

A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE LITERATURE REVIEW SECTION OF GRADUATE DISSERTATIONS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF BOTSWANA

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Abstract

The literature review is one genre that requires the writer to justify the need for their own research by critically evaluating previous research. It involves both a statement of personal judgment and an appeal to shared norms and values. My experience over the years of graduate supervision indicates that many ESL students in African universities find it difficult to express evaluation. This seems to result from difficulty in their critical thinking skills. Although many appear proficient in their writings; but quite often they find it difficult to maintain that expert identity in their use of critical voice. Drawing examples from the literature review section of 30 completed Master's theses from the University of Botswana, I examine the problems which postgraduate students have in adopting the use of critical thinking and voice in their writings. I found that quite a significant number of them were unable to shed light on any gaps in previous research, resolve conflicts amongst seemingly contradictory previous research; show insight and an awareness of differing arguments; link the review at all times to the rationale and purpose of their study.

Key words: student writing, identity, voice, critical thinking, literature review

Introduction

There has been considerable literature on identity and voice in L2 writing, and in particular debate on the role of voice in writing pedagogy (Hyland, 2002a, 2002b; Matsuda, 2001, Stapleton, 2001). Much of this debate has been provoked by suggestions that learners from interdependent cultures (i.e. cultures where collective values take precedence over individualism (Botswana, for example), lack individualized voice in their writing. This non-availability of individualized voice has been attributed to social norms and acculturation (Atkinson, 1997; Fox, 1994; Ramanathan & Atkinson, 1999). However, other studies have pointed out that all cultures have voice, as is heard in the various types of English across the world (Kachru, 1986, 1999). The use of the first

person pronoun is claimed to establish self-identification in writing (Hyland, 2001; Hyland, 2002a, 2002b).

Researchers in this area seem to be unanimous in their findings that identity, voice and critical thinking constitute an integral part of academic writing and that it should be considered as “an essential component of second language writing pedagogy” (Stapleton, 2002:177). However, they disagree on the point that voice alone is a strong determinant of good quality writing. I agree with the current thinking on these elements that constitute good writing hence my desire in this study to explore them in the literature section of graduate dissertations at the University of Botswana.

The literature review is one genre where the writer needs to adopt a critical voice. By convention it requires the writer to justify the need for their own research by critically evaluating previous research. In an examination of what evaluation means in written discourse, Hunston (1994:46) argues that expressing evaluation in a text involves both a statement of personal judgement and an appeal to shared norms and values, and that in academic writing this appeal is to shared values about what constitutes knowledge. It is therefore clear that expressing evaluation demands that the graduate student/researcher has a clear understanding of acceptable practices of expressing personal judgement in academic texts and that they are confident enough to appeal to values they believe they share with their readers (Moodie, 1994: internet).

I have observed over my years of graduate supervision that the students’ users of English as a second language (ESL) may be proficient in their writings in English; but quite often they find it difficult to maintain that expert identity and critical voice in their writing. They are often uncertain about what is an appropriate critical voice to adopt as a student in an academic environment. Their lack of familiarity with the expectations of their new discourse communities makes it particularly difficult for them to write reviews of the literature where they need to express critical evaluation and to make appeals to values shared with their readers.

My experience at the University of Botswana suggests that graduate ESL students find it difficult to achieve both these aspects of evaluation in a literature review. As they are working in a second language, they seem unable to express personal judgement appropriately. More importantly, since most of them come from educational systems and cultural backgrounds in which it is difficult to question the views of respected authorities (Akindele & Trennepohl, 2008; Fox, 1994), they are reluctant to express any negative evaluation which they consider to be criticism of other researchers. A student recently asked this question at a workshop organized for graduate students on research: “why should we criticize re-known authorities in a given field of study when their views have been cited by several authors and such are considered final?”

