

Enhancing Doctoral Research Education through the Institution of Graduate Writing Courses in Ghanaian Universities

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Abstract

A key support service in doctoral research that has increasingly gained attention is academic writing courses. This position paper argues for the institutionalization of graduate writing courses in universities in Ghana in order to acquaint doctoral students with the theoretical, procedural, and practical aspects of the writing of high stakes academic genres. An overview (including evaluation) of existing courses on research-related writing in some universities is proffered. The study consequently presents arguments to support a proposal for institutional graduate writing courses in Ghanaian universities, followed by a discussion of other pertinent issues such as the curriculum, staffing, and funding. It is hoped that the institutionalization of such a writing support service will ultimately improve the quality of doctoral research education in Ghana.

Keywords: academy, doctoral research education, Ghana, graduate writing course, support

Introduction

Worldwide, doctoral research education has, in recent times, attracted increasing amounts of research and policy attention, partly, in response to a perception that all is not well at this most advanced end of the formal educational spectrum partly by reason of its close link to national development. However, attention has principally focused on organizational and administrative matters such as completion times, completion rates, costs, and benefits (Bair & Haworth, 2005; Bansel, 2011; Bitzer, Trafford, & Leshem, 2014; Aitchison & Mowbray, 2015) as well as on the broad issue of quality (Manathunga, Paseta & McCormack, 2010) of doctoral education and the scare of unemployment that faces doctoral students upon the completion of their programs (Kamler & Thomson, 2014).

Research writing has only recently begun to receive serious attention. In other words, little attention has been paid to the processes through which doctoral candidates learn to write and, hence, learn to become authorized and authoritative writers within the scholarly communities in which they seek to take their place. In this paper, I define academic writing, part of which is that central, difficult, and often trauma-ridden activity of the production of the ultimate doctoral thesis, as:

a term largely used to describe written works presented from an informed stance that is reflective of significance, criticality, detail and organization, and designed for review by a wider audience. In most instances, the term is used primarily to describe a style of writing specific to a discipline within the academic sphere. It is an integral part of teaching and learning at the tertiary level as it is the primary measure by which educational success is judged. (Watson, 2013. p. 12)

Without doubt, writing instruction is critical to doctoral student success (Lee, 1998; Aitchison & Lee, 2006; Flaherty & Choi, 2013; Burford, 2017). Lee (1998) refers to the ‘profoundly textual nature’ of doctoral research. Writing, conceptualized as a discursive, social, and embodied practice (Kamler & Thomson, 2008, 2014; Hopwood & Paulson, 2012; Barnacle & Dall’Alba, 2014; Bosanquet & Cahir, 2015), locates doctoral writers within scholarly and institutional communities where they must construct and position themselves as legitimate knowers and text producers. Moreover, research writing does not merely record the knowledge that has been produced elsewhere but actively shapes it (Hakkarainen et al., 2004). In this paper, the reference to ‘research writing’ is deliberate as it is meant to protest the often but erroneously held view of writing as essentially separate from research and often left until quite late in the process of completing the degree.

The practice of research writing is at the core of doctoral studies. During their studies, doctoral students write many genres, among which are annotated bibliographies, critical reviews, literature reviews, articles, and dissertation proposals or prospectuses that set up research projects. They are also trained in the writing of grant proposals that make a case for funding research and theses/dissertations that report findings from research already undertaken. Such forms of writing help student-researchers create, evaluate, share, and negotiate knowledge (Hyland, 2004; Starke-Meyerring et al., 2011). As doctoral students are offered the chance to write these high stakes genres, they adopt new roles as junior scholars, using writing to explore the theory, practice, and research of their chosen disciplines. Doctoral research writers learn to ‘invent the university’ (Bartholomae, 1985) for themselves, and they do this before they become ready to undertake a proper project, carve a niche for themselves, and acquire the

confidence to speak as academics. In other words, doctoral research writers cannot wait until the research is done and then spring “full-formed” into the scholarly community.

Furthermore, even for the highly motivated student, doctoral research writing is a complex and lengthy process. While, in general, doctoral students are a highly selected and talented group of students, a good number of them struggle with their writing (Fergie, Beeke, McKenna, & Creme, 2011). In the end, as McAlpine and Norton (2006) report, some of them fail to complete their thesis. I agree with Boice (1993) and Brookes-Gilles et al. (2015) when they attribute this failure to the lack of support for academic writing and the focus of research methods courses in doctoral programs on approaches to research (Kwan, 2010). It must be pointed out that learning doctoral academic writing is challenging as it does not only involve exhibition of individual skills (Pryor & Crossouard, 2010) but an understanding of what constitutes “culturally specific knowledge-making practice” (Starke-Meyerring, 2011, p. 85), where students learn “what knowledge is valued, what questions can be asked and who is allowed to ask while at the same time learning what they know and how to write what they know” (Badenhorst et al., 2015, p.2).

