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Abstract
Technical writing is commonly offered in higher education as part of an English course for undergraduates of technical disciplines. Among the various forms of technical writing, technical report writing is deemed an important skill that technical undergraduates need to master for immediate academic needs and future writing needs. Despite the increased recognition in the importance of technical reports, most studies in this area tend to focus on the pedagogical concerns towards producing better writing products. The question of how technical report writing is taught, learnt and done still lacks understanding. Motivated by the lack of evidence in technical report writing process, this study attempts to provide an understanding through a theoretical analysis. Data were collected from interviews, observations and analyses of artefacts. The data were then analysed and interpreted using three approaches to academic writing in higher education, namely traditional skills, academic socialisation and academic literacies. Findings indicate an in-depth understanding of the data that would otherwise be regarded as ordinary constraints in the classroom. By illuminating the process of how report writing is taught and learnt, it is hoped that contribution can be made towards better pedagogical decisions and effective writing instructions in the ESL classroom.

Keywords: ESL classroom, higher education, technical report, technical writing, theoretical analysis

INTRODUCTION
Technical writing is a form of discipline-specific writing in higher education. For engineering and computer science students, the learning outcomes are associated with producing specific writing products such as technical manual, technical business

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proposal and laboratory report (Roy, 2010). For students undertaking communication courses, the writing products would be promotional writing, advertisements and posters, resume, technical translation, proposals and reports (Gould & Losano, 2008). In business communication, students are expected to produce business letters, memos, minutes of meeting and business reports. Technical writing is purposefully done to communicate specific and factual information to specialised groups of audience, such as engineers, medical doctors, and sometimes to general readers (Shelton, 1994). It is therefore reasonable to establish that technical writing is a form of specialised writing, product- and content-oriented.

The technical report is a writing product commonly expected from students studying engineering or other technical programmes. It is considered an important communication tool at the workplace (Monash University, 2005) and hence, learning to write the technical report would prepare the students for the practical writing that is required of them as part of their job in the future (Riordan & Pauley, 2002). However, in the academic context of higher education, technical report writing is often taught synonymous with academic writing in English language courses. In addition, technical reports are graded as the equivalent of an undergraduate thesis. Apart from learning to write technical reports for practical workplace needs, the students also have to fulfil the academic writing requirements. This could be problematic, as the requirements of academic writing may not necessarily align with the practical purposes of writing technical reports, which requires discipline-specific content. English language lecturers might not necessarily perceive the purpose and writing of the technical reports in the same way as expected by the students, and vice versa. These are factors that will affect how writing is taught, learnt and done between the lecturer and the students.

LITERATURE REVIEW
Research on technical writing in higher education in the past has involved medical, computing and engineering disciplines (Cillers, 2012; Tazl, Hassler, Messnarz & Fluhr, 2012). Much attention has been paid to researching various instructional methods in order to improve technical writing such as the use of graphical models (Roy, 2010), collaborative project-based model (Tazl et al., 2012) and direct involvement of students in real world writing projects (Ford & Newmark, 2011). Recent studies have also looked into ways to make technical writing in the academic setting more relevant to workplace needs (Bourelle, 2012; Linsdell & Anagnos, 2011). These studies seem to suggest that the answer to better writing products lies in the quest for effective instructional methods for better classroom practices. While such studies are crucial for improving pedagogical concerns in the classroom, the fundamental question of how technical writing is taught, learnt and done by the participants in the classroom is hardly examined. Understanding the reality of how technical writing is taught and learnt might lead to more relevant propositions made with reference to the contextual needs.
This study posits that the institution where learning takes place is a socially dynamic site. Institutional practices dictate the ways of teaching, learning and doing that stem from their social and cultural histories (Lea & Street, 1998). In addition, the participants (both the lecturer and learners) come from different learning backgrounds that inform their expectations and perceptions on how teaching and learning should be. For example, how lecturers play their role in the classroom is shaped by their previous experiences (Reeves, 2009; Tsui, 2008) while students, on the other hand, are not “empty heads that reverberate harmoniously with the environment” (van Lier, 2000, p. 247). In other words, the teachers and students have perceptions and expectations that might be misaligned.

