THE ACADEMIC WRITING DIFFICULTIES OF UNDERGRADUATES: THE CASE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF BOTSWANA STUDENTS

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Abstract
The paper has examined writing problems encountered by University of Botswana first year undergraduate students doing a compulsory writing course. Writing was assumed to be one of the most difficult activities for learners, especially that they do it in English which is a second language to them. The study has, therefore, brought to surface the difficulties the learners face as they grapple with the course. To address the problem, data were collected from the students doing a writing course titled 'Writing in English' through a combination of methods, such as administering a questionnaire, classroom observation and examination of the students' assignment scripts. The study found that although the majority of the learners enjoy writing as an academic exercise by helping them to express their ideas, views, opinions; and desire to have more practice in crafting a thesis statement, sentence constructions and paragraph development, they are grossly deficient in areas of vocabulary, grammar, mechanics, sentence constructions and expressions. To analyse data effectively, The Social Constructivist Theory was used. Recommendations were made that students be given more practice in academic writing, especially sentence constructions, crafting a thesis and paragraph development. It was further recommended that writing tasks be activity based and that students be engaged in cooperative learning. This was done with the hope that students' writing difficulties would be minimized and that more meaningful writing would take place in the classroom.

Key words: academic writing, difficulty of writing, activity based tasks, cooperative learning, graphological devices, social constructivism

Introduction

The paper examines writing problems as encountered by the University of Botswana first year undergraduate students doing a first year writing course titled 'Writing in English'. The study is done with the hope of finding the possible sources of students writing difficulties and towards the end suggesting the possible remedial interventions which will help them to communicate with clarity in writing. The English Department writing course lecturers always complain about the students' inability to communicate effectively in writing. They are perplexed that despite the fact that the students' doing this course have previously received writing instruction at primary, junior and senior secondary school levels and subsequently from Communication and Study Skills Department on a similar course, there is no demonstration of their writing skills knowledge in their written work. The research findings showed evidence of not only spelling punctuations and grammatical errors, but also a limited vocabulary, wrong sentence construction, lack of cohesion and coherence that are supposed to show the logical connection between sentences and paragraphs. Writing is a process of encoding of a message through graphic symbols in any given language. It involves the organization of sentences into a text that makes a coherent whole to communicate successfully to a reader or a perceived audience. The problems stated above have been observed in the literature.

Literature Review

The process of learning writing skills has for a long time been observed to be the most difficult and complex of all the language skills by many researchers in the literature, (Abdel Latif, 2012; Abu Rass, 1997; Afrin, 2016; Alfaki, 2015; Byrne, 1988; Hu, 2016; Raimes, 1983; Simpson, 2012; Stanley, 2003). Hu (2016:43) notes that 'among the four language skills, writing has been widely perceived as the most challenging skill to master. Byrne (1988) and Hedge (1988) comment that there is no possibility of interaction or benefit that in the process of writing, the students have to compensate for the absence of gestures, prosodic features such as stress and intonation which help to clarify meaning in speech. Byrne (1988), Hedge 1988 and Alfaki, 2015 further argue that the situation is compounded by the fact that the students lack mastery of graphological devices such as punctuations, spelling and capitalization, which have been employed to make a message clearly understood. Oguine, Gowon and Gochal (1988:367) define writing as "a highly sophisticated activity comprising five general components, namely: content, organization, grammar, vocabulary and mechanics". According to them, for writing to be effective and meaningful, all these components must be pulled together. However, from the classroom observation, writing seems to be the most difficult activity for students, especially when they do it in English, which, to them, is a second language that comes with its own problems. Person (1977:270) argue that writing is so vital in the 21st century that "it is difficult to imagine life without it". Morapedi (2012) shares the view as well. She argues that writing as an activity is equally very important in the learning process. According to her, it serves a variety of pedagogical purposes and thus

provides variety in classroom activities that help as a break from oral activities. Lea and Street (1998) add that it is an abstract exercise that relies on the cognitive processes requiring the ability to think critically, analytically and reflectively in order to express ideas meaningfully to the audience. Abu Rasi (1997) also observes that writing is difficult for native speakers and non-native speakers alike because writers "must balance issues such as content, organization, purposes, audience, vocabulary punctuation spelling and mechanics". He further adds that writing is, especially, difficult for non-native speakers because they are expected to create written products that demonstrate mastery of all the above elements in a language. Stanley (2003) shares the idea of writing being a difficult activity and adds that because writing is a complex process, it can lead to the learner frustration. Alfaki (2015) and Afrin (2016) argue that many learners simply do not enjoy writing tasks because of their difficult nature. According to them, students feel that the tasks have little value for them so far as social interaction is concerned. Non-the-less, they hasten to say that in most cultures, the ability to write carries prestige. Morapedi (2002) observes that students have negative attitude towards learning to write in a language that is foreign to them such as English.