Against the above background, in the rest of the paper, I present some efforts and a brief evaluation of writing support services for postgraduate, including doctoral, students in some parts of the world. This is followed by a profile of academic writing courses at some Ghanaian universities, focusing on both undergraduate and postgraduate levels. The arguments for the institutionalization of graduate writing courses (GWCs) in Ghanaian universities are proffered. The paper then profiles the proposed GWC by paying attention to its curriculum, theoretical underpinning, staff and administrative set-up, funding, and envisaged challenges.

Overview and Evaluation of Some Graduate Writing Courses (GWCs)

As early as the 1970s, Leming (1977) advocated instructional support to prepare graduate students for the rigors of professional survival, and Struck (1976) reported on a course specifically designed to support graduate writing skills. In this section, I discuss and evaluate GWCs in such settings as the United States of America (USA), the United Kingdom (UK), Australia, New Zealand, Hong Kong, and Singapore to provide the context in which the proposed Ghanaian model can be located.

The teaching of academic writing has a long history in the USA, where university-level writing instruction has for decades been provided to undergraduate students, mostly native English speakers, for decades (Materese, 2013a). Research into the effectiveness of this instruction led to the Writing in the Disciplines (WID) movement, where students were taught the requirements

of academic text production specific to the disciplines they were studying. Attention, in the last three decades, has shifted to graduate writing. Many North American universities operate different permutations of GWCs. Some of these courses draw international students from various departments throughout the university, and as such focus on graduate level writing genres (for example, abstracts, and grant or conference proposals).

One of the most cited and earliest surveys of graduate writing courses (GWCs) in the USA which involved 213 universities was conducted by Golding and Mascaró (1985), following the pioneering study of Bjork (1983) that focused on writing courses in American medical schools. The aim of Golding and Mascaró's research was to establish the extent and range of GWCs throughout the USA and the rationale for offering them. Although some faculty who participated in the survey had proffered "remediation" as the reason for such writing courses, most GWCs surveyed covered professional and scholarly subject matter not dealt with at the undergraduate level. In 2004, the University of Kansas launched an interdisciplinary Graduate Writing Program as part of an initiative to increase degree completion rates (Sundstrom, 2014). Serving both domestic and international students, this program employed a rhetorical (that is, genre-based) approach in a series of courses organized around the genres of graduate school and beyond.

In the UK, academic writing (often referred to as English for Academic Purposes) assumed importance in the seventies, leading to a national survey of staff perspectives on the teaching of academic writing in 2000. This, in turn, led to Ganobesik-Williams' (2004) publication, which provided an overview of existing academic writing courses and initiatives in UK higher education. The overview is offered as a provisional map of current approaches taken by staff to support student academic writing. The four types of provision deemed most useful by a cross-section of staff included one-to-one tutorials in writing offered *via* a university writing center (93%), optional professional development sessions for academic staff in the teaching of writing (92%), optional courses taught by a writing specialist on subject-specific forms of writing (91%), and optional centrally-taught writing courses for students from all disciplines (88%). Required courses for students and staff were supported, to a lesser extent (65% and 52%), while the idea of "required centrally-taught writing courses for students from all disciplines" was categorized as "useful" by 44% of respondents. The Centre for Academic Writing (CAW) in Coventry University, in particular, addresses the needs of postgraduates through a module "M01CAW: Writing for Scholarly Publication".

In Australia, as in the USA, there are approaches and practices in supporting doctoral research writing. Aitchinson and Lee (2006) reported the emergence of two key approaches to academic writing for doctoral students. For instance, at the University of Western Sydney, the Learning Skills Unit initiated thesis writing

circles in response to the problem of student writing in contexts where there were few system-wide structures for the support of doctoral research development and none that recognized the importance of writing. In the Faculty of Education at the University of Technology (Sydney), there was a doctoral writing group that focused explicitly, for the first time, on the research development needs of academics enrolled in doctoral studies. In this writing group, domains covered included epistemology, expertise, skill, and know-how about writing. Johnson (2014) also describes a qualitative research study of a cross-disciplinary, cohort-based doctoral writing in the New Zealand university context, following the successful trialing of the Thesis Writing Circles program in the University of Waikato. Similarly, The University of Hong Kong offers a series of workshops for cross-disciplinary students who need to write dissertations in English (Cooley & Lewkowicz, 1995; 1997; Allison et al., 1998).