It seems to me that many University of Botswana postgraduate students in this study had difficulty expressing evaluation confidently and appropriately. While similar difficulties may also be experienced by other L2 students in the early stages of their research degrees, these students’ problems were compounded by their cultural orientation and lack of familiarity with the conventions of critical reviews in an academic context. Perhaps a clearer understanding of these conventions would enable them to analyze critically the literature review to their study area. This paper explores the extent to which graduate students studying for master’s degrees at the University of Botswana are able to critique relevant literature in a scholarly fashion in their research.

Methodology

In an attempt to examine the problems which postgraduate students may have in evaluating literature critically in their writing, I examined the Literature review section of 30 completed Masters Dissertations drawn from faculties of Education, Humanities, and Social Science at the University of Botswana. The 30 dissertations were drawn from a poll of about one hundred master’s dissertations completed between 2001-2006 academic year. The selection of the samples was done randomly but effort was made to ensure that equal number was selected from each of the three faculties. The three faculties were chosen because they produced the highest numbers of graduate students annually.

In addition, I interviewed 6 graduate students who have completed their projects from the Faculty of Education, Humanities and Social Science. This is intended to elicit their views about their training in the use of critical voice in the writing of literature review. The interview questions include, among others, their views about their training in the use of identity and critical voice; their skills in structuring the reviews and summaries and argumentations. Finally, the students were asked to explain the kind of guidance they got from their supervisors on writing literature review. Similar interview was conducted with six mentors/supervisors of graduate students from the three faculties in which the dissertations analyzed in this study were drawn.

In order to foreground the problems, the following questions that addressed the components of literature review were examined:

1. Does the review provide synthesis or a set of summaries of each work reviewed?
2. Does it show the relationship of each work to the other under consideration?
3. Does the review shed light on any gaps in previous research?
4. Does the writer resolve conflicts amongst seemingly contradictory previous research?
5. Does the writer show insight and an awareness of differing arguments?
6. Does the writer link the review at all times to the rationale and purpose of their study?

On reviewing literature in research

A literature review is designed to identify related research, to set the current research project within a conceptual and theoretical context. The literature is used to explain research and not just to show what other researchers have done. The aim of the review should be to evaluate and show relationships between the work already done, and the current work, and how the work adds to the research already carried out. It also involves why the research needs to be carried out, how the researcher came to choose certain methodologies or theories to work with.

A literature review surveys scholarly articles, books and other sources (e.g. dissertations, conference proceedings) relevant to a particular issue, area of research, or theory, providing a description, summary, and critical evaluation of each work. The purpose is to offer an overview of significant literature published on a topic. It involves data evaluation, determining which literature makes a significant contribution to the understanding of the topic; analysis and interpretation, discussing the findings and conclusions of pertinent literature.

A literature review may constitute an essential chapter of a thesis or dissertation, or may be a self-contained review of writings on a subject. Researchers seem to be unanimous on the purpose of literature review which includes, among others, to: place each work in the context of its contribution to the understanding of the subject under review; describe the relationship of each work to the others under consideration; identify new ways to interpret, and shed light on any gaps in, previous research; resolve conflicts amongst seemingly contradictory previous studies; identify areas of prior scholarship to prevent duplication of effort; point the way forward for further research; and place original work (in the case of theses or dissertations) in the context of existing literature (Bruce 1994, 1997; Cooper 1989, Galvan 1999, Hart 1998, Macauley 2001).

It therefore means that the review should not be simply a description of what others have published in the form of a set of summaries, but should take the form of a critical discussion, showing insight and an awareness of differing arguments, theories and approaches. It should be a synthesis and analysis of the relevant published work, linked at all times to the purpose and rationale of research. The review must be written in a formal, academic style. The writing should be clear and concise, devoid of colloquialisms and personal language. It should always aim to be objective and respectful of others' opinions; bearing in mind that it is not a forum for emotive language or strong personal opinions. For these reasons, the literature review tasks the graduate student/researcher to demonstrate their critical and evaluative sense in their writing.