Teaching and learning of writing is not a straightforward transmission of skills and knowledge from the teacher to the students. Students bring with them experiences from prior learning experiences and contexts that underlie their perceptions and expectations of how technical report writing should be. Their perceptions and expectations may not necessarily align with the teacher’s. Hence, it is important that the study of writing must take into consideration its social context and as Lea and Street (1998) suggested, the institution where writing takes place is often a site of discourse and power, and will affect how writing is taught and learnt.

**Approaching Second Language (L2) Writing in Higher Education**

Over the years, writing research has gone through some major shifts from viewing writing as a cognitive activity constructed within the individual mind to a socially constructed activity between an individual and the surrounding people (Leki, 1995; Leki & Carson, 1997). These shifts can be understood through three approaches to writing in higher education: traditional study skill or skill-based, academic socialisation or text-based, and academic literacies or practice-based (Baynham, 2000; Lea & Street, 1998, 2006; Street, 2004).

The traditional study skill or skill-based approach (Baynham, 2000; Lea & Street, 1998, 2006) identifies writing as a generic skill set that can be transferred to other contexts once acquired. This approach mainly emphasises language surface features, such as grammar and spelling, which students need to master as part of their writing skills (Hermerschmidt, 1999; Lea, 1999; Lea & Street, 1998, 2006; Street, 2004). It is assumed that once the students have mastered writing skills, they would be able to apply these skills to other forms of writing in different contexts. To put it simply, students that have mastered their grammatical skills will maintain good grammar in all their writings. The approach has resulted in its “crudity and insensitivity” (Lea & Street, 1998, p. 158) towards students as social beings and the social context where writing takes place. Research (Marshall, 1987; Zimmerman, 1997; Turuk, 2008) has also indicated that too much emphasis on the skills approach can result in students’ inability in complex thinking.
The academic socialisation or text-based approach attempts to address the social context of learning (Street, 2004). It draws primarily on the resources of disciplinary discourses and genre analysis. Following this approach, text types are treated as the primary emphasis and analysed for identification of discipline-specific language demands (Derahvasht, 2011; Martin, 2009; Swales, 1990; Yasuda, 2011). These demands are then translated into the design of discipline-specific curricular and explicit teaching of rules and conventions (Baynham, 2000), or in other words, to “acculturate” (Lea & Street, 2006, p. 369) students into their disciplinary discourse and genres. This approach has been critiqued for assuming institutional practices as “monolithic with set rules and criteria” (Hermerschmidt, 1999, p. 8), and text autonomous with stability of disciplinary discourses (Hyland, 2009; Lea & Street, 1998, 2006). Assuming undifferentiated genre in writing is impractical as genre writing is a practice based on expectations (Hyland, 2009). Different expectations result in diversities that exist not only across genres of different disciplines but also within a genre for a specific discipline. For example, expectations of readership between the language and technical lecturer will affect how students write and what they write. Assuming that writing is a process of acculturating students into a homogenous culture may undermine the complexities of writing.

The practice-based, or better known as the academic literacies approach, draws on a heterogeneous institutional learning context. Writing practices are seen as “ways of doing” (Hermerschmidt, 1999, p. 8), implicitly bound with “the relationships of power, authority, meaning making, and identity” within specific institutional settings (Lea & Street, 2006, p. 370). In other words, the lecturer and students are social beings, who will continue to produce or construct different notions and ways of doing writing, through their interaction in the classroom. Writing practices are no longer implicated solely by what needs to be learnt (or taught) as prescribed by the lecturer or course requirements. Instead, students’ responses to their sociocultural context and how they moderate themselves in writing are recognised as part of writing practices, known as academic literacy practices. Three dominant features of academic literacy practices that have been identified are (a) switching practices as they move from one setting to another, (b) deploying appropriately “a repertoire of linguistic practices” for each setting and (c) coping with the social meanings and identities evoked by each setting (Street, 2004, p. 15).