The profusion of courses on academic writing has been supported by pedagogical texts such as *Writing up Research: Experimental Research Report Writing for Students of English* (Weissberg & Buker, 1990), *Academic Writing for Graduate Students* (Swales & Feak, 1994), *English in Today's Research World: A Writing Guide* (Swales & Feak, 2000), and *Academic Writing: A Handbook for International Students* (Bailey, 2015). These texts usually valorize Anglo-American rhetoric. Also, worth noting is illuminating work of Thaiss et al. (2012) on writing courses worldwide, which includes those in South Africa and Egypt. While these courses mainly celebrate Anglo-American rhetoric, the collection by Zawacki and Cox (2014) has drawn attention to the use of Global English in some writing courses at George Washington University and Middlebury College, with the view to encouraging the acceptance of different types of rhetoric in different writing courses. As far as I know, the first attempt to comprehensively describe the range of writing support for non-Anglophone researchers was made with the publication of *Supporting Research Writing: Roles and Challenges in Multilingual Setting* (Materese, 2013b). The book advanced the view that effective writing support in non-Anglophone research setting requires input from three professional areas, key among which is the teaching of academic writing.

As the goal of each writing course is to equip students to write at the university level, subsequent outcome evaluations have allowed universities to measure the effectiveness of writing programs. Existing studies have produced somewhat contradictory results. While some studies report no improvement after students have taken a writing course (e.g., Read & Hays, 2003), others find improvements (e.g., Elder & O'Loughlin, 2003; Storch & Tapper, 2009). It is worth noting that many of such evaluation studies as those by Xudong, Cheng, Varaprasad, & Leng (2010), and Wong (2015) have confirmed a positive correlation between writing courses and improvement in writing ability in both Western and non-Western contexts. Although some scholars (e.g. Freedman,

1994; Casanave, 2002) have criticized the genre-based approach in academic writing courses, it continues to be the preferred approach, as it produces positive results in students' writing ability, especially in doctoral education.

Academic Writing Courses (AWCs) in Ghanaian Public Universities

In this section, I refer to four public universities in Ghana – University of Ghana (UG), University of Cape Coast (UCC), Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST), and University of Education, Winneba (UEW) – with the view to ascertaining the existence of academic writing courses (AWCs), especially, at the postgraduate level.

It is interesting to note that in all these four Ghanaian public tertiary institutions, there are university-wide writing courses designed to assist undergraduate students to handle the voluminous and varied forms of writing forms. In particular, at UCC, plans are far advanced to introduce an AWC for undergraduate students in the Department of English, apart from the university-wide AWC, popularly called Communicative Skills (CS). At UG, there is a Language Center which provides the university-wide EAP program as well as a Writing Center that provides consultancy services mainly to students. At UCC, there is also a Writing Unit for both faculty and students. Like the two previously mentioned universities, UEW and KNUST offer Communicative Skills to undergraduate students, with varying lengths of duration. There is no writing center to support either group of students (that is, both undergraduate and postgraduate students) or faculty at either university. A study recently conducted by Nimako, Danso, and Donkor (2013) has suggested the need for a writing course for junior faculty at KNUST with limited experience in academic writing.

Informal discussions with faculty and my former students who are pursuing doctoral programs in the above-mentioned universities indicate the absence of GWCs. Rather, seminars and workshops on thesis writing, in particular, are organized for doctoral students. Experts and scholars who have been involved in postgraduate training for many years are invited regularly to speak on pertinent aspects of research writing (e.g. research proposal and thesis). Such seminars and workshops are mandatory for doctoral students. As in the University of Kansas, the University of Ghana has a Summer Doctoral Writing course. At the University of Cape Coast, in particular, these seminars relate to aspects of research methodology and thesis writing. The Academic Board of the University of Cape Coast has commenced discussion, and approval of a proposal on the introduction of a GWC for all graduate students (including doctoral students) is expected soon.

It is worth mentioning a special writing course that targeted lecturers from Francophone West African countries (in particular, Burkina Faso). This three-week course titled 'English for Academic and Publishing Purposes' was presented at the Department of English of the University of Cape Coast to lecturers from

universities in a French-speaking country to improve their writing ability and enhance their chances of publishing in English. In 2014, an advertisement appeared in *Daily Graphic*, a state-sponsored Ghanaian newspaper, inviting interested students to enroll in a course ‘Graduate Writing and Publishing’, although I do not have any means of ascertaining whether or not the organizers of this course delivered it to their targeted clients.

