AN ACADEMIC WRITING SKILLS FRAMEWORK FOR DOCTORAL CANDIDATES AT THE CENTRAL UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY, FREE STATE (CUT)

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Abstract

Doctoral thesis writing proves to be difficult and poses various challenges to candidates during their postgraduate journey. This article seeks to contribute to the knowledge base underpinning academic writing at doctoral level by proposing an academic writing skills framework for doctoral candidates at the Central University of Technology, Free State (CUT). Participants include students who study towards a doctoral qualification, their supervisors and language editors who regularly proof-read doctoral theses. A qualitative research design is employed to investigate problems, obstacles and challenges experienced with academic writing; and to explore opportunities for promoting academic writing. Based on the perspectives from the literature and the findings from the study, a framework is proposed reflecting six levels at which academic writing skills of doctoral candidates may be promoted. These are: the creative level (mind-mapping); social level (workshops and meetings); intellectual level (reading); pedagogical level (reflective practice); scholarly level (addressing academic writing at undergraduate level); and spiritual level (determination and resilience). This framework may be a valuable tool to offer support for doctoral writing and skills development.

Keywords: Academic writing skills, doctoral candidates, Central University of Technology, Free State (CUT).

1. INTRODUCTION

Doctoral candidates are faced with a considerable amount of writing, with the doctoral thesis being the most comprehensive writing project of their careers. They are required to demonstrate the ability to produce substantial, independent, in-depth and publishable work that meets the expectations of academic readers in the target audience (Al-Zubaidi 2012:49; Lategan 2017b:4; South African Qualifications Authority 2012:15). According to Trafford and Leshem (2008:109) "this makes writing a doctoral thesis uniquely demanding due to the direct evaluative role that examiners have as primary readers."

Dissertation writing proves to be one of the most difficult forms of academic writing (Imani and Habil 2012:460; Trafford and Leshem 2008:118), and poses many challenges to candidates during their postgraduate journey. A study by Lategan (2017b:5) on the enrolment, retention and completion rates of doctoral candidates pointed to the fact that many doctoral students cannot

manage a publication as a condition for graduation; the defence of the study (viva); or presenting the research results to a broader research community. The success rate for PhDs in South Africa is only 50% (Ortega 2017). In other words, only 50% of candidates who enrol for the degree complete it. The Academy of Science of South Africa's (ASSAf) report: "The PhD Study: An evidence-based study on how to meet the demands for high-level skills in an emerging economy" (2010), the South African Regional University Association (SARUA) Report on Doctoral Education (2012), the White Paper for Post-school Education and Training (Department of Higher Education and Training, 2013) and the National Development Plan (NPD): Vision 2030 (2011) further inform these challenges and indicate that more attention should be paid to the education and training of doctoral students. Lategan (2017a: xv) indicates that "more attention should be given to creativity, innovation and entrepreneurship in the 'postgraduate curriculum' through scholarship".

Research into academic writing skills of postgraduate students have reported mainly on linguistic challenges that international students encounter when writing their dissertations in English (Al-Zubaidi 2012:46; Fenton-Smith and Humphreys 2015:40; Imani and Habil 2012:460; Johansen and Harding 2013:366; Kaufhold 2015:125), with academic language and learning support strategies being offered as a means to overcome these obstacles (Al-Zubaidi 2012:51; Elton 2010:151; Fenton-Smith and Humphreys 2015:40; Imani and Habil 2012:460; Kaufhold 2015:133; Mazgutova and Kormos 2015:13). Although these texts may address academic writing at postgraduate level, they do not necessarily address challenges experienced with academic writing at doctoral level. Added to this is the notion by Kamler and Thomson (2006:2) that the advice doctoral candidates receive from their supervisors "often glosses over the complexities of writing and/or locates the problem in the writer."

Very little has been published on the perceptions of language editors regarding academic writing skills of doctoral candidates. Language editors could make a valuable contribution in addressing challenges experienced with doctoral writing, given their objective, impartial and direct evaluative stance. They should be seen as part of the academic community of practice working with doctoral students to support their writing.

This study aims to explore issues and challenges experienced with academic writing at doctoral level, and to propose a framework reflecting suggestions of good practice to promote academic writing skills. Perspectives were gained, through a qualitative inquiry, from doctoral candidates at the Central University of Technology, Free State (CUT), their supervisors and language editors who regularly proof-read doctoral theses.