There are quite a number of studies devoted to L2 postgraduate students' writing. Pertinent to this current study is the work of Moodie (1994 internet) which focuses on international postgraduate students from non-speaking backgrounds who have difficulty in maintaining identity and using appropriate voice in their literature review. Her study was based on a case study of an Indonesian postgraduate student in the Engineering faculty of Monash University, Australia. According to (Moodie 1994: internet), the student has little experience in writing academic English, as she, like any other international students, "was enrolled in relatively short courses, and there was little time available for her to become familiar with western academic genres and she felt under great pressure to perform at a high level of English almost immediately" (Moodie 1994, internet). The subject used in this study could only give the positive evaluation positioned prominently in the opening and concluding paragraphs, with statements such as "this is an interesting paper", the study "has succeeded as a useful guide to tactile sensing for many years", "their method is very simple and understandable" and "this paper is very useful for other research". The student did not identify or analyze these limitations in the body of the review; and did not give any supporting evidence for her claims; hence there was no critical voice in the review (Moodie, 1994: internet).

Moodie's study is limited to Engineering faculty while other faculties of the university were not involved. Secondly, Moodie claims to have studied the problems of international graduate students in writing literature, but focuses only on one Indonesian student. It is as if one Indonesian student is representative of all Indonesian students and indeed all international students. Besides, the researcher failed to define the term international students within the framework of her study. International students could be learners and users of English as a second language from Africa, China and India or students from Europe who use English as a foreign language. Surely the competence of these categories of international students varies. Nevertheless, the problems identified Moodie appears to be peculiar with the group of students whose dissertations are being analyzed in this study. It will be interesting to see if there are similarities or differences in the findings of the two studies.

Writer's identity and critical voice

Writing is not just about conveying 'content' but also about the representation of self. This is also the case with literature review. According to Ivanic (1998: iv), writing is an act of identity in which people align themselves with socio-culturally shaped subject positions, and thereby play their part in reproducing or challenging dominant practices and discourses, and the values, beliefs and interests which they embody.

According to Chance (1986:6), critical thinking is the ability to analyze facts, generate and organize ideas, defend opinions, make comparisons, draw inferences, evaluate arguments and solve problems. In the same vein, Beyer (1995:8) sees critical thinking as "...making reasoned judgments"; and observes critical thinking as using criteria to judge the quality of something. The notion involves identifying, evaluating, and constructing arguments and the ability to infer a conclusion from one or multiple premises. In reviewing literature, the ability of the writer to evaluate and argue is very crucial; and argumentation requires critical thinking, which can be seen as the product of individualism and identity, which graduate students are expected to demonstrate in their writing. Ramanathan and Atkinson (1999) suggest that in order to think critically, one must have an individual voice. Secondly, this voice should not be influenced by concerns of group cohesiveness or the status of those making alternative claims. In order to display critical thinking skills, students have to have the freedom to voice their ideas comfortably. See also (Stapleton, 2001, 2002).

It follows therefore that critical thinkers judge and question an idea or thought based on reliable evidence by establishing logical relationships among statements or data based on reliable evidence or source by establishing logical relationships. Accordingly, a good literature review should reflect the aspects of critical thinking. A graduate student writer should be able to reflect in his/her review the following elements/criteria for critical thinking suggested by Stapleton (2001:536-539). The first is that arguments are claims supported by a reason. A claim consists of a statement whose truth is arguable, and is often advanced in answer to a problem or controversial issue. A claim which stands alone without a supported reason is an opinion and cannot be classified as an argument.

Claims may be proposals, definitions, and evaluations. The second point is that reasons are statements used to support claims and generally answer why the claim should be believed. Reasons must show a direct logical link to the claim in order to be bound into a single proposition called an argument. Reasons need not be new; however if they are simple repetitions of those found in the prompt, without elaboration, they do not indicate critical thinking. Next is the fact that evidence constitutes statements or assertions serving to strengthen the argument. It can be defined as support for the truth of a proposition, especially those that derive from empirical observation or experience (Kemerling, 2002). Forms of evidence are personal experience, research studies, statistics, citing authorities, comparisons and analogies, pointing out consequences, facts, logical explanations, and precisely defining words (Ramage and Bean, 1999).