Moreover, academic writing research in Ghana in the last two decades and half has become increasingly vibrant, with many of such efforts focusing on the writing of undergraduate students and, in recent times, postgraduate writing. Very few studies have been conducted on aspects of research articles written by Ghanaian academics. While no survey has been made of all these anecdotal efforts, it bears mentioning that beyond these empirical studies on academic writing research in Ghana, there have been few non-empirical papers. Among these are Adika and Owusu-Sekyere’s (1997) proposal for a department-based writing program and Afful’s (2007) proposal for a revision of the University of Cape Coast’s Communicative Skills. Interestingly, Nimako, Danso, and Donkor’s (2013) proposal for a writing course for junior faculty at KNUST with limited experience in academic writing raises the question whether there exists any writing course for postgraduate students in Ghanaian universities. In 2012, Afful had argued for the collaboration between practitioners of Applied Linguistics on the one hand and Schools of Graduate Studies and faculty of various disciplines on the other hand, listing courses on thesis writing as an important step. As far as I know, there are neither Thesis Writing Courses (TWCs) nor GWCs in any of the four established public Ghanaian universities mentioned earlier. What exists in the selected public universities are regular seminars and workshops organized for all postgraduate (including doctoral) students to equip them with generic skills in writing. The scholarship gap in an important area such as graduate writing for doctoral students in Ghana justifies the current study. In the next section, I present arguments for the institutionalization of GWCs for doctoral students in Ghanaian universities.

Arguments for Graduate Writing Courses (GWCs)

In this section, I shall attempt to present cogent arguments for instituting writing courses against the backdrop of the preceding discussion of writing courses in non-Ghanaian universities and the absence of same in their Ghanaian counterparts.

First, the *First-year Composition (FYC)* in universities in the USA; *English for Academic Purposes* in the UK and other European contexts; *Communicative Skills*, *Communication Skills*, and *Use of English* in other contexts, including Africa; and the more traditional undergraduate writing assignments alone are insufficient preparation for graduate-level writing tasks. Yet, while institutions in English-medium universities in Ghana have long seen these writing courses as

integral to undergraduate studies, these same institutions have strangely viewed graduate writing as something to be learned by intuition and the lack of strong writing skills as something akin to a deficit. Graduate writing, in fact, assumes content knowledge, process knowledge, and knowledge of social and power relationships (Tardy, 2009; Frick, 2011) to enable graduate students to understand normalized knowledge-making practices (Sullivan, 1996). It assumes students know how to apply critical thinking to transform and create knowledge as well as develop their identity as future scholars. Unfortunately, this assumption is not true among doctoral students who are either non-native users or native users of English (Bitchener & Basturkmen, 2006).

The second point concerns the shifting demographics in graduate student population worldwide, in general. This situation has now led to institution-wide failures where time-to-degree and completion rates are concerned, making it imperative to find ways of dealing with the situation. Graduate student demographics show much greater diversity in age, gender, marital status, education, and work experience than previously. Increasingly, faculty report feeling a sense of helplessness in guiding the writing of such a diverse student population (Starke-Meyerring et al. (2011). As universities recruit a diverse graduate student body, they constantly express worry about the very students they admit. This reflects a failure to update graduate curricula to address today's institutional missions. Graduate studies faculty worldwide report a lack of effective pedagogies for mentoring graduate students (Aitchison & Lee, 2006). Unsurprisingly, students are more likely to become casualties in their graduate programs. As Lovitts (2001) avers, these institutional failures are no longer tolerable since we understand the lifelong consequences of students failing in graduate school. The proposed GWC seeks to not only prevent these failures but also add value to degrees for doctoral students by giving them a leg up in publishing (Lee & Kamler, 2008; Kwan, 2010; Watts, 2012) and making their final research reports as strong as possible.

A further reason for the institutionalization of GWCs for students in Ghana is the increased demands on faculty time. The increasing pressure on universities to be entrepreneurial and on faculty to bring in research funds, conduct interdisciplinary research, and publish more has resulted in less available time for mentoring doctoral students. Overburdened faculty have less interest in adding individualized teaching of academic and professional writing to the other demands on their time (Epstein, 2007; Thomson & Kamler, 2010). Some advisors and supervisors who are great mentors are so overbooked that they do not have time to perform that role. Some faculty mention their own lack of training in mentoring graduate writing at the very time that a greater need exists for in-depth feedback and instruction.

Admittedly, only departmental faculty advisors and supervisors can determine the research territories and the potential niches that a student's research

will address, the accepted methodologies, the key participants in the field, and the expectations of the doctoral thesis committee and department. However, faculty advising can be—and, in the face of the research pressures placed on faculty today, often *must* be—supplemented effectively with writing instruction and/or consultations if we want strong future stewards of the disciplines (Golde & Walker, 2006). In this sense, the GWC works to bridge the gap between what faculty expect and what students know about the writing in their discipline.

