt working memory thereby resulting in poor writing task performance. Differences in motivational levels have been reported in literature as mediating gendered differences in writing productivity. However, in the present study, no gendered differences in word count and paragraph count performance were found between male and female undergraduate freshmen and freshwomen. It is not known whether there was a difference in writing anxiety between the two comparison groups. It is also not known the levels of motivation that members of each comparison group brought to the task.

3. There were no qualitative differences in how female and male undergraduate students structured their paragraphs and how their male colleagues did so. This conclusion lends credence to the two foregoing conclusions, and serves to supply a robustness to the quantitative conclusions of this work.

Recommendations

In cognizance of the limitations and delimitations of the present study, the researcher posits that the evidence on gendered differences in writing competence, especially in the Ghana's L2 context, can be strengthened further with possible implications for pedagogical design. In connection with the

conclusions summarised in this chapter, the researcher makes the following recommendations:

1. More quantitative research should be conducted on writing competence. Future research could measure competence using more tools and variables. Further, these studies could be longitudinal studies that track developments in writing competence among a cohort of learners from basic school to university. Such studies could yield useful insight on whether and where gender differences in compositional ability occur, and, therefore, whether or not where to apply pedagogical interventions.

2. There is the need to expand writing research in Ghana by recognising other factors that have been shown to mediate gender differences in writing productivity. Such factors include socio-economic backgrounds, levels of writing anxiety, and levels of motivation.

3. The knowledge base could be expanded by including more qualitative analyses. These analyses could include larger corpora and more diverse genres of student writing across different educational levels. The researcher acknowledges the potential time and resource implications of qualitatively analysing large corpora of text. Hence, the recommendation is that the use of newer artificial intelligence tools be explored for their potential to be exploited for more nuanced analysis of writing.

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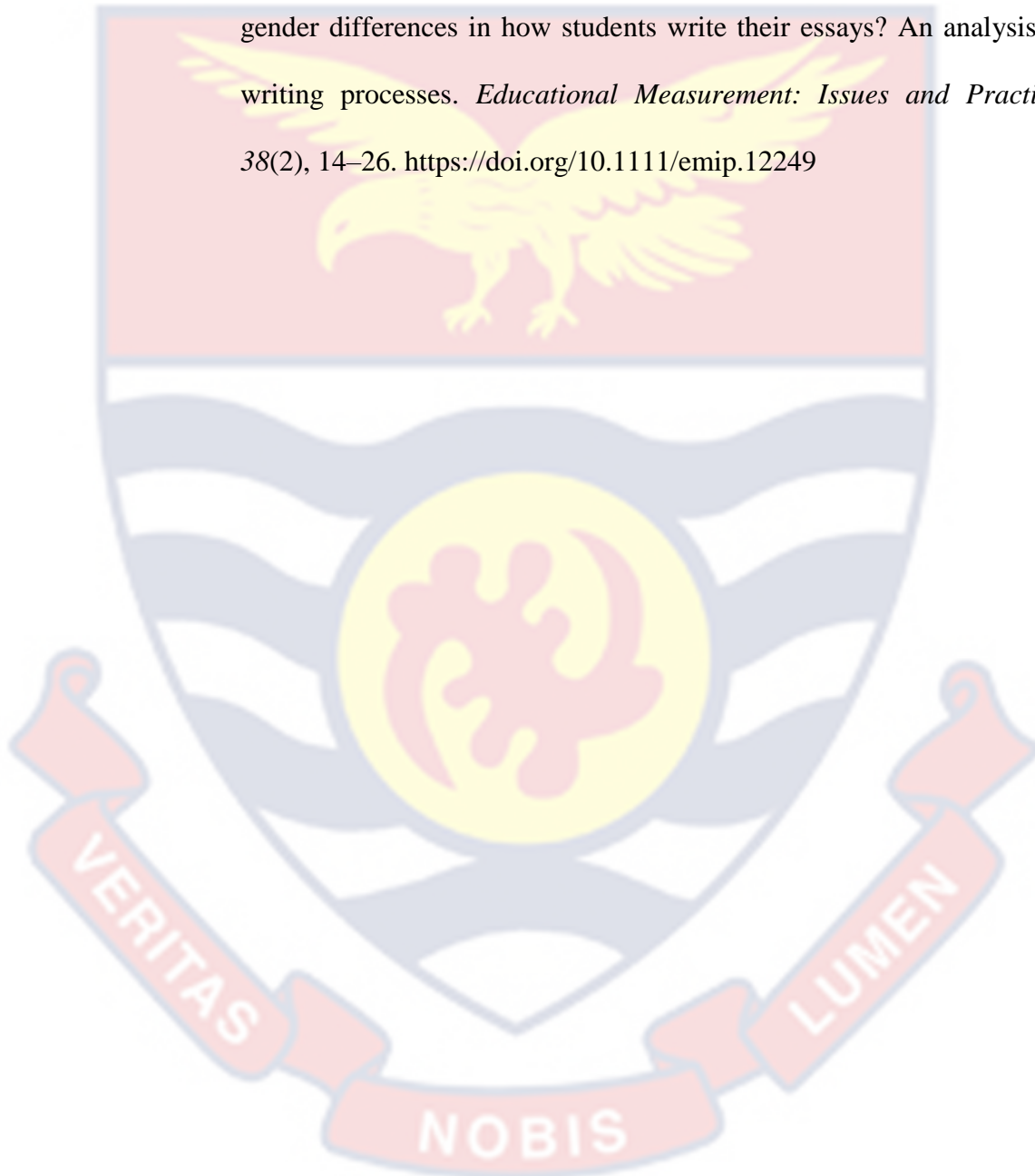
APPENDICES

Appendix 1

Table 14: Expository essay checklist adopted from Smadi & Al-Haq (1995)

Component	Rating				
	0	1	2	3	4
A. Thesis statement					
1. To what extent is the thesis statement clear?					
2. To what extent is the thesis statement qualified?					
3. To what extent is it indicative of further development?					
4. To what extent is it supported?					
5. To what extent are the topic sentences clearly stated?					
6. To what extent are the topic sentences qualified?					
7. To what extent are the topic sentences indicative of further development?					
8. To what extent are the topic sentences supported?					
B. Relevance					
9. To what extent is the treatment as a whole relevant?					
C. Coherence					
10. To what extent is the essay as a whole coherent?					
D. Cohesion					
11. To what extent is the essay as a whole cohesive?					
E. Exposition					
12. To what extent is the treatment as a whole developed?					
13. To what extent is the treatment as a whole supported?					
14. To what extent is the treatment as a whole organised?					
15. To what extent is the essay a whole expository?					
16. To what extent is the treatment logical?					
17. To what extent is the treatment as a whole comprehensible?					
F. Quantity					
18. To what extent is the discussion complete?					
19. To what extent is the discussion balanced?					
G. Unity					
20. To what extent is the whole essay unified?					
H. Wording					
21. To what extent is the wording as a whole adequate?					
I. Grammaticality					
22. To what extent is the topic as a whole grammatical?					
23. To what extent is the spelling correct?					
24. To what extent is the punctuation proper?					
Scoring key 0= complete failure in performance 4= complete success in performance					

Appendix 2

Table 15*: **Coding scheme for paragraph analysis**

Colour	Code
	Thesis statement
	Statement of intent
	Topic sentence
	Major support sentence (supporting topic sentence)
	Minor Support sentence (supporting major support sentence)
	Concluding sentence
	Irrelevant sentence

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