Theoretical Framework
This study is grounded on the social constructivist theory propounded by Vygosky (1978). The theory emphasizes the importance of social interaction in the construction of knowledge, (Van de Ven, 2009). It states that all knowledge develops as a result of social interaction and language use, and is, therefore, shared rather than an individual experience, (Lynch, 2016). The process of learning requires that the learner actively participates in creative activities and self-organization. Vygosky (1978) believes that learners learn best when they function as a social group that collaboratively constructs a shared culture or artifacts with shared meaning. In the social constructivist context, the teacher is not a dispenser of knowledge, rather he or she is a guide, a facilitator and a co-explorer, who encourages learners to question, challenge and formulate their own ideas, opinions and conclusions, (Lynch, 2016). In the writing classroom, therefore, students should be encouraged to participate in class discussions and group activities. Group work is emphasized to ensure that social interaction takes place and language is used in context to create knowledge. As students share ideas in groups and generate points for writing their essays on a given topic, the stress and pressure which they feel when asked to write an essay will gradually dissipate. As they engage in collaborative learning, with the teacher facilitating the learning process, scaffolding is provided in the learners' zone of proximal development, (Lynch, 2016; Vygosky, 1978). This means the zone between what learners can achieve independently and what they may achieve with support from peers or the teacher. The process approach to writing is adopted in the writing classroom. When in groups, students are encouraged to follow through the pre-writing, the writing and the re-writing and proofreading stages to progressively produce the final draft of the

essay, (Alfaki, 2015; Umunnakwe, 2014). The authors, therefore, believe that collaborative learning, shared experiences and peer support are essential to help students get over the apprehension and stress they experience in the writing classroom.

Research Questions

The study seeks to answer the following questions:

    i)   Do undergraduate students at the University of Botswana enjoy writing as an academic exercise?

    ii)   What are the writing problems encountered by first year undergraduate students in the writing classroom?

    iii)   How can they be assisted to eliminate these writing problems?

Methodology

The survey method was used to collect primary data for the study. A questionnaire was administered to 100 students randomly sampled from a population of 150 registered for the first year writing course in the second semester of the academic year 2017/18. The questionnaire was divided into two sections: A and B. Section A sought demographic information of the participants, such as gender, age, course of study and year of study. Section B sought information on the attitude of students towards writing, problems encountered by students when they write and ways in which they can be helped to overcome their writing problems. In addition, classroom observations were undertaken over three semesters by the researchers as they taught the writing course. Furthermore, some randomly selected students' scripts were examined to highlight the problems encountered by students when they write assignments and tests. Using frequency counts and simple percentages, the questionnaire data were analyzed. In addition, the sample scripts were analyzed using content analysis to highlight the errors. The results were discussed to reveal the findings of the study.

Presentation of Results

Of the 100 participants who answered the questionnaire, 74% were female and 26% were male undergraduates. Their ages ranged between 15 to 25 years, with the majority (75%) within the 15 to 20 age range. The majority of the students (70%) undertaking the writing course were first year undergraduates, 24% were second year students, and 6% indicated that they were in the third year. These students came from various faculties in the University of Botswana. Apart from students of English (20%) who took the course as a compulsory writing course, 80% came from other disciplines such as Law (35%), Education (10%), Media Studies (10%), Social Sciences (10%), Tourism and Hospitality (7%), Logistics and Supply (3%), Fine Arts (3%) and Engineering (2%). The percentage of students (80%) who registered for the course as an elective from outside the

Department of English testifies to the importance and functionality of the course across the curriculum.

Attitude of students towards the writing course

Responding to the question: Do you enjoy writing? The majority of the students (85%) indicated that they enjoyed writing. Only 15% stated that they did not. The overwhelming majority who enjoyed writing did so because it is a form of self-expression, enabling them to express their ideas, opinions and feelings on paper. Others recognized the importance of writing in education and said the write to improve their communication and critical thinking skills, and their creative abilities. Some students indicated that writing helps them to escape boredom and relieve stress. It is clear that the majority of students had a positive attitude towards writing and enjoyed it as an academic exercise. On the other hand, 15% of the respondents stated that they did not enjoy writing. The reasons included: writing is time consuming, tiring, demanding, cumbersome, and produces physical strain on the wrist and back. Other reasons given by this group of students included: writing requires critical thinking, knowledge of grammar and vocabulary; the topics are usually boring and uninteresting. This group of students clearly had a negative attitude towards academic writing. The majority of the students (95%) confirmed that they received writing instructions in the secondary school before coming to the university. They had been taught how to write narratives, descriptions and argumentative essays at the secondary school level, which means that they had prior knowledge and experience of essay writing before they came to the University of Botswana.