In sum, the academic literacies approach encapsulates the traditional study skills and the academic socialisation approaches as it adopts a wider view towards writing. Furthermore, the academic literacies approach provides a clearer and more explicit understanding of writing practices in the social context of learning.

METHOD
Based on the above discussion, there is a need to explore writing in its social context. The study was therefore exploratory and interpretive in nature. The aim was to explore
writing practices through an understanding of the lecturer and the students’ expectations, perceptions and interpretations towards technical report. Hence, a case study approach was deemed appropriate for this purpose. As explicated in Yin’s (2009) definition, a case study is an empirical study that “investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context” (p. 18). The physical and social setting of the classroom where writing takes place was identified as a real-life social context. The phenomena, conceptualised as writing practices, were shaped by this social context where the participants were constantly interacting and forming their expectations, perceptions and interpretations.

Data were collected through observations, interviews, informal discussions and analyses of artefacts in a class of consenting participants for a period of ten weeks. This paper reports part of the findings from this empirical study by focusing on what technical report writing means to the lecturer and the students, how they perceive and interpret technical reports, and their “ways of doing” technical report (Hermerschmidt, 1999, p. 8). Due to the focus of this paper, data reported are mainly drawn from interviews conducted with the lecturer and students, supported with other sources where necessary.

**Interviewing Procedure**

In-depth interviews were conducted with the lecturer and students to gather information on their understanding, perceptions and interpretations of technical reports. A simple survey form was distributed along with a consent form prior to the interviewing process. The types of students based on their demography, educational background and seniority in terms of how many years they had studied the programme were considered. This was to ensure that the interviewees covered as much as possible the diversities in the classroom. The consent form given to the students explained the nature and purpose of the study, as well as their rights as participants of the study. Focus group interviews were conducted with two to three students at a time. Individual interviews were conducted with the lecturer. Each interview lasted an average of between one and two hours.

Each interview was consistently conducted in a structured and connected manner (Kim, 2008). By structured, this means an interview protocol was designed with the interview questions mapped closely to the research questions of the study. Prior to conducting the interviews, the questions in the protocol were validated by two experts followed by a pilot test. Using the feedback from the participants in the pilot test, the questions were further refined for the actual study. To maintain a connected manner in conducting the interviews, interview questions were asked with the provision of probing questions when necessary. This measure was adopted to encourage interviewees to expand their answers for more information.

Interview data amounting to twenty hours of audio data were then transcribed, analysed for themes and verified with the interviewees. During the analysis stage, data triangulation
was employed by comparing the information gathered from the lecturer and students for areas of agreement and divergence.

**The Setting and its Participants**
The study was conducted in a local technical university where all the degree programmes offered were technically- and vocationally-based. Here, all students were required by the university to take an English course that includes technical report writing. The course period was a semester of 14 weeks, with three hours of classroom interaction per week.

The participants consisted of the lecturer, Mdm. Ayesha (pseudonym), and her undergraduate students (who were all given pseudonyms). Mdm. Ayesha holds a masters degree in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) and had been teaching the same course for four years at the time of the study. All the students were second language learners of English, who spoke Malay as their mother tongue. The majority of these students were diploma holders with a few who had undergone matriculation programmes in local colleges, as well as Form Six and the Malaysian Higher School Certificate (*Sijil Tinggi Persekolahan Malaysia, STPM*) in the local public schools. According to the lecturer, these students generally had average to low English proficiency levels based on their entry-level English results; particularly, the diploma holders had a limited proficiency level in English.

On seniority, the students could be divided into two major groups: (i) juniors of second year who enrolled in this course following the normal cohort system, and (ii) seniors who had failed or missed the course before, and needed to complete the course before internship and graduation. These seniors were in their final semester of writing up their Final Year Project (FYP), an equivalent of the undergraduate thesis.

**FINDINGS**
In analysing how Mdm. Ayesha and the students perceived the technical report, findings indicated that both the lecturer and her students generally concurred on the aspects of writing that should be considered in a good technical report “which” included content, structure and format, language, and style of writing. However, the interpretation of the lecturer and students for each of these writing aspects showed differences that were likely to affect and be affected by their social context. The following sections present the theoretical analyses on the four writing aspects that led to this finding.

