University of Sussex

A University of Sussex DPhil thesis

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Developing Criticality in the Context of Mass Higher Education:

Investigating literacy practices on undergraduate courses in Ghanaian universities.

Ekua Tekyiwa Amua-Sekyi

International EdD

University of Sussex

November, 2011

Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis has not been and will not be submitted in whole or in part to another university for the award of any other degree.

Signed õ

Ekua Tekyiwa Amua-Sekyi

Date õ ..

Abstract

The study observed five introductory classes at the University of Cape Coast, Ghana, to find out what academic literacy practices are being engendered and how criticality is being fostered through those practices. The results are intended to help both myself, as a teacher researcher, and the university to identify how students make the difficult transition from expectations of literacy at secondary school to those at university.

I observed lecturers and students in their classroom environment for a semester (16 weeks); interviewed lecturers who taught the courses observed and conducted five focus groups, made up of eight students each, with volunteers from each of the classes observed. These interviews were replicated in two other public universities: the Universities of Ghana and Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology where two and five lecturers respectively participated in individual interviews, and eight students each participated in focus groups. Finally, I triangulated the data in order to identify emergent patterns of lecturers' and students' experiences with teaching and learning.

The data indicates that students need more explicit teaching of the basic literacy skills they are assumed to have. Most students in the study had difficulty comprehending academic texts. Additionally, students rarely attempted to read their assigned texts beforehand since they had little experience in anticipating what to look for or connect with in the text. Student writing is poor, as they have no opportunity to practice continuous writing. In order to address the literacy difficulties of these students, there is the need to pay attention to institutional and faculty engagement practices which promote student learning. A major area for improvement is in encouraging lecturers to teach using more explicit methods so that students can move from where they are in their literacy competence to where lecturers expect them to be. The place to explain to students what is expected in a discipline is within that discipline (Skillen et al., 2001), rather than assume that students will automatically see the shift in expectations for each field of study.

Although there was substantial consensus about the importance of criticality in lecturers' aims for student learning, this was not adequately translated into literacy practices. Massification has led to a preference for multiple-choice testing which has removed the need to read and write for assessment, inviting students out of the

intellectual dialogue that characterizes the various disciplines as they engage critically and thoughtfully with course readings (Svinicki, 2005; Carroll, 2002). The findings of this study indicate that lecturers have only adapted to the changed circumstances of massification in ways that mean that the critical acquisition of academic literacies is diminished. The impact of massification on teaching and learning has resulted in lecturers feeling under pressure to teach in ways that conflict with their personal ideologies. To foster criticality in students lecturers will have to learn new skills as what may happen with a group of 20 cannot be translated into a group of hundred or more.

There are policies in place to enhance teaching and learning but few mechanisms to implement them. In the most important sense that the university in its policy statements and course outlines values critical thinking and deep engagement with ideas and concepts, the practices described by students and lecturers are completely in tension. In order to address the literacy difficulties of students, universities will need to actively support lecturers in teaching reform efforts so as to respond to pressures on them to increase their output while maintaining quality. Significant progress is likely to come about only if universities are willing to invest in resources that are needed to experiment with institution-wide changes.

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List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

CS	Communicative Skills
EAP	English for Academic Purposes
GCE 'A' level	General Certificate of Education, Advanced Level
GCE 'O' Level	General Certificate of Education, Ordinary Level
JSS	Junior Secondary School
KNUST	Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology
MOESS	Ministry of Education, Science and Sports
NAB	National Accreditation Board
NCTE	National Council for Tertiary Education
SSS	Senior Secondary School
SSCE	Senior Secondary School Certificate Examination
UCC	University of Cape Coast
UG	University of Ghana
UK	United Kingdom
URC	Universities' Rationalization Committee

Acknowledgements

I am very grateful to many people for their invaluable contributions in several forms towards the completion of this work.

First, I owe a great debt of gratitude to my eldest son, Ekow Ahinakwa Asamoah (Paakow), whose encouragement was a strong motivation in getting me interested in the doctoral programme. I appreciate so much the unspoken cheerleading: downloading information he thought would be relevant to my work, and together with his brothers Kofi Afedzie Asamoah (Yoofi), and Kofi Tekyi Asamoah (Fiifi) giving me the space to read, write and to think. This debt of gratitude also extends to my friend Mrs Patricia Tod of Steyning, West Sussex for her unflagging support. Together with my children, they are the wind beneath my wings.

I would like to express my profound gratitude to Professor Harold Stewart Amonoo-Kuofi, School of Medical Sciences, University of Cape Coast; Professor Kobina E. Yankson, Department of English, University of Cape Coast; Dr Frank Odoom, Director-General of the Social Security and National Insurance Trust, Ghana; Mr George Ankoma-Mensah, Ankoma-Mensah and Associates, Accra, Ghana; Mr Andreas Lumor, Universities of Ghana London Office and Father Isidore Bonabom, Department of CDE, School of Global Studies, University of Sussex for their support in various ways.

I extend a deep appreciation to Dr John B. Pryor for the insights and suggestions which shaped and made the completion of this work possible.

Ultimately, I thank God for the strength and comfort during those times of difficulty and for allowing me to accomplish my goal.

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to the memory of my parents: CLARA ANYEMA KORLEY and KOBINA AMUA-SEKYI.