Students' writing problems

The respondents were requested to indicate the problems they encountered when they undertook academic writing. Table 1 below presents the results. Forty percent (40%) had problems with how to begin an essay; 45% had difficulty with writing the thesis statement; 35% were deficient in grammar, spelling and punctuation; 30% had problems with constructing sentences; 25% struggle with paragraph development; 20% have challenges of expression; another 20% had problems with what to write (content of the essay), 13% have difficulty in writing supporting sentences and 10% generating ideas on a given topic. Other problems included presenting ideas logically and sequentially, writing captivating introductions; writing concisely and writing straight to the point.

Table 1: Analysis of students' writing problems

Students' Writing problems	Frequency	Percentage
How to begin the essay	40	40%
Writing a thesis statement	45	45%
Grammar, spelling, punctuation	35	35%
Sentence construction	30	30%
Paragraph development	25	25%
Expression	20	20%
What to write (Content of the essay)	20	20%
Writing supporting sentences	13	13%
Generating ideas on a given topic	10	10%

The plethora of problems and challenges articulated by these students indicate the enormous difficulties they faced when confronted with a writing task. Ghabool et al. (2012: 132) note that lack of English language proficiency is the main cause of lots of difficulties that the English Second Language learners have in their writing tasks. They further observe that the writing task is challenging because many practical and theoretical issues are included (Ghabool et al. p., 2012: 133).

Solutions to students' writing problems
The students suggested ways in which they could be assisted to eliminate the myriads of problems they encountered in academic writing. The majority of the students (40%) wanted their lecturers to give more writing exercises and timely feedback on their writing tasks (Ghabool et al., 2012; Gue'nette, 2007; Ramaprasad, 1983). Indeed, researchers recommend that students should be supported by teachers to enable them take control of their writing. (Ghabool et al.,2012). The students believe that practice makes perfect so the more they wrote and are promptly corrected, the better they would become in academic writing. Pineteh (2014:17) points out that students struggle with academic writing because they do not receive regular quality feedback on academic papers. Some students would want lecturers to focus on their areas of deficiency such as writing thesis statements, introductory paragraphs, paragraph development, with topic sentences, grammar, sentence construction, cohesiveness, coherence and punctuation mechanics. They would also appreciate their lecturers giving them model paragraphs and essays as a guide to their own writing. A few students suggested extensive reading on their part to enrich their vocabulary and to learn from renowned writers on how to write effectively.

Presentation of Students' scripts and Analysis
The examples below serve to illustrate how deficient most of the first year undergraduates are in writing. There are spelling and punctuation errors, run-on

sentences, sentence fragments, poor sentence construction, problems with subject-verb agreement, incorrect tenses, poor expressions, to mention but a few. Most of the sentences are so long that the writers fail to control them effectively, thereby vitiating meaning. Some students' scripts randomly selected by the authors were analyzed to highlight authentic problems encountered by students in the writing classroom. The following paragraphs taken from first year students' scripts will suffice as illustration: Sample A:

Topic: "My Family":

> i) *Blood is thicker than water for it runs warm **true** and gives us life but with family, it's the **give** that hold us together **atleast its** what i **belived** for as long as **i** have lived **i** have been told that nothing is more important than family.*

Sample A (i) is so badly constructed that the writer fails to communicate. It is made up of a series of run-on sentences that embody more than one idea. The following words are misspelt: atleast (at least), its (it's), belived (believed). The first person singular personal pronoun "I" is consistently written in lower case. The adjective words "true" and the verb "give" do not communicate the intended meaning.