In addition there is recognition of Opposition and Refutation: Opposing viewpoints constitute statements that run counter or offer alternative interpretations to those expressed in the claim. As with the arguments, these alternative viewpoints do not have to be original: they can be taken from the prompt. Refutations are statements in which the writer responds to the opposing viewpoint in a way that shows that it is inadequate in some way. Shortcomings in opposing viewpoints can include logical flaws, poor support, erroneous assumptions or wrong values (Ramage and Bean 1999:117). Refutations must be logically linked to the opposing views which they profess to counter. They can also offer rival causes or solutions. In refuting an opposing or alternate view, the writer maintains his conclusion. There should also be a conclusion, that is, a conclusion is a statement or series of statements in which a writer sets out what she wants the reader to believe. This belief is conveyed via an argument, evidence and other statements that the author uses to signal his belief. Conclusions are usually limited to agreeing, disagreeing or taking some middle ground with respect to the prompt. Finally, there is the recognition of fallacies defined as errors in reasoning. Davis and Davis (2000) argue that thinking critically is to find logical fallacies. It occurs when the reason does not adequately support the claim in a number of ways (Kemerling, 2002).

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cohesiveness or the status of those making alternative claims. In order to display critical thinking skills, students have to have the freedom to voice their ideas comfortably.

Individual voice has been defined in various ways by different researchers. For instance, voice has been defined as authorial identity (Ivanic, 1998; Hirvela and Belcher, 2001) or authorial presence (Hyland 2002). It has been referred to as the speaking personality or the speaking consciousness (Holquist and Emerson, 1981 cited in Wertsch, 1991). In examining the issue of voice in second language writing, some scholars claim that certain social practices of the L2 learner's culture constitute an obstacle in their attempt to capture the individualized voice and authorial identity and presence required when writing in English (Cadman, 1994; Fox, 1999; Ramanathan & Atkinson, 1999; Ramanathan & Kaplan, 1996;). They argue that interdependent or hierarchical values may either prevent L2 learners from projecting a strong voice in their writing or diminish their presence as authors (Stapleton 2002, p. 180). While this may be true for some writers, ('humble servants of cultural norms'), this may not necessarily be so for others. Some writers can be very assertive while others can be subservient. The former group may choose to use their individual voice while the latter may suppress their voice. Furthermore, the academic culture of writing that students are subjected to by their supervisors/mentors may be instrumental to how graduate students express their identity and critical voice. In some departments at the University of Botswana, students have been specifically advised to follow the conventions laid down for writing and such students have no choice other than follow the rules.

It is against this backdrop that some scholars claim that L2 learners need to be taught or made cognizant of certain features that enhance a writer's voice (Cadman, 1997; Hirvela & Belcher, 2001; Hyland & Ivanic, 2001; Matsuda, 2001). Similar view has been expressed by Moodie (1994) in her discussion of the problems that international EFL postgraduate students have in writing in English.

The use of the first person seems to be the most discussed feature associated with voice. The first person has been identified as a key element in establishing the individual

identity of an author (Hinkel, 2001; Hyland & Ivanic, 2001; Ivanic, 1998; Wu & Rubin, 2000). Hyland claims that the first person helps writers to stake out what is their territory and thereby stamp authorial presence on their work and gain acceptance for their claims (Hyland 2001:215). Ivanic (1998) argues that the use of the first person “in association with knowledge claims and beliefs acknowledges the writer’s responsibility for them and property rights over them” (p. 308). She contends that by not using “I”, “the writer is withdrawing from all responsibility for an academic essay” (p. 306).

Hyland (2002) examines the notion of voice in academic writing. (Hyland 2002:352-353) explores the most visible expression of a writer's presence in a text: the use of exclusive first person pronouns. He observes that not all disciplines follow the same conventions of impersonality, and that in fact there is considerable scope for the negotiation of identity in academic writing. He argues that by treating academic discourse as uniformly impersonal we actually do a disservice to our students, and that as teachers, we might better assist them by raising their awareness of the options available to them as writers.