2. INFORMING LITERATURE

2.1 The genre of academic writing

Morton, Storch and Thompson (2015:1) concede that, over the years, there has been a growing recognition of the complexity of academic writing. Not only is academic writing regarded as writing by academic researchers for scholarly publications (Kaldord and Rochecouste in Johansen and Harding 2013:367), but also as "a particular style of expression that researchers use to define the intellectual boundaries of their disciplines and their areas of expertise" (USC Libraries 2016:1). Kamler and Thomson (2006:12) postulate that academic writing "is itself a form of research".

Academic writing is governed by rules and practices that adhere to traditional conventions (Wilkes, Godwin and Gurney 2015:166), and should ultimately present a clear, creative and professional image of a particular matter (Your Dictionary 2015:5), without jeopardising academic standards (Trafford and Leshem 2008:118). It involves solid planning, in which thoughts are critically and strategically organised. Academic writing is an activity that requires awareness of the disciplinary rhetoric, as well as the capacity to write grammatically accurate and coherent prose (Lourens 2007:1). Academic writing also follows a consistent stylistic approach, such as the Harvard Method of Referencing, MLA, APA or Chicago Manual of Style, and employs a specific "structural code" (Johansen and Harding 2013:368). In this regard, a doctoral thesis is structured in accordance with a set of macrostructural components, such as an abstract, introduction, literature review, research methodology, discussion of results, conclusion, and recommendations. This "structural code" requires that doctoral candidates demonstrate skills that are commonly associated with doctorateness, such as finding appropriate evidence; conducting an extensive literature review; synthesising and contextualising information into an authoritative viewpoint; analytical and critical thinking, reflecting and debating over academic arguments; and illustrating clinical competence through academic writing. Academic writing also entails engaging in dialogue with a disciplinary community. Morton *et al.* (2015:2) consider academic writing as a social activity in which individuals are regarded as socially situated actors. Writing as a social practice (Kamler and Thomson 2006:4) is therefore embedded in a writer's interactions with texts and people, both of which are considered as essential resources in the process of learning to "write engagingly" (Green in University of Technology Sydney 2015:1) in discipline-specific ways.

2.2 Challenges experienced with academic writing

Literature indicates that academic writing poses many challenges to candidates during their postgraduate journey, not only due to the high standards required for writing a dissertation or thesis, but students' insufficient mastery of grammar and vocabulary (Imani and Habil 2012:460). Academic

writing proves to be difficult (Kamler and Thomson 2006:2), complex (Morton *et al.* 2015:1), time consuming (Kearns 2017), challenging (Hopwood 2015:1), demanding and frustrating (Gimenez in Johansen and Harding 2013:367), and elaborated and explicit (Hyland in Biber and Gray 2010:3) with grammaticality and syntactical complexities (Al-Zubaidi 2012:49). The genre of academic writing is also discipline dependent (Kaufhold 2015:125) with the rules not being explicitly expressed (Elton 2010:151). Cultural differences, academic background, negative attitudes towards the requirements of academic writing, plagiarism, patch-writing, over-reliance on quotation (Al-Zubaidi 2012:48, 51), unsubstantiated claims (Lategan & Kokt 2017:85) and failure to take an authoritative stance (McCulloch 2013:136) are other challenges. Wisker (2013:351) list issues of logic, coherence, crispness of style and clarity of purpose as challenges doctoral candidates in particular are faced with during their doctoral journeys.

2.3 Suggestions of good practice from the literature review to promote academic writing

Universities globally have increasingly begun to offer their students institutional support to address these challenges. Researchers have identified several practices as enabling doctoral students to become better academic writers. In this regard Fenton-Smith and Humphreys (2015:51) conducted a study whereby five language and learning support mechanisms were rated effective to assist postgraduate students with academic writing. These are: team-teaching, credit-bearing Academic Language and Learning (ALL) courses, adjunct tutorials, ALL consultation services and discipline-specific workshops. ALL consultation services were highly regarded with students rating them extremely effective (Fenton-Smith and Humphreys 2015:48). In their study several participants believed that postgraduate students could make significant progress if pushed to analyse their own language output. Fenton-Smith and Humphreys (2015:48) mention that "… it was only through grappling with the issues in terms of their own writing that they learned to write far more successfully and to critically evaluate their own work." The kind of reflexivity has been linked in other research to success in academic writing (Green in Morton *et al.* 2015:9; Wisker 2015:70). The ability to reflect on one's own experience and knowledge, and use that to make improvements, is an important aspect of university-level thinking (Solent Online Learning 2017:1).