> (ii) *Coming from Kweneng district in Molepolole my parents both originates. We all reside know in Tlokweng.*

Sample A (ii) has two short sentences with errors of punctuation, spelling, grammar and expression. For example, the subordinate conjunction '*where*' which links first clause with the second clause making a comment about the place *Kweneng district in Molepolole* is missing. Also, the comma that should demarcate the subordinate clause "*Coming from Kweneng district in Molepolole*" and the main clause "*my parents both originates*" is missing. Furthermore, there is subject-verb agreement violation in "*my parents both originates*". The subject, *my parents,* is plural in number and the verb, *originates*, is singular as it carries the grammatical morpheme –s. The word "now" is spelt "know" in the second sentence. The two sentences taken together do not make much sense, which implies that the student has problems of expression.

> (iii) *I have **head** that its family that lifts you up and protect you when life gets hard, but the day I **head** the words " sir you are under arrest" they were nowhere to be found.*

Similarly, Sample A (iii) has spelling and grammatical errors. The word "heard" is spelt "head" twice. The contracted word "It's" is written without the apostrophe, and plural

verb, "protect", does not agree with the singular subject "family." The word '*sir'* which begins the sentence is in small letter.

Sample B: Topic: "Technology in today's world":

> *(i) Technology in general play a very important role in our everyday live but internet appears to be the most significant form of technology because we rely on it for almost everything such as news, education, social networking, advertising online shopping and so on.*

Sample B (i) is one long compound complex sentence talking of the importance of internet as compared to technology in general. It has subject-verb agreement violation, spelling and punctuation errors. For example, The subject *technology in general* which is singular does not agree with its plural verb *play* in terms of number in the sense that the verb *play* does not carry the singular morpheme *–s*. The word "*live*" should be spelt as *life*. The definite article *the* is missing before the word internet (the internet) and the comma before "and so on" is missing.

> *(ii) Although mass media is one of the most used outcome of technology, it has effects on people's lives including the fact that it provides a great deal of information, secondly it changes their behavior, thirdly it is addictive and lastly it enhances socialization.*

Sample B (ii) has a run-on sentence and punctuation errors. There should be a full stop punctuation at the end of the complex sentence finishing with the preposition *of information*. The constructions, '*secondly it changes their behavior', 'thirdly it is addictive and lastly it enhances socialization' should be full sentences beginning with capital letters in the words secondly, thirdly and lastly ending with full stops.*

> *(iii) There is the visual aspect of technology that is used to ease the learning process as **it make** it easier for information to be mass broadcasted to scholars as slides, inforgraphics, video and others.*

Example B (iii), There is also evidence of tense problem. The subject-verb agreement rule has been violated. The plural verb **make** does not agree with the singular pronoun **it,** to mark the simple present tense. It should read 'It makes'. The word **broadcasted** has

had the past tense morpheme *–ed* overgeneralized to the work broadcast which should be " broadcast".

Similarly, Sample C (i, ii, iii) have errors of grammar and poor expression.

Sample C: Topic: "How to be the best student at University"

> i) *Participation in class is also key when you participate you are able to better know if you understand what is being taught.*

For example, C (i) has a run-on sentence which fails to communicate effectively. The long sentence could be divided in three sentences with the verbs '*is*', '*are*' and *understand*.

> ii) *Dedication also takes a time consciousness to bring out the student in university*
> *because everything one does knows that time is running out and must be utilized accordingly on his/her studies.*

For example, C (ii) has errors of expression such as: "to bring the student in university (to bring out the best in the student…), "everything one does knows that…", and using "he or she" to replace "one".

> iii) *Last minute things will results in doing the work that is not well so students must always do assignments well on time.*

Example C (iii) also has grammatical errors of agreement such as "last minute things will results". The word results should read as 'result'. The expression "and work that is not well" should read well *done*.

Lastly, Samples D (i,ii,iii) are also fraught with errors of punctuation, spelling, grammar, expression and poor sentence construction.

Sample D: Topic: "The role of social media in today's world"

> i) *The youth that is adolescents and teenagers are mostly affected and influenced by social media. This meaning that they can easily be manipulated by what their exposed to.*

Example D (i) leaves out the commas that should separate the appositive "that is, the adolescents and teenagers" from "the youth" in the first sentence. The second sentence

starts with "this meaning that" instead of "this means that" and the pronoun "their" is used instead of "they are."

> *ii) Social media is a platform socializing, however the downfall of the country's economy is crime through social media. So by doing this they are attracting potential clients and social media also makes it easy for people to buy goods and services online in the comfort of their homes.*

Example D (ii) has the word "for" omitted before "socializing," a full stop before "however" instead of a comma, to signal the end of the first sentence because what follows next is a different idea. Similarly, two different ideas are put together in the second sentence, and the word "downfall" does not collocate with "the economy."