**Content**
Mdm. Ayesha and her students agreed that content was highly important but they differed in the choice of content that should be used in writing a technical report. As students of a technical discipline, the students felt that their technical reports should consist of content reflective of their specialisation, “more technical” (Johan & Musa, Interview 1; Aleen, Interview 3; Azim, Khan & Raja, Interview 4) and “more wide and clear” (Ezna,
Interview 2) content. Mdm. Ayesha defined a technical report as “any report that is related to workplace reporting. But in my context, it has been diverted to social research report” (Mdm. Ayesha, Interview 5). This was apparent in her choice of content through the texts she used in her teaching, for example, studies on environmental issues and learning problems among students. She explained that texts on arts and social studies were “easier for the students to handle, and they can understand better when they read the content” (Mdm. Ayesha, Interview 5). Mdm. Ayesha seemed to perceive that if the students were able to understand her input, they would be able to apply the same understanding to fulfil writing needs in other contexts, including the workplace. Following which, she mentioned that students “would naturally be able to write any form of report, anything” if they had the necessary language and writing skills. Underlying Mdm. Ayesha’s perceptions was a seemingly skill-based approach that suggested to her the transferability of generic writing skills, resulting in a lack of consideration of the students’ social learning contract.

Mdm. Ayesha’s rationale for choosing non-technical and social content is not necessarily agreeable to her students. Some students pointed out the content was irrelevant to them and they found the texts given by the teacher too difficult to understand. This could clearly be a factor that affected the quality of writing among the students. As pointed out by Macalister (2012), students who struggled to understand input texts would be affected in their writing about it. Moreover, students having to conform to the writing requirements set by Mdm. Ayesha could also be seen as the evidence of the academic socialisation approach whereby writing serves as an acculturation into homogenous norms and conventions.

Mdm. Ayesha further expressed that her expectations on content included organisation of ideas, relevance and appropriateness of content, all put together into a piece of coherent writing. The students, although did not agree with the lecturer’s choice of non-technical content, appeared to try to fulfil her expectations. Many among them relied on Internet references to search for content. The difficulty they faced was in getting the right content for a specific topic, particularly with topics suggested by the teacher, and “revising or editing the materials into content” for their writing (Johan & Musa, Interview 1; Mariam & Nurin, Interview 3; Khan & Raja, Interview 4). Drawing from the academic literacies approach, it was apparent that the students understood the need to switch their practices to suit the requirements of the English language setting. Yet their lack of a linguistic repertoire that is suitable for this setting caused them to face problems in delivering what the lecturer expected from them.

**Structure and Format**
Mdm. Ayesha and the students appeared to be very familiar with the structure and format of technical reports required in the English language classroom. There was a mutual agreement that a good technical report must adhere to the five-chapter format as required by the university for the Final Year Project (FYP), the equivalent of an undergraduate
thesis. These five chapters of Introduction, Literature Review, Research Methodology, Data Analysis and Discussion, and Conclusion and Recommendation are similar to that of an academic dissertation. The lecturer shared that it was important to familiarise her students with structure and format which constituted the basics of a technical report. These basics would enable the students to “know exactly what content to put in and how to arrange the content appropriately” (Mdm. Ayesha, Interview 5). Mdm. Ayesha’s standpoint appeared to be consistent of her views that the students would be able to transfer what they had learnt about structure and format to other contexts, like Final Year Project (FYP) and workplace, as she asserted, “Once students have the basics, they can always look up appropriate models or examples to help them through it” (Mdm. Ayesha, Interview 5).