Curriculum

In what follows, I discuss the curriculum of the proposed GWC by taking into account the course structure, the course objectives, material development, topics, and assessment strategies to ensure the effectiveness of the course.

First, the proposed GWC is an intensive three-credit bearing course that spans over a thirteen-week period in a semester. In a given week, students are expected to have three contact hours with their instructors or faculty. Given the number of students and the scarcity of faculty to teach this course, students can be encouraged to take the course in either the first semester or second semester. To maintain the proposed in-built intensive writing practice, it is expected that there will be no more than twenty students in a class. As much as possible, students from the same discipline will be made to constitute a class to foster collegiality and make collaboration a useful aspect of the course.

Concerning the aim and objectives of the course, first, the course provides the opportunity for the doctoral students at universities in Ghana to develop and acquire rhetorical knowledge and practices for studying, understanding, and writing effectively a wide range of genres and part-genres within discipline-specific contexts. It is expected that at the end of the proposed course, the student would have learnt to:

- i) Apply the key features of academic writing to writing within their disciplines;
- ii) Define and describe procedures and processes in writing for various academic purposes;
- iii) Develop successful writing, proofreading, and editing habits and strategies;
- iv) Develop strategies for using/providing/understanding feedback;
- v) Develop awareness of the politics and craft that govern academic writing in the disciplines (such as working with faculty mentors, journal editors, and writing consultants);
- vi) Gain a thorough understanding of the social and political processes involved in writing for academic and publishing purposes.

To accomplish the above objectives, graduate students are to be taken through topics such as the general features of academic writing, the interface between research and knowledge, and some key theories and concepts underpinning academic writing. The GWC will also focus on other practical issues in research writing such as language use, discipline-specific vocabulary, and grammatical features; proofreading and editing; appropriating the benefits of written feedback comments; and the geopolitics of writing for pedagogic and publishing purposes. The course draws on a combined framework of theories from various fields such as linguistics, rhetoric, philosophy, and sociology. For instance, from the field of linguistics, the appraisal theory is utilized to enable students to understand the language of evaluation which is pivotal in academic writing. Toulmin's (1958) theory of argumentation is also utilized together with Johns' (1997) socio-literate theory to underscore academic writing as a form of argumentation and a social practice. Graduate students are expected to be introduced to key written genres (e.g. research articles, theses/dissertations, research proposals, and grant proposals) and part-genres (e.g. abstract, keywords, introduction, and literature review). Other topics which relate to the candidates' future academic development include offering them practice and opportunity to analyze and write texts such as bio data, curriculum vitae, and teaching philosophy in support of a research career. Linguistic issues at the morpho-syntactic and lexical levels can be discussed with the help of faculty from the Departments of English and Linguistics, and the Writing Unit as well as established academic corpora in the USA, the UK, and emerging corpora from some African countries. To give students ample opportunities for practice through individual and group tasks, the course identifies genres such as critical review, annotated bibliographies, synthesis (a kind of literature review) of articles on a given topic, research proposal, and a research paper to be written in the course of the semester.

With regard to the syllabus design and material development, knowledge of general tendencies and the relative importance of the various schematic features in the selected genres can help teachers or textbook developers of GWCs to address student needs in their disciplines. The syllabi can incorporate knowledge of the correspondences between a generic feature and communicative purpose(s). Integrating both the process- and product-oriented approaches, some aspects of the syllabus can be divided into rhetorical teaching units, with each unit focusing on a generic feature such as tense and its categories. The unit can include corresponding communicative purposes for each tense category per rhetorical move of the thesis. In this approach, generic features are not treated as ends in themselves but as consequences of rhetorical choices. Such syllabi can include carefully designed tasks that specify the competencies expected of students, what they will do to generate the required product and the resources available to the students to generate the product. I suggest that the most effective way of raising students' awareness of the key generic and linguistic features and

the role they play in the writing of various academic genres in their disciplines, is for GWC teachers to select their own authentic materials such as research articles and theses in their disciplines. The use of such materials is one of the best ways of developing students' academic writing potential at the doctoral level.