> *iii) They are both at the most confusing stage of their life which makes them more gullible. Them not being sure of themselves they tend to imitate western cultures and lose their self-identity along the way.*

Finally, in D (iii) "their life" should be "their lives". The word "them" which starts the second sentence should be pre preceded by the preposition *with* and the sentence should begin with the subordinate clause "With them not being sure of themselves," These numerous writing problems echo Pineteh's (2012:16) observation that "students' writing are usually fraught with mechanical weaknesses, especially in areas like paragraph and sentence construction, grammar and syntax, as well as style". Pineteh also rightly notes that "sentences are often truncated and convoluted because students still grapple with grammatical aspects such as noun-verb agreement, tense and spelling (2012:20). All the errors found in these scripts confirm the fact that the students have numerous writing problems which should be dealt with to ensure effective communication when they write.

Findings and Discussion
This study has found that the majority of the undergraduate students enjoy writing, and therefore, have a positive attitude towards it. This finding does not coincide with earlier studies which record high levels of student apprehension, frustration, boredom, and lack of interest in writing (Daly & Miller, 1975; Daly, 1978; Graham et al., 2007; Abu Rass, 2007, Zamel, 1983; Abdel Latif, 2012). Graham et al., (2007) observe that writing attitudes significantly predict writing achievement. They note that students with more positive writing attitude had greater writing achievements than their peers with less favourable attitude. It is very impressive to note that the students in this study have positive attitudes towards academic writing because it helps them to express their ideas,

views and opinions. In other words, writing gives them a voice on a variety of topics. Unfortunately, this positive attitude does not translate to greater writing achievements in the case of these students, considering their level of performance.   However, the fact that they enjoy writing is an indicator of their willingness to learn and improve on their writing skills.

Some of the findings confirm what has been observed in the literature. The study also found, from the sample scripts, that the undergraduate students have a multitude of writing problems, ranging from spelling, punctuation, subject-verb agreement, sentence construction, paragraph development, to problems of expression, organization and content. Many of the students have difficulties in starting the essay regarding what to write about a given topic, how to write a thesis statement, supporting details and how to logically sequence their ideas. Previous studies have also highlighted these problems as common to students studying English as a Foreign Language as well as English as a Second Language, (Leibowitz et al., 1997; Bacha, 2002; Pineteh, 2012; Hu, 2016). Nunan (1989:36) points out that, students' writing difficulties emanate from the fact that "writing is an extremely complex cognitive activity which demands that the writer demonstrates a number of variables simultaneously". He further argues that at the sentence level, these variables include "control of content, format, sentence structure, vocabulary, punctuation ...". Nunan (1983:36) goes on to say that "beyond the sentence, the writer must be able to structure and integrate information into cohesive and coherent paragraphs and texts". The fact that students must perform so many tasks simultaneously while creating a text makes writing challenging and difficult. The result is the production of a piece of writing that fails to communicate meaningfully to the audience.

The students have suggested having enough writing practice in order to alleviate the situation. Indeed, since writing is a creative process which requires critical, analytical and reflective thinking to be able to formulate ideas and put them together meaningfully, a lot of practice is needed. Lecturers should, therefore, ensure that students are given regular writing tasks with a lot of monitoring and mentoring. The more students write and receive regular and constructive feedback, the better writers they will become. Grabe and Kaplan (1996:6) note that writing does not come naturally but rather gained through continuous effort and practice. They add that learners must take the responsibility for their learning if meaningful learning is to take place. Similarly, Hedge (1988:11) states that, "in order to become a good writer, a student needs to write a lot". In other words, Hedge is emphasizing on the fact that students should be given a lot of practice in the writing exercise.

Furthermore, constructive and positive feedback cannot be overemphasized in the writing process and, therefore, the respondents in this study demand that lecturers provide it to

help them improve on their writing. Pineteh (2014: 17) asserts that students struggle with academic writing because they do not receive regular quality feedback on academic papers. Zamel (1985:79) argues that feedback can be effective if teachers respond to students' writing "as genuine and interested readers rather than as judges and evaluators". Similarly, Byrne (1988:29) believes that if teachers are to be truly readers and not judges, they should not concentrate on what learners have failed to achieve but rather on what they actually succeeded in doing. Most importantly, the feedback must be done constructively and positively in order to support learning. Lectures must encourage students when giving feedback in their written work. In deserving situations, lecturers must praise students so that they get motivated to work harder. In other words, lectures must guide learners in such a way that they ultimately improve in their writing. Ellis (1994) believes that if teachers see their students' responses as the end of the interaction, then students will not make any further effort to learn. But if the feedback includes specific direction on what students should do next, the students will get encouraged to work harder than before. Indeed, the feedback that is not constructive and, thus, negative, vague and abstract does not help students develop their writing skills or revise their writing. Ferries (1995:49) also believes that teachers should make constructive criticisms alongside the comments of encouragement in their written feedback.