Data analysis

In analyzing the data the following are used as criteria for assessing the literature review section of the dissertations: summaries of each work; relationship of each work to the other; highlighting gaps in previous research; resolving conflicts amongst previous research; awareness of differing arguments; linking the review to the rationale and purpose of study. The analysis of these six components is linked with the issues of *authorial identity*, *evaluation* and *critical voice* in the literature review section of the graduates’ dissertations. The analysis is in two parts. The first part is quantitative based on the features highlighted above. The second part deals with the responses of the six lecturers and six graduate students interviewed.

Table 1: Overall findings of M.A. Dissertations

Components	Education n=20	Humanities n=20	Soc. Sciences n=20	Realization
Summaries of each work	100%	100%	100%	Evaluation
Relationship of each work	52%	60%	64%	Evaluation

Gaps in previous study	35%	40%	52%	Evaluation & critical thinking
Awareness of different views	35%	45%	50%	Critical thinking
Resolve conflicts among research	30%	40%	45%	Authorial voice/identity
Link with purpose of study	40%	50%	50%	Authorial voice/identity

The findings show that in all the sampled dissertations, all the writers of the literature review summarized the relevant literature consulted. The summaries only focused on the gist or main concerns of the literature but do not consider their strengths or weaknesses. The analysis of the literature review further indicates that the reviewers were able to demonstrate fairly well the relationship between each of the works reviewed; even though this varies from faculty to faculty. However, the data show that quite a significant number of the graduate students were unable to demonstrate the critical thinking and evaluation skills in their review of related literature to their study, as they did not show gaps that exist in previous studies. Only a few of them were able to show their evaluation and critical thinking skills. Most of the dissertations examined also indicate that the graduate students could not resolve conflicts among the research works they reviewed hence they were unable to demonstrate their authorial voice and identity in their reviews. The literature review section of the dissertations examined in this study therefore points to the graduates' deficient in showing awareness of differing views among the studies reviewed. Thus, they were incapable of demonstrating their critical thinking skills, as they only provided the summaries of the works reviewed. The analysis also shows that half of the graduate dissertations only reflect that the students were able to link the studies reviewed with the purpose of their own research.

A closer analysis of the findings indicate that only a few number of the graduate students from the Faculty of Education were unable to show their evaluation, critical thinking skills and express their voice and identity in their literature review. In contrast, the dissertations from the faculty of Humanities show that the students were slightly better than their counterparts from Education Faculty in demonstrating their awareness of their evaluation, critical thinking skills, asserting their voice and identity. Of the three faculties in which the data was sourced, students from the Social Sciences demonstrated most their

awareness of the writing skills examined in the literature review section of the master's dissertations.

In order to corroborate the findings derived from the quantitative analysis of the features of the writing in the master's dissertations, I undertook a textual analysis of some of the texts. In analyzing the data, two dissertations were selected from each faculty and they were coded in the following manner: Education: EDRE; Humanities: HUEE; Social Sciences: SOSW. The analysis revealed the following as shown by the extracts from the dissertations:

In a section of the literature review from EDRE1, a student remarked that a writer's evaluation of some studies seemed to be very positive. The positive evaluation was positioned prominently in the opening and concluding paragraphs, with statements such as "this is an interesting paper", the study "has succeeded as a useful guide to solving the problem of defining curriculum for many years", "their method is very simple and understandable" and "this paper is very useful for other research". Here, the positive evaluation is confidently expressed and implicitly appeals to shared values of what constitutes good research in the field.

On the other hand, HUEE2 evaluation of the limitations of the research presented was very tentative. For instance, she stated that "I think that the writers made a mistake when they chose the selected features...This mistake may be just typographical" and "Their figures are quite confusing. It would have been better if they had used the same scales...". Her claims here are highly qualified and she is almost apologetic about suggesting that there are any weaknesses in the research. Hence there is nothing critical in the evaluation of the work reviewed.