Kaufhold (2015:125) suggests that institutions should provide the necessary supportive structures to promote academic writing skills. As such language centres at universities seem to be a valuable tool to develop students' academic writing skills. These centres present academic literacy courses or workshops to promote postgraduate students' reading and writing skills, specifically in relation to the completion of a thesis (Language Centre 2017:1). CUT's Writing Centre is a peer-based learning support service for currently enrolled CUT students. The Centre's primary focus is to help students to develop their academic writing skills by discussing high order issues such as

structure, organisation, and how to best articulate ideas (CUT 2016:1). The Centre, however, does not edit or proofread dissertations or theses, and focuses more on academic writing at undergraduate level, concentrating on aspects such as the structuring of an essay, avoiding plagiarism, referencing, creative writing, grammar, proposal writing and revising drafts.

Al-Zubaidi (2012:49) notes that the academic writing skills of international students may be improved by encouraging them to integrate into departmental communities. This may be achieved through academic and social integration (workshops and meetings). Academically, they are encouraged to work together with fellow students. Social integration is brought about through social emotional integration and supportive interaction. Wisker (2015:70), who has done extensive research into academic writing at doctoral level, identifies conferences and network building as strategies enabling doctoral students to become better academic writers.

Academic writing at doctoral level may also be promoted through broadening reading. Wisker (2015:70) postulates that "difficulty in the reading process is described as a significant barrier, but as students grapple with complex theoretical perspectives they find ways of providing a basis for their own thinking and writing". Weideman (2007:111) mentions that, through reading, students will be able to compare their writing with that of others who have studied in the same field. "You find a model to imitate and, if you develop as you should, even to surpass."

Other work on good practice in academic writing offer strategies, mainly from a pedagogical perspective, to support doctoral students. In this regard Kamler and Thomson (2006) offer a framework for scholarly work to help doctorate students produce clear and well-argued dissertations, whilst also focusing on the complexities of forming a scholarly identity. Wisker (2015) covers the practicalities of writing, discussing well-tested methods for managing time, overcoming writers' block and developing a confident academic voice.

The blog DoctoralWriting SIG is a forum where doctoral students will find helpful writing tools to improve their grammar, doctoral voice, style, writing practices and scholarly identities. Sword (2017), in her latest book "Air & Light & Time & Space: How successful academics write, focuses on the habits that anchor successful writing practices". These texts focus primarily on perspectives from doctoral students, supervisors and examiners. This study aims to also incorporate the views of language editors, who regularly proof-read doctoral theses, into a framework for promoting academic writing skills of doctoral candidates.

3. RESEARCH DESIGN

The study employed a qualitative approach in which semi-structured, face-to-face interviews were conducted with doctoral students at CUT, their supervisors, and language editors who regularly proof-read doctoral theses. The author opted for qualitative interviews as the method most likely to reveal the multiplicity and complexity of academic writing.

The questions centred around problems and challenges experienced with academic writing at doctoral level, whilst participants were also asked to propose strategies for promoting academic writing skills at doctoral level.

4. DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

The qualitative data obtained in the interviews were analysed by means of content analysis. The respondents' answers to the semi-structured questions pertaining to challenges experienced with academic writing and suggestions on how to address these were reviewed and grouped into six categories.

4.1 Spelling and grammar

Challenges: The supervisors all concurred that grammatical errors and spelling are major challenges. “Students cannot write!”, said one. Grammar and spelling are concerns also raised by language editors. One replied: “Doctoral students will write one thing in three different ways. There seems to be a lack of spell-checking on the side of the students. They leave prepositions and punctuation out.”

One of the supervisors mentioned that students do not assess their own work. “Students need to read their study and assess their own work.”

Doctoral candidates, supervisors and language editors voiced their concern about the lack of practical writing methods and language practice at undergraduate level.

Suggestions: The supervisors emphasised that grammar and syntax at doctoral level should be on standard. One of them mentioned that, when a student lacks proper grammar and syntax usage, she will send the document back to be language edited before she reads it again. “I repeat myself numerous times, but eventually the students start to understand and get it right.”

Supervisors stressed that the use of reflective assessments is an important strategy to improve spelling and grammar. One of them remarked that reading and writing skills may be improved by employing self-reflective assessments such as the Cloze-procedure. “This self-reflective assessment encourages students to pay more attention to their reading skills, which will

subsequently improve their writing skills," he added. Other supervisors stated that doctoral students need to read through their own work, edit it, recognise their own mistakes and critique their own work. One of the doctoral candidates mentioned that she learned best from correcting her own mistakes.