Assessment strategies such as portfolio, teacher observation, and conferencing may be adopted in checking student progress. In general, a portfolio is a folder or box in which students store significant pieces of class work that mark their progress. Students are able to reflect on and track their progress if they keep successive pieces of a task in a folder. For instance, an initial exercise on writing a rhetorical section of the thesis can be followed up by write-ups of the same task after class revisions and discussions to help learners improve on their performance. All such exercises can be filed as an accessible gauge of a student's progress. When working on various learner tasks, the teacher also needs to be a participant-observer. For instance, when creating and analyzing mini-corpora involving student and expert writing, the teacher needs to informally participate in and observe how the student executes the task. The teacher can use this to respond to any queries students may have. Besides, the teacher can document those areas where the learners are doing well and where they are going wrong. Conferencing with individual students is another form of learner-contextualized assessment that allows the academic writing course to review how much students' writing goals have been achieved. Students can use this forum to present their findings on small-scale research, focusing on the relationship between particular generic features and the rhetorical purposes they fulfil in respective genres. The proposed GWC will apply an ABC grade, as grades in general serve as critical motivational factors for students not accustomed to the rigors of graduate writing.

Theoretical Framework

For the GWC, I propose a combined theoretical framework that recognizes the role of epistemology, the different sociological spaces that house different departments (that is, disciplinary variation), and the persuasive use of language (that is, rhetoric).

First, given that academic or scientific writing involves the construction, dissemination, and evaluation of knowledge, Bereiter and Scardamalia's (1987) knowledge telling and knowledge transforming models are critical here. Although Bereiter and Scardamalia's work has been severely criticized for being largely cognitivist, thereby focusing on individual development, they stress the power of writing in developing an individual's thinking. As the literature indicates, knowledge telling is associated with the learner who must grapple not only with the content but also with the conventions of academic writing. The expert, on the other hand, is easily able to transform what content there is into new forms of knowledge. Tardy (2009) observes that students must develop both writing

and content area expertise so they can transform knowledge in their fields. Learning academic writing involves learning how to transform knowledge into a comprehensible and disciplinarily acceptable entity for a specific audience. It is not only about the adoption of disciplinary concepts and theories, but also about the command of the methods and practices of disciplinary activities which can be achieved in a supportive context.

The second set of theories that a GWC can leverage on identifies the nature of disciplines as sociological spaces referred to, in broad terms, as ‘discourse communities’ and in metaphoric terms, as ‘tribes’ and ‘territories’ (Becher & Trowler, 2001). A discourse community is a group of people who share certain language-using practices (Bizzell, 1992) as well as other ties such as geographical, socio-economic, ethnic, and professional relationships (Lee, 1998). As ‘socio-rhetorical networks’ (Freedman & Medway, 1994, p.8), discourse communities may be both generic/homogenous and heterogeneous/discipline-specific (Becher & Trowler, 2001). Generic academic writing assumes the existence of a single invariant literacy that is transferable and usable in any situation. On the other hand, discipline-specific writing valorizes multiple literacies. A GWC must draw attention to generic academic writing and discipline-specific writing and highlight the relationship that exists between them. Discipline-specific academic writing is not absolutely discrete, as it draws on the broad features identifiable with general academic writing. Overall, the actualization of features of writing in a specific discipline depends very much on the use (extent and range) of the following: multimodal semiotic representations such as graphs, tables, diagrams, symbols, and figures; lexical, collocational, and phraseological features; and, taxonomies, detachment, and genres (Afful, 2012). For instance, Chemistry discourse differs from that of History based on the former’s dominant use of symbols and the latter’s use of emplotment built around causation (Coffin, 2004).

The final theoretical point to consider in any GWC is its largely rhetorical orientation, which invokes scholars such as Aristotle (with his triad of ethos, logos, and pathos), Toulmin’s (1958) argumentation, and Swales’ (1990) perspective on genre theory. The proposed rhetorical orientation of the course draws on the view of rhetoric as an organizational pattern in a piece of writing which aims at persuading the reader in an academic discourse community. This means recognizing the importance of the combined rhetorical features such as message, purpose, and audience on one hand and the distinct features of academic writing on the other hand. Swales’ (1990) rhetorical approach has become the most popular in GWCs, given its pedagogical orientation, enabling graduate students and professionals to raise their rhetorical awareness as a first step in handling both academic and non-academic genres. In this approach, genres are seen as both rhetorical actions in response to recurrent situations and part of the recurrent situations themselves (Miller, 1994). The rhetorical genre approach

facilitates students' study of academic and other professional genres, the rhetoric of their fields, and the disciplinary and cultural contexts in which they write the specific genres. Genre theory offers tools for balancing disciplinary and cultural contexts and expectations with individual goals, rhetorical contexts, and purposes as students write themselves into future careers.

From the above discussion, it is clear that a combined framework for the success of a GWC depends on rhetorical knowledge, subject-matter knowledge, and process knowledge. In writing authentic classroom genres, graduate students move from peripheral to full participation in a rhetorical community, developing their research space and professional identity. In the view of Afful (2009) and Frick (2011), this is a matter of doctoral students 'becoming' in which they position themselves ontologically, epistemologically, methodologically, and ethically in multiple disciplines.