In an attempt to critique the methodology employed in a research paper on the effects of global warming on agriculture in X country, SOSW1 simply listed a number of limitations by stating that the paper was only based on questionnaires or predictions which were not really accurate. SOSW1 did not mention how the question format and

how he made the summarizing map from his questionnaire responses. However, he did not identify or analyze these limitations in the body of the review, nor did he give any supporting evidence for his claims. To be convincing, SOSW1 needs to substantiate these briefly mentioned limitations. Thus, in the review, SOSW1 had not been able to adopt a critical voice. He should be able to argue forcefully that the methodology of the research was fundamentally flawed. It was clear that he had actually formed an incisive, well-supported critical evaluation of these studies, but that he had not expressed this in his writing.

There were clearly a number of factors at work. SOSW1 major problem was not that he did not understand what the process of critical evaluation meant; rather, he did not know how to write a critical review which he felt would be acceptable in an academic context. Although he was certain about his judgement of the studies, he was very unsure about what would be considered acceptable evaluation by his readers and what would be considered unacceptable criticism. To avoid making controversial claims, he omitted much of his negative evaluation, qualified most of the negative evaluation which he did include and softened its effect by carefully locating these negative comments between favourable comments. In short, he had not adopted a convincing critical voice.

On the other hand, SOSW2 attempts to justify her use of quantitative method in research in the following way “ Qualitative design is defined by Bodgan & Taylor (1975) in Guy, Edgely, Arafat & Allen (1987:257-258) as:

...research procedures which produce descriptive data: people’s own written words or spoken words and observations. This approach directs itself at settings and the individuals within those settings holistically;

‘The qualitative research method enabled the researcher to capture the utterances of the participants verbatim, and to also observe what was going on in the classroom during the lesson. The result was rich data to be categorized and interpreted according to common themes in order to arrive at the main theme of the study’. This student did not point out

any limitations of this approach.

In another review, a student EDRE1 provides a detailed evaluation of the researcher's methodology stating that before the validity of the study can be discussed, the validity of the methodology needs to be questioned. The predictions he made in this paper were only based on questionnaire responses and a literature review. He did not provide an example of the questionnaire neither did he explain how he developed questionnaire results. It is not clear whether he provided a limited range of possible responses to each of the questions he asked.

In defining curriculum, EDRE1 merely states what other writers have said e.g. Doll (1996:13) states that “to different people, the curriculum represents what is taught, how it is taught, materials for teachers, materials for youngsters’ experiences in school and out. McCormick and James (1989) concurs with Doll (1996) in their claim that there is a wide variation in the way curriculum is commonly used, and in its definition as found in the literature”. It is not clear what the student’s position is with regards to this definition neither does he provide any working definition of curriculum throughout the study. Thus, there is neither the writer’s identity nor his voice in this review.

In a study in education another student in EDRE2 simply parroted other writers’ views on the definition of religion and failed to provide one for her study. She says “there is no universal definition of the term religion, since there are various approaches (theological, philosophical, functional, and substantive) to the definition of religion”. She goes on to enumerate them. The same goes for the definition of the concept of democracy also in EDRE2.

HUEE1 a student attempts to grapple with Grice’s conversational implicatures, a term in pragmatics. He begins by stating that Grice (1975:45) proposes the notion of 'conversational implicatures', which is derived from a general principle of conversation and a number of maxims which the speakers normally obey. He calls this 'co-operative principles'. Grice's theory suggests that there is a set of assumptions guiding

the conduct of conversation. His maxims point to what interactants in a conversation have to do in order to converse in a maximally efficient, rational co-operative way. That is, they have to speak sincerely, relevantly, and clearly, while providing sufficient information. HUEE1 ends with this positive complementary but uncritical analysis of the concept; “Grice's theory is a useful development in the understanding of the coherence of utterances in naturally occurring conversations”. The writer makes it sound as if Grice’s theory can be applied to all forms of conversations!

HUEE 2 explains the notion of Informatory in discourse analysis by merely stating that it is derived from the definition of an exchange as a unit concerned with negotiating the transmission of information (Coulthard and Brazil, 1981:101). An Informatory exchange is considered as an exchange which has information content. However, it is suggested in Berry (1981) that not all exchanges transmit information. This looks like a summary rather than an evaluation of the concept being reviewed by the student.