With regard to language practice, one doctoral candidate remarked: "A lot more language practice should be built into the undergraduate curricula". In this regard, a student, supervisor and language editor recommended that a mark or small percentage be allocated to grammar and syntax, regardless of whether a student studies towards a Language Practice qualification. The language editor mentioned: "Some lecturers, especially when assessing students' knowledge at an undergraduate level, oversee language and grammatical errors, more even so when knowledge is tested in a field other than Languages; for instance, Somatology or Engineering". She said that, by allocating a mark for language, students will learn to write with care from undergraduate level.

One supervisor remarked that students must write and rewrite numerous times before getting it right. "There must be a strong will on the side of the student (determination and resilience) to do academic writing over and over again, until they master it." Another supervisor added: "Students don't practice enough when it comes to academic writing. They should write, rewrite, over and over again." These comments point to the fact that writing is ultimately a skill developed through practice.

4.2 Synthesising of information, systematic reporting and linking of paragraphs

Challenges: During the interviews, one doctoral candidate said that synthesising of information is "a bit challenging". Another candidate struggles with sequencing of information, systematic thinking and linking of paragraphs. "With time and practice, it becomes better and easier." He said that Chapter 1 is the most difficult chapter to write, but that it becomes easier after one comes to realise how to write a doctoral thesis.

According to supervisors and language editors, the flows of sentences and paragraphs, as well as systematic reporting, are huge concerns. One language editor remarked. "Some ideas stand loose without linking sentences from one paragraph to the next." According to another language editor, students don't cross-reference. "This is very important to demonstrate coherent thinking." She said that students don't summarise or conclude their thoughts at the end of their thesis. "They must state where and how they have addressed the primary and secondary research questions."

One supervisor said: “Paragraphs and sentences are not structured properly.” Another one added: “Students don't demonstrate coherent, systematic thinking. There is no thread or narrative thinking.” Another supervisor added: “Students' ideas don't flow logically and systematically.”

Suggestions: During the qualitative interviews, a supervisor stated that students should try to adopt a systematic way of thinking and writing early on in their academic careers. One of the doctoral candidates mentioned that she employs a systematic way of writing, in which she first drafts a mind-map, ordering her thoughts systematically. In this way she learns to master synthesising of information. “I then quote sources in support of a particular viewpoint. Thereafter I draw my own conclusions and argue about perspectives taken on issues.” Only then would she type her work in a word document on the computer.

4.3 Taking an authoritative stance and own viewpoint

Challenges: All doctoral candidates who were interviewed struggled with the so-called “authoritative stance”. Two of them mentioned that the “authoritative viewpoint” in doctoral thesis writing is “challenging”, and that arguing about a topic is “difficult”. Another candidate said: “At times you want to align your thinking with what others have said; it becomes a problem.” According to another candidate the biggest challenge she experienced during her doctoral journey is to think on another level (critical thinking): “To have an argument about the literature is quite difficult.”

The supervisors also voiced concerns about the “authoritative stance” in doctoral thesis writing. One of them said that students “are not reflecting on and engaging with the text” – thus lacking an authoritative stance. For him conceptualisation of information is a huge concern. He said: “Students do recycling of already known information.” Another supervisor added: “Critical thinking is a problem. Students have the ability to collect sources, copy and paste, but can't interact with the text, give their own views and link it with their studies.”

One of the language editors mentioned that critical thinking, reflection and taking an authoritative stance are neglected. “Students quote sources word for word and the thesis is thus a replica of something already being said by someone else; they struggle to give their own viewpoint.” Another language editor added: “There's a lack of doctorateness and authoritative stance as well as the contribution being made towards a particular field.” She explained: “The student's own voice is not coming through. It's basically a repetition of what other authors say.” Another added: “They make statements without naming the authors.” Another concern raised by all participants was insufficient Research Methodology modules at undergraduate level. At CUT, students only get exposed to Research Methodology in their BTech year (postgraduate level).