Staffing, Administration, and Funding of GWCs

For an effective running of the GWC, it is important to have full-time faculty or the equivalent, part-time lecturers, and language specialists in addition to the Coordinator, the Administrative Assistant, and Research Assistants (preferably, doctoral students). The Course Coordinator may have administrative, teaching, research and development, professional development, and service duties in a tenured academic staff position. The Administrative Assistant could manage everything from reception and enrollment to database management and evaluation through events coordination. Faculty may also perform some administrative tasks and services.

Faculty will be expected to come from disciplines including, but not limited to, Academic Writing, English Studies, Communication Studies, (Applied) Linguistics, and English Language Education. In the application and interview process, successful applicants who have a Masters or have yet to complete their PhD seeking to be part-time can be required to demonstrate their strengths by submitting a graduate or professional text in which they do the following: analyze exemplars of graduate genres from other fields, provide appropriate oral feedback, and demonstrate an awareness of key rhetorical and linguistic features. Writing instructors could be specialists, as described by Ochser and Fowler (2004), bringing to the program a strong background and skills related to genres and disciplinary writing.

An important issue in the training for both faculty and part-time instructors in approaches to genre studies, is using training at semester beginnings and during the semesters, such as staff meetings, professional development, and course meetings. Training for faculty will include pre-service meetings, weekly new instructor meetings for the first one to two semesters, and ongoing faculty professional development meetings. In these professional development sessions, faculty will read and then discuss articles from Genre Studies, Rhetoric and

Composition, Discourse Analysis, English as a Second Language (ESL), and English for Specific Purposes (ESP), including literature on mentoring and peer review, to continue to hone their art and craft. New faculty will be expected to complete the rhetorical and genre studies exercises used with students based on samples from unfamiliar fields and discuss disciplinary practices and opportunities for creativity before they work with students. The Coordinator and faculty will be expected to conduct research into mentoring and/or teaching graduate writing to keep on top of this emerging field and to fulfill research or professional development requirements.

Depending on the resources of a particular university, a GWC may be housed within a Department of Communication Studies, Department of English, or Language Center, drawing on the expertise of faculty there. There also have to be proper structures for collaboration between the School of Graduate Studies and the departments as the courses are meant for graduate students from all departments in a university. Further, there is the need for the Coordinator of a GWC to generally collaborate with other stakeholders—the Writing Center/Unit, the School of Graduate Studies, and the Library—to develop other graduate writing support in the form of workshops and Research and Write-Ins (RWIs). These RWIs can be thought of as day-long writing retreats that provide or facilitate writing, workshops on research and writing, and writing consultations that typically occur twice each semester.

The School of Graduate Studies together with faculty can serve as a sounding board on programmatic issues such as course funding. They will be expected to serve as advisors to the Dean. Tuition should be levied as it is for other graduate courses. The writing course may receive part of the tuition paid by or on behalf of the enrolled graduate students. This budget can be jointly administered by the School of Graduate Studies and the departments involved.

Challenges in GWCs

The university (as an institution), faculty, and doctoral students are likely to face challenges in the implementation of the GWCs. These challenges, in essence, may differ from one stakeholder to the other but closely connect insofar as they mar the quality of doctoral research education.

First, there is no doubt that the courses will make considerable demands on the tutors of GWCs, if they have to read and develop a working understanding of lengthy texts such as dissertations/theses, part-genres of the thesis, and other academic genres; and moreover, there is a wide variety of disciplines involved. Nonetheless, from the perspective of instructors of GWCs who are not subject specialists, there is the nagging issue of what Allison et al. (1998) call ‘the nexus between language and content’. A pertinent issue is whether an instructor of GWC has to comment on an aspect of content such as the appropriateness of a research design, given that instructors have no mandate to comment on

substantive and procedural issues that relate to the research process itself and faulty research designs.