I interviewed six postgraduate students currently enrolled into Master’s programme in the faculties of Education, Humanities and Social Science to find out how they are being guided in their writing of literature review. The subjects were unanimous in their response namely, that they understand:

- That a literature review surveys scholarly articles, books and other sources relevant to a particular issue, area of research, or theory, providing a description, summary, and critical evaluation of each work.
- That the writing of Literature review constitutes an integral part of the research method course that they took.
- That they were taught to evaluate and show relationships between the work already done, and the current work, and how the work adds to the research already carried out.
- That it should also involve why the research needs to be carried out, how the researcher came to choose certain methodologies or theories to work with.

- That functionally, its purpose is to offer an overview of significant literature published on a topic.
- That it helps the researcher to map out their own line of research
- That it provides some insights to methodology and some reference sources relevant to the researcher's area of inquiry.
- They were also instructed not to use first person pronoun in their writing.

However, all the interviewees said they were not taught the language of literature review and how to evaluate or be critical about their sources of review. This problem of style that is lacking in the graduates' training seems to have left a wide gap in their writing. Thus the findings in this study are a reflection of this inadequacy in the students' work. This inadequacy calls for a need to train the graduate students not only the content and function of literature review but also to learn the appropriate style of writing reviews.

The six lecturers/supervisors interviewed agreed with the views of the six students interviewed, namely, that they taught their graduate students in the research methods course the structure, content and the functions of literature review and did not dwell on the style of the genre. They noted that they observed such inadequacies in the students' writing every year but argued that graduate students were expected to have learnt about the language and style of writing literature review during their undergraduate programmes. Further, they stressed that if this skill is lacking in their writing, they should contact the communication skills department where such skills were taught at the University of Botswana. Indeed, the lecturers gave some examples of students that they have referred to the Communication skills department to improve their language as well as evaluation and critical analysis skills; stressing that the students benefitted from the guidance provided by the concerned department. Although some students/faculties have benefitted from this informal arrangement, there is need for all the mentors /supervisors of graduate students to teach their students the style of writing reviews.

Conclusion

The analysis of the literature review section of some graduate dissertations of the University of Botswana pointed to some inadequacies in the students' writing skills. They

are deficient in evaluating texts relevant to their own study; they could not relate adequately the texts reviewed to their own studies, and they were mostly uncritical of their sources. At best, most of the students could only summarize and indicate the strengths of the literature reviewed but failed to point out their weaknesses and the need to improve on such studies. Therefore, most of the graduate students lack critical thinking skills and they were unable to assert their identity and voice in their writing.

These inadequacies in the students' writing have some pedagogical implications, and the need to address them urgently the following proposals may help to improve the situation. The first step is the development of an appropriate critical voice that will enable the postgraduate students to gain a clear understanding of the expectations of a literature review in English. Their very reluctance to risk making appropriate criticism meant that they needed to be convinced that it was acceptable to express both positive and negative evaluation of the work of other researchers. In order to assist the students, there is need to explain the differences between critical evaluation and criticism, and then discuss the generic conventions of literature reviews in research writing.

In addition, there is need for the supervisors of graduate dissertations at the University of Botswana to assist the students sharpen their critical thinking skills. They should make the students to understand that the literature review section is more than just outlining in a summary fashion the views of other writers; pointing out that this section of their work enables them to indicate their own point of view with regards to the text reviewed.

Next, there is need for senior academics in each of the Faculties of the University of Botswana to liaise with the communication skills department with a view to assisting graduate students solve some of their writing problems. Organized and sustained seminars and workshops on writing would go a long way to achieve the goal of writing effectively and efficiently. Finally, although this study is limited to three faculties at the University of Botswana, the findings do point to some deficiencies in the writing of graduate students; and this should create awareness for all supervisors/mentors in tertiary institutions, the need to pay more attention to graduate students' style of writing.

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