Suggestions: Comments made by participants in the CUT study correlate well with previous research, indicating that workshops on academic writing and doctorateness greatly contribute to addressing academic writing challenges at doctoral level. During the empirical investigation, all doctoral candidates indicated that they had attended workshops relating to doctorateness. One candidate proposed that workshops be presented to doctoral candidates every six months, rather than as a cluster at one specific time. He said that this could help doctoral candidates as they mature and proceed with their doctoral journey. One language editor and one supervisor recommended that students should attend workshops on academic writing and doctorateness. "They should be taught a list of joining words to use in their academic writing, and words to use when quoting sources, as some students use the same words over and over again. Academic writing and doctorateness go hand in hand," the language editor said.

One supervisor suggested that students should be introduced to a module on research at the beginning of their academic careers, and not only in the fourth year of study, which is currently the case at CUT (as with most other universities of technology in South Africa). One language editor elaborated: "It's one thing to write well, but it's a different story to write about research. Students need to develop writing skills in research from undergraduate level and they need to engage with text in philosophical ways early on in their academic journeys."

4.4 Uniformity and inconsistency errors

Challenges: According to the supervisors, errors relating to uniformity and inconsistency are very common when reading through doctoral theses. One supervisor remarked: "Students are not uniform in their writing. For instance, they don't write out an abbreviation in full the first time it is used and thereafter only use the abbreviation. Another concern is the fact that students use terms interchangeably. "A student will use the term 'organisational culture', but thereafter the student refers to only 'culture'. There's a difference between 'organisational culture' and 'culture'. Students are thus not consistent in their writing."

The language editors also expressed their concern about inconsistency and uniformity errors: One language editor remarked that students use abbreviations without clarifying what it stands for, and often omit some abbreviations from their list of abbreviations. Students also write half sentences and do not make use of proper referencing techniques. Another language editor referred to referencing where students fail to keep to the same style when quoting sources in the text. Some sources, according to her, are sometimes quoted without a comma after the sources' surname, other times the comma is left out. She also made mention of the use of "*et al.*", stating that candidates sometimes write it in italics, other times not; sometimes with a full stop, and other times the full stop is omitted. She also mentioned that

candidates are also not consistent with their tenses. “Sometimes a sentence is written in the present tense, then in the past tense, and then in the past perfect tense.”

Suggestions: The participants all indicated that CUT should revisit the undergraduate curriculum to promote academic writing at postgraduate level. One supervisor mentioned that a bigger focus on academic writing needs to be employed at undergraduate level. The following comments were made by doctoral candidates: “Students need to be trained at undergraduate level on how to write in an academic manner”, and “I suggest a six-month module on academic writing for all undergraduate students”. “Another way of improving academic writing at postgraduate level is to incorporate assignments at undergraduate level that must adhere to the standards and requirements (writing style) of an academic essay,” added a language editor. Another language editor remarked that academic writing should be a credit-bearing module as part of Research Methodology. One student added that students should, already in the BTech year of study, be introduced to writing academically, especially in the module Research Methodology.

4.5 Quality and clarity of purpose

Challenges: According to one of the supervisors, students need to meet the demands and expectations of the academic target audience. Another supervisor mentioned that doctoral candidates do not have an understanding of, and insight into, the topic under investigation: “The lack of insight is challenging their writing abilities.”

Suggestions: One supervisor remarked: “Students must present their work in such a way that anyone reading it will be able to understand it. Especially at doctoral level students need to write at the same level as their examiners, their peers.” One of the language editors said that, since students are writing for a certain audience, they must ensure that their message is clear to that particular audience, without bias. One of the supervisors asks his doctoral students three questions in this regard: “Firstly: Who are the five leading authors in this particular field? Secondly: What are the five leading themes linked to your topic? Thirdly: What are the five leading journals reporting on this particular topic/issue?”

One of the language editors added: “Students tend to lose focus of their research topic, and they often wander off. Doctoral candidates sometimes write too broad, and lose focus of the research topic”.

4.6 Reading issues

Challenges: According to one supervisor students fail to read sufficient authoritative information on a particular issue. He added: “Students do not read examples or expose themselves to examples of good scholarly work”.

He said that students seem to have limited historical understanding of a particular matter. “They just start to read, without asking the question: 'where is this coming from?'”