The students generally had the impression that writing in the university placed a lot of emphasis on structure and a fixed format, particularly where writing a technical report is concerned. Students with a diploma background claimed that they had previously been exposed to writing text structure and format similar to the technical report (Johan & Musa, Interview 1; Mariam & Nurin, Interview 3). Hence, they were familiar with adopting a fixed structure and format as expressed by the following student:

*Interview Extract 1*

“Not so difficult, all the formats are just the same. If we look at the format like introduction must have background, problem statement, objectives, scope, literature review, methodology…until we can memorise all. So when we do our FYP, we can memorise already, we know the format. Actually before this in diploma, we already learnt the same thing. That’s why, it’s all the same.” (Mariam, Interview 3)

These students appeared to appreciate the skill-based approach here as they could apply their prior learning to the existing context of learning. Others, however, did not find their prior learning of writing skills to be applicable or practical for writing in the university. These were students who came from the public school system. They found that writing in school was “more flexible” as they could write essays of “any format” (Suriani, Interview 2) and the language was “more flowery” as they could use sayings and proverbs (Ezna, Interview 2). Their views stemmed from having gone through the school syllabus that covered text types ranging from narrative, descriptive and argumentative essays, and speech writing. The students generally did not find school writing helpful in preparing them for writing in higher education (Ezna & Suriani, Interview 2; Azim, Khan & Raja, Interview 4). This is evident in the limitations of the skill-based approach whereby writing is more than just a set of transferrable skills; how and what students write are also affected by their social context as in the people and institution they are interacting with.
Further evidence on how the social context of learning affects the students’ writing was found in the students comparing their technical lecturers’ requirements and Mdm. Ayesha’s. For instance, Mdm. Ayesha encouraged the use of surveys and interviews as research methods whereas their technical lecturer would emphasise the design of experiments and statistical analysis. The students expressed that they had to consciously moderate or adapt their writing practices according to the requirements of different teachers. This clearly affirms that the academic literacies approach of writing is implicitly bound with power and identity struggle. A summary of what students perceived as the acceptable structure of a good report is available in the following table.

Table 1. Students’ interpretations of a good structure for technical reports in different settings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Setting</th>
<th>English Language Classroom</th>
<th>Technical Classroom</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Structure</td>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>Executive Summary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Introduction (Consists of Background, Problem Statement, Objectives, Research Questions, and Scope)</td>
<td>Introduction (Focus on problems, issues and motivation of the research project)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Literature Review (Consists of a table with specifics: title, author(s), year of publication, theory used, and a summary of the methodology and findings for the studies reviewed)</td>
<td>Review of related research projects (Can be presented in diagrams where necessary)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Research Methodology (Use of survey questionnaire)</td>
<td>Methods/Procedure (Provide a step-by-step procedure in conducting the experiment) Statistical analysis)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Results (Report the results to achieve the objectives and answer the research questions)</td>
<td>Results/Findings (Can be data calculation using statistical analysis or/and level of success in producing the research product)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Conclusion (A summary of the major findings and some suggestions for future studies)</td>
<td>Conclusion and Recommendations (Contributions and benefits from the research project, and what to do next after the research project)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graphs and Charts</td>
<td>Used only when deemed necessary</td>
<td>Used sparingly in the sections of Procedure/Methods and Results/Findings</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Despite the students’ comments that the structure and format varied between the language and technical classrooms, the table above indicates there are some commonalities. For
example, abstract and executive summary are similar in nature as they are both written with the purpose to inform the readers of the salient points in the report. The differences lie perhaps in the rhetoric and mechanics expected by the readers of different backgrounds. In fact, the students’ different interpretations above appear to support a dialogic pedagogy for both the lecturer and students to engage in academic discourse about writing and the issues faced. However, such an interaction did not take place as the students did not voice their concerns and the lecturer did not probe for their views.

Language

Mdm. Ayesha and the students invariably mentioned grammar as the main language feature of a good technical report. Students felt that the language requirements in the university were far more challenging than in school (Johan & Musa, Interview 1; Azim, Khan & Raja, Interview 4). For example, they were confused with the tenses and not sure when to use which tense (Johan, Interview 1; Mariam & Nurin, Interview 3; Khan & Raja, Interview 4). From the students’ perspectives, a good sentence must be grammatically correct and hence, constructing good sentences was more problematic for many among them who still struggled with their grammar. As expressed in the following extract by Azim, echoed by Khan and Raja (Interview 4):

Interview Extract 2

“For me the most difficult thing is grammar, how to write my sentences correctly. If I have ideas also it is still difficult because difficult for me to write my sentences.” (Azim, Interview 4)