Further, the issue of disciplinarity needs to be considered by instructors in GWCs. Instructors bringing their evaluative criteria of Applied Linguistics and Language Education to, for instance, Medical Science or Law, may run the risk of imposing a scheme that is either too stringent or too lax on the course. Approaches to constructing an argument, reviewing the literature, and using discourse markers and hedging devices can help students appreciate disciplinarity. It is conceded that the appraisal of discipline-specific writing by non-members of the discipline remains problematic, as indeed acknowledged and discussed in EAP literature (e.g. Hyland, 2002). In class discussions, multiple types of rhetoric are expected to be explored so that students can choose to apply the appropriate one in a specific context. Students are required to explore how to foreground or background their voice, establish their authority, and convince a specific audience of their claims. Instructors in GWCs need to take account of arguments around language and knowledge ecology which warn us against the homogenizing effects of the global spread of knowledges in English (Skutnabb-Kandas, 2000). Taking a cue from Cadman's (2005) 'pedagogy of connection', the strategy in any GWCs should aim at encouraging students to assess some of the broad intercultural influences on their research project design, implementation, and dissemination of findings. It is worth commenting that writing courses in Grand Valley University such as *WRT: 354: Writing in the Global Context*, *WRT 200: Introduction to Professional Writing*, and *WRT 350: Business Communication* have begun to incorporate cross-cultural communication (Rydecki, 2014).

On their part, doctoral students need to grapple with the issues of disciplinarity, rhetorical practices, cultural context, and language use. Both Parry (1998) and Hyland (2002) recognize the disciplinary requirements and subject expertise of learners. While Parry submits that disciplinary preferences and practices be reflected in features of arguments, Hyland emphasizes control of 'rhetorical personality', and the ways in which writers engage readers. Doctoral students can read several articles, theses, and other publications for the purpose of ascertaining for themselves citation practices, use of personal and impersonal voices, hedging devices, and active and passive voice with appropriate verb forms. Differing cultural beliefs about what constitutes critical thinking, authorial voice, good research, and good writing pose some potential challenges to doctoral students in Ghana.

Doctoral students must recognize that critical thinking involves the capability of grasping, analyzing, and evaluating arguments or ideas. Thus, critical thinking becomes a socio-cognitive practice involving intrapersonal (between a reader and her or his own mind) and interpersonal (between a reader and text). Authorial voice involves three tones of positioning: ideational positioning, interpersonal positioning, and textual positioning. The ideational

positioning corresponds to what point of reference and values writers hold while the interpersonal positioning deals with how a writer becomes aware of her or his relationship with the reader. Textual positioning pertains to how writers organize their ideas through different linguistic resources. A solid authorial voice is achieved by the use of linguistic and critically grounded writing. Graduate students face cultural challenges in creating agency and a voice while seeking a balance of conforming and resisting in their own work (Canagarajah, 2002). This cultural competence plays a critical role in whether non-native speakers of English publish in international English-medium journals.

Finally, universities in Ghana must boldly address GWCs as key, and not peripheral, to the success of doctoral research education. In many English-medium universities in Ghana, writing is not, in general terms, regarded as a learning process to be deliberately supported. Rather, doctoral education often focuses on the end products. A change in such a position will lead to the provision of office space and other forms of support for the staff development and professionalization of faculty who teach academic writing. Recognizing the value of academic writing means that Ghanaian universities must be keen in recruiting full-time lecturers with qualification in academic writing, unlike the situation at the undergraduate level where the teaching of academic writing is largely handled by non-professionals. As a long-term measure, Departments of English in Ghanaian universities may be charged by their respective university managements to mount courses in academic writing at the master's and doctoral levels, as done by University of Coventry in the UK, to provide qualified faculty for the teaching GWCs. This will depend on the capacity of the departments and institutional support.

Conclusion

The present paper has argued for the institutionalization of GWCs for doctoral students in Ghana. It first stressed the importance of writing as a socio-cognitive activity, drawing insights from, especially, Anglo-American settings. This provided a basis to consider the writing courses in key Ghanaian universities, which were noted to be mainly limited to undergraduate level. Three arguments were presented, followed by a discussion of the theoretical underpinning, curriculum, and related issues.

Clearly, the approach to doctoral research writing in Ghana has to be thorough enough to reflect the increasing importance several universities worldwide attach to it (Burford, 2017). Doctoral writing is inextricably linked with knowledge communities, bringing content knowledge, rhetorical knowledge, critical thinking, and research to bear on the challenges the world faces. Being able to write a literature review, for instance, is a complex task worthy of instruction. Research articles, monographs, book chapters, funding proposals, dissertations, and annotated bibliographies are no less critical to preparing future knowledge

workers. If writing courses are institutionalized, as argued here, doctoral students in Ghanaian universities will be able to effectively position themselves in the larger community of practice, create their professional identity with some relative ease, and be able to acquire funding for research that benefits academia.

Doctoral research writing instruction has a place in today's Ghanaian universities. First, the envisaged GWC prepares students for the writing they will need to do later as scholars. Second, it prepares them to mentor the writing of others. For those who do become faculty, a third potential benefit exists: these interdisciplinary classrooms prepare students to become ideal Appointment and Promotion committee members because they learn about disciplinary differences in writing while doing peer reviews where they work closely with graduate students in other fields.

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