The students further suggested that their lecturers should focus on their areas of deficiency in the writing classroom. According to them, as teachers discover areas where the students are deficient, they can direct add explicit instruction to those areas to ensure that the students improve. Leibowitz et al., (1997) suggested that the writing course incorporate explicit instruction in grammar, spelling, punctuation, sentence construction and vocabulary development, (Bacha, 2002; Pineteh, 2012). It is true that teaching spelling effectively requires regular spelling exercises to be carried out in class. This can be done by drawing students' attention to words which are often misspelt, such as receive, accommodate, embarrass, succeed, grammar, quite, quiet, referred, title, writing, just to mention a few. Byrne, (1988) observes that the relationship between sound and symbol is a complex one and that this poses a huge problem for many users of the language. Therefore, it is the teacher's responsibility to provide guidance in key areas, through rules. He, however, hastens to say that students must also take responsibility to consult a dictionary for guidance. Alfaki, (2015), asserts that the habit of consulting a dictionary should be greatly emphasized not only for spelling but also for vocabulary development. He further suggests that students refer to spellcheckers when they do their assignments in order to eliminate most of the spelling errors.

Punctuation is another area which the teachers need to give attention when teaching writing exercise. Teachers must make the students appreciate the communicative value of punctuations by not only explaining but exposing them to a variety of examples to

demonstrate their usefulness. For instance, the reader expects sentence boundaries to be marked, with the capital letter at the start of all the sentences, and a full stop at the end of the declarative sentences; the question mark to end the interrogative sentences and the exclamatory mark at the end of imperative or interjection utterance. Alfaki (2015:40) suggests that students should revise their written work by reading it aloud and inserting appropriate punctuation marks when they make natural pauses as they read. These conventions cannot be ignored if writing must communicate effectively.

Constructivist analysis

The social constructivist view is that learning takes place as students interact with one another, generate ideas and construct knowledge, with the teacher facilitating the learning process. In that way, the students get to share ideas and generate points for the writing task. Therefore, lecturers should encourage cooperative learning and give writing tasks in groups or in pairs. In other words, students should take responsibility for their own learning and not wait to be spoon-fed by the lecturers, especially at the university level. The process approach to writing should also be followed so that students work in groups, progressively, and go through the stages of the writing process until they produce the final draft, (Goldstein & Carr, 1996). The process approach focuses on the process rather than on the product. This is because writing is done in stages from the pre-writing, writing and re- writing or revision stage. It helps to solve the problem of how to begin an essay, what to write and how to organize the points. The process approach also relieves the pressure that students feel when they are required to write an essay. Students should be encouraged to read extensively in order to enrich their vocabulary and knowledge of the world, so that they can ultimately write well. It will also exposes them to how experienced writers construct sentences and organize their thoughts in writing. The areas that demand explicit instruction are grammar, sentence construction, formulating thesis statements, writing supporting sentences and paragraph development. Lecturers should focus on these problem areas and provide ample guidance. Model paragraphs and texts should be provided so that they act as guide to the students in their writing tasks.

Conclusion

The paper has demonstrated the difficult nature of writing as experienced by the University of Botswana undergraduates undertaking a writing course. The paper has also highlighted students' problems and difficulties in writing. The paper has demonstrated the complexity of writing as a process and showed how most students find it difficult to communicate effectively, especially when writing in English. It has, however, been shown that despite the difficulty the students undergo, they have a positive attitude to writing and enjoy using it as a medium of expressing their ideas, opinions and views on a variety of subjects. Some suggestions have been put forward as measures that can assist students to improve on their writing performance. These include giving them a lot of

writing practice, offering timely and constructive feedback on their written assignments, giving explicit instruction on areas of students' deficiency and encouraging cooperative learning in the writing classroom. In addition to these suggested strategies, it has been suggested that teachers need to be sympathetic towards students' writing predicament and give them as much support as possible. It has been further suggested that teachers refrain from behaving like judges but view students' work as attempts to learn, even if it does not communicate effectively. The suggestions were made with the hope that through the different stages in the writing process, students will hopefully learn to communicate their ideas more effectively with time.

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