Students also acknowledged that their weak grammar had been a persistent problem in their writing and they could not understand why they were still unable to overcome it. Some of them had even tried to attend tuition classes to improve their grammar but gave up after a few sessions due to the packed schedule they had in the university (Johan & Musa, Interview 1). Although the students appeared to appreciate the grammar focus in the English language course, they were doubtful if the grammar exercises they did in class would have any lasting effects on them, especially when they had to write for their technical courses. A common comment, “Every time teacher explains and gives exercises, I can understand. But after that, when I have to make my own sentences, I don’t know why I always cannot” (Khan, Interview 4). This could be attributed to the failure in adopting a skill-based approach to writing. Students, who understood grammatical features in one setting, might not be able to apply the same skills in writing for other settings. This further led to the question of whether it is practical to teach grammar in isolation from the writing of technical reports.

Mdm. Ayesha also observed the students’ weaknesses in grammar to be a “widespread problem” (Mdm. Ayesha, Interview 5). She attributed their weaknesses to their perceptions of grammar as secondary to writing a good technical report. Her observation
was corroborated by the students’ comments that grammar was only important for getting good grades in English courses as the focus of technical courses was more on content than grammar (Johan & Musa, Interview 1; Azim, Khan & Raja, Interview 4). The students were so weak in their grammar that her lessons often deviated from topics stated in the course outline to “fix their grammar problem first” (Mdm. Ayesha, Interview 5). She would either provide explanations on grammar on the whiteboard or distribute worksheets on areas of grammar that students had problems with in the next lesson. The following extract from the teacher’s classroom instructions illustrates her emphasis on fixing language problems for the students:

Observation Extract 1

“I know in the instructional plan we are supposed to look at conclusion and recommendation today, but it is more important that you get your grammar problems cleared first ok. Or else, whatever and whenever you write, you will have problem.” (Lesson 8, Classroom Observation)

The solutions that Mdm. Ayesha employed in addressing this problem were suggestive and consistent with her skill-based approach to writing. Her assumption that the mastery of grammar would enable the students to understand and write “whatever and whenever” has indirectly resulted in narrow interpretations of technical writing among the students and possibly, herself.

Style of Writing
The students described the writing style for technical report simply as “more technical”, “good sentences”, “formal” and “clear” (Ezna & Suriani, Interview 2; Mariam & Nurin, Interview 3; Azim, Khan & Raja, Interview 4), as indicated in the following response:

Interview Extract 3

“Language is formal English, because we are engineers…technical…so English must be formal. Engineer’s English must be clear, for example teacher can say many books but engineer must say three books. Or if asked how many feet, a teacher can say many feet but engineers must answer not more than one foot. So because of the status engineer, the language must give more details”. (Aleen, Interview 3)

Findings here are supportive with the students’ perceptions on content and grammar as discussed earlier. The social context of learning where they aligned their identities to the profession of engineers had given shape to their expectations and interpretations of the technical report. Their strong affiliation to the profession posed difficulty for them to fully grasp successful learning in the English language classroom. Drawing from the academic literacies approach, the students’ issues in technical report writing in the English language course seemed to suggest their struggle in having to cope with the
social meaning and identities evoked by different settings.

Mdm. Ayesha expected to find clarity and conciseness in her students’ writing. Due to the students’ “low proficiency in English and lack of confidence in writing as a result of their self-awareness of their poor English” (Mdm. Ayesha, Interview 5), she found it difficult to help her students understand the writing style. She explained that the students performed poorly in writing because they lacked exposure to the basics of writing. By basics, she meant the writing of different text types such as narrative, argumentative and exploratory essays (Mdm. Ayesha, Interview 5), as indicated in the following extract:

*Interview Extract 4*

“I think fundamentals of writing like knowing the basic as I have gone through during my matriculation…that would help them to really write better. Exploring different kinds of writing and getting the writing correct, at the basic level. Once they are ok at the basic level, then when they have to write technical report, they will have a better idea of how to write”. (Mdm. Ayesha, Interview 5)