Suggestions: Participants in the CUT study recommended that doctoral candidates read more in order to become better academic writers. One doctoral candidate emphasised the importance of reading and reflective practice. She mentioned that she had read a lot throughout her primary and secondary education. “This in particular, I think, contributed to my 'linguistic intelligence'.” Another one added: “Students should read more, since reading improves writing.” The supervisors all agreed that students should read more to develop their academic writing skills. One supervisor said: “Students need to dig in deep in their field of specialisation and read numerous articles about their focus area. There must be a strong will to read.” Another one added: “Students should be encouraged to read more academic articles.” One of the language editors said that doctoral candidates must do their own research (reading) about academic writing. “Writing a doctoral thesis requires students to be skilled and knowledgeable on academic writing, and moving forward such as delivering papers at conferences, writing articles for accredited journals and contributing to chapters in books. Doctoral candidates must learn to write academically well to improve their professional development and career paths.”

The interviews with the doctoral candidates, supervisors and language editors brought valuable insight into exploring obstacles and issues experienced with academic writing at doctoral level. The findings underscore challenges raised in the literature review. These include grammaticality, language-related issues, patch-writing, unsubstantiated claims, over-reliance on quotation, and not meeting the expectations of academic readers in the target language. Critical reading and thinking skills as well as taking an authoritative stance were other challenges raised.

5. A FRAMEWORK FOR PROMOTING ACADEMIC WRITING SKILLS OF DOCTORAL CANDIDATES AT CUT

Based on the perspectives from the literature and participant comments during the face-to-face interviews, a framework reflecting six levels of suggestions of good practice is proposed to improve academic writing skills of doctoral candidates at CUT.

The scholarly level (addressing academic writing at undergraduate level): The biggest concern raised by doctoral candidates, supervisors and language editors is the lack of practical writing methods, language practice and Research Methodology at undergraduate level, and that CUT should revisit the undergraduate curriculum to promote academic writing at postgraduate level. This, in particular, will address the following challenges: Spelling and grammar; taking an authoritative stance and own viewpoint; and uniformity and inconsistency errors.

The creative level (mind-mapping):
Mind-maps seem to be a popular method in which doctoral candidates learn to order their thoughts systematically. This will assist doctoral candidates with challenges experienced with synthesising of information, systematic reporting and linking of paragraphs.

The social level (workshops and meetings):
The CUT study confirms that workshops about academic writing and doctorateness greatly contribute towards promoting doctoral candidates' academic writing skills. Workshops presented to students during their doctoral journeys may assist them to develop an authoritative voice.

The pedagogical level (reflective practice):
The findings of the study underscore the importance of reflective practice, which is regarded highly relevant and helpful towards continuous professional development. This will enable doctoral students to experience their academic writing, think about it, and learn from their experiences to improve their academic writing skills. Issues relating to spelling, grammar and reading will be addressed.

The intellectual level (reading):
Participants in the CUT study suggested that doctoral candidates should read more to become better academic writers. Broadening reading will address challenges experienced with spelling and grammar; and quality and clarity of purpose. Students need to read more scholarly articles and dig deep into their field of specialisation in order to become better writers. Reading ultimately improves writing.

The spiritual level (determination and resilience):
The results of the study suggest that resilience and determination are great self-motivation strategies that students may incorporate into their academic writing. The interviews revealed that there should be a strong will on the side of the students to write and rewrite numerous times – until they get it right.

6. CONCLUSION

In this article, the author proposes a framework for promoting academic writing skills of doctoral candidates at CUT. The development of the framework is informed by the complex and tacit nature of academic writing, particularly at doctoral level, drawing from the literature review and suggestions made by doctoral candidates, supervisors and language editors during the interviews.

In realising the aim of the research, a thorough literature review was conducted, after which an empirical investigation, comprising qualitative face-to-face interviews with doctoral candidates, their supervisors and language editors, was carried out. The proposed framework is based on perspectives

from the literature and suggestions made by participants during the qualitative interviews. The framework reflects six levels at which academic writing skills of CUT doctoral candidates may be promoted. These are: the creative level (mind-mapping); social level (workshops and meetings); intellectual level (reading); pedagogical level (reflective practice); scholarly level (addressing academic writing and undergraduate level); and spiritual level (determination and resilience). The framework proposed in this article should make a valuable contribution towards the development of academic writing amongst doctoral candidates at CUT.

Perhaps the greatest contribution towards promoting academic writing skills of doctoral candidates at CUT was the suggestions made by doctoral students, supervisors and language editors that doctoral writing should be informed and developed at undergraduate level. The findings from this study reveal that practical writing methods, language practice and Research Methodology should be built into the curricula of undergraduate programmes at CUT. The results suggest that challenges experienced with academic writing at doctoral level may already be addressed at undergraduate level – thereby challenging Higher Education for future change.

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