Mdm. Ayesha consistently expressed her belief that a good command of the language facilitated writing, especially where the students had to write in a clear and concise manner for their technical reports. Given the context of her students’ poor writing skills, Mdm. Ayesha had to lower her expectations in grading the students’ written products, “I don’t really have any high expectations on our students, because if I do, most of them will end up having C and D” (Mdm. Ayesha, Interview 5). The sense of helplessness detected in Mdm. Ayesha in having to lower her expectations seemed to stem from a simplistic view of what writing, or specifically technical report writing, was about and the issues related to it. This was in line with the critique on adopting the skill-based or academic socialisation approaches. The explicit teaching of writing skills or genre often results in writing practices bound to surface features like structure, format and grammar. There appears to be a lack of engagement in deeper knowledge such as thinking and knowing inherent in the writing process, norms and conventions (Street, 2004).

**PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS**

Findings on the lecturer and students’ writing practices in the social context suggest the need to relook at what writing means and how writing is taught and learnt, particularly where discipline-specific writing is conducted in an English language classroom. Several practical implications can be drawn from the findings.

The dominant influence of the skill-based approach was apparent in the lecturer’s expectation that students should be able to write well “whatever and whenever” (Mdm. Ayesha, Lesson 8, Classroom Observation) upon the mastery of writing skills. Her choice of content, emphasis on grammar and the academic genre was also suggestive of her tendency toward skill-based and academic socialisation approaches. These approaches,
however, did not appear to help students learn technical report writing. The students are not engaged in constructing deeper knowledge that involves the thinking and knowing inherent in writing in higher education (Street, 2004).

In addition, treating writing as a set of skills and sub-skills tend to result in the writer’s voice and identity being neglected (Macalister, 2012), evident in the students suppressing their own voice to conform to the lecturer’s requirements. It further implies there is a lack of conversation or discussion between the lecturer and students on the subject of learning. A dialogic platform is therefore necessary so that the lecturer and the students can interact with one another in construction and negotiation (Jaramillo, 1996). By having the students talk about their process, issues and problems concerning writing, the lecturer “can direct the discussion to another level of understanding” (Wells, 1999, p. 311).

Findings also show that the students had to switch practices by drawing on appropriate linguistics practices for different settings. This implies the need for integrating reading of appropriate input texts, preferably with the inclusion of discipline related texts, in the curriculum. The students will learn to distinguish the differences as well as identify the features representative of the discourse community they have chosen. The selection of input text is a crucial step towards ensuring quality in writing (Macalister, 2012). The correct selection will enable the students to draw meaning and relevance to their learning.

In addition, the basic elements of grammar like sentence construction and tenses must form an important part of the teaching. The findings of this study have alluded to two fundamental questions related to the teaching and learning of writing: (i) Can technical report writing be segmented into grammar and content? And if not, then (ii) How do students accomplish writing that combines grammar and content into a coherent report? The teaching and learning of grammar need to be considered coherently along with the writing and organisation of content by creating a social awareness of the structure and function of the language during classroom instruction (Turuk, 2008). Students could be more attuned to their discourse community (Borg, 2003; Spack, 1988) by studying the language use in technical reports or topics that are related to their chosen discipline.

CONCLUSIONS
The different approaches to writing was evident in the lecturer and the students’ writing practices. The skill-based approach was found to be a dominant influence, particularly where the lecturer’s writing practices are concerned. The findings also appear to suggest that an overemphasis on writing as skills and acculturation could result in surface understanding. The simplistic view of writing was evident in the participants’ responses that tend to view writing aspects in isolated segments instead of a unified coherence.

Writing in higher education, as seen in technical report writing in this case study, encompasses literacies and not merely skills or acculturation (Blanton, 2005; Lea &
Street, 2006). The academic literacies approach has provided an in-depth understanding of writing practices that might otherwise be perceived as issues of writing due to the students’ low English proficiency. Writing is considered in a wider context that recognises the lecturer and the students as active social participants with varying perceptions and expectations towards their learning. This has further illuminated the problems and issues of writing practices and led to practical implications that could be considered for better pedagogical decisions and effective writing instructions.

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