Chapter 1 Introduction

1.0   Criticality and Higher Education

The development of students' abilities to think critically is one of higher education's most widely professed goals. Traditionally, critical thinking, analytical capability, problem solving and originality have been central to the goals of higher education. The privileged status of critical thinking, particularly in undergraduate classrooms, is often implied in university policy statements and is rarely questioned or criticized (Browne & Freeman, 2000). It could be argued that one of the aims of 'higher' learning is the development of a more questioning, critical engagement with the world.

The educational objective of fostering critical thinking in students may be so widely valued because it is an enduring skill that adds value to higher education; it prepares students to handle the multitude of challenges that they are likely to face in their careers and their personal and social lives where the content of education gives way to application of knowledge and skills. It is not surprising then that the charters of universities worldwide signal the institutions' definition of the educated person as one who is critical and reflective. Consequently many institutions, through their mission or vision statements, profess their capacity to foster criticality in their students.

Indeed, Gosling (2006) observes that a majority of graduates never directly use the subject matter of their degree after graduation, a view that suggests that qualifications, despite signifying a general level of ability, do not necessarily equip individuals with the skills necessary for particular occupations. Barnett (2009) argues that it is not clear that knowledge *per se* has anything to offer educationally, for knowledge is soon "out of date" (p. 439). What is required then are capabilities with which graduates can engage purposively with the world. After graduation, a science graduate may move on to become an accountant, an English graduate becomes a personnel manager, an electronics engineer takes on a teaching job, a pharmacist becomes a social worker and a philosophy graduate becomes a banker, yet they have to function in their new careers.

Educational qualifications are no longer sufficient in themselves to guarantee success. Graduates not only need to be able to do a particular job, but also need to have the skills and dispositions to engage with the world around them in order to deal with

change throughout their careers. This suggests that graduates need a wide range of knowledge, skills and attributes to meet their employment potential (Cranmer, 2006). Morley (2001) concurs and argues that employability is not just about students making deposits in a bank of skills, but also about dispositions.

Graduates who remain in the confines of their academic discipline are in the minority. While all will have gained the specialist knowledge of their degree subject, since that is the material they have been taught and which they have used to complete their assessments and examinations, only some will be able to use this knowledge directly in their professional lives as teachers and engineers. Others will be able to give direct application to their subject-specific knowledge as consultants. But for many, the study of a discipline is merely a means to an end and these graduates use their subjects as a means to demonstrate their abilities as learners. While the attainment of a subject-specific degree is essential for certain types of jobs where subject knowledge is necessary, for many it is the type of aptitudes and skills gained as a result of higher education, rather than subject-specific skills, that matter (Morley, 2007).

Critical thinking is undoubtedly a valued attribute in graduates, useful not only in the higher education context but also transferable beyond the confines of the academic world. While graduates may change careers several times in their lifetime, the mental framework or the critical perspective they develop through academic literacies is in many instances transferable (Neeley, 2005). They are able not only to build productive connections between their academic community and their employment community when they graduate, but have developed a flexibility of thought that will serve them well in any encounter. They have acquired a skill over and above subject knowledge.

There is a presumed link between higher education and academic literacies which has engaged the attention of educationalists, applied linguists and other scholars interested in the use of language by students (Lea & Stierer, 2000). The considerable attention that has been paid to academic literacies worldwide in the last three decades derives from the challenges posed by the globalization and internationalization of higher education, and the increasing prominence given to English language education. Academic literacies, the specialized forms of speaking, reading and writing that occur in various disciplines at university, involve the more holistic, inseparable skills of critical reading, critical writing, critical listening, critical speaking and critical thinking within disciplines that constitute central processes through which students learn and develop their knowledge about new areas of study. It requires that students need to understand

not only academic language but also how to meet academic communication expectations in the different disciplines; skills which Chiseri-Strater (1991, p. 144) refers to as %the reading, writing, talking and thinking patterns of the discipline+, and the literate practices involved. The term academic literaciesqconjures all the multifaceted sets of complex skills that are required for a person to function effectively in various disciplinary communities in a university.

Apart from the fact that these complex skills are required for students to interact effectively with a text, they are perceived to be critical for students entering university, as pre-university institutions are seen to have a culture and practices different from those of universities or higher education institutions (Alfers & Dison, 2000). It is not surprising, therefore, that in Ghana the teaching syllabi for all subjects, from primary to secondary school, emphasize the concept of profile dimensionsqrather than content knowledge as the basis and prime focus of instruction and assessment. Profile dimensions describe the required learning behaviour, and teachers in pre-university classrooms are asked:

> to move teaching and learning from the didactic acquisition of %knowledge+to a new position where students will be able to apply their knowledge, develop analytical thinking skills, synthesize information, and use their knowledge in a variety of ways to deal with learning problems, and with problems and issues in their lives (Ministry of Education, 2007, p. xi)

According to the Ministry of Education (2007), teaching and learning should stress the use and application of knowledge (which carries 60% of assessment weighting) as against knowledge and understanding, which carries 40%. Explicit examples of what goes into the use and application of knowledge are given, and teachers are particularly urged to give their students chances to engage in evaluative thinking, as the lack of evaluative thinking is considered to account for the poor performance of students (Ministry of Education, 2007, p. xii).

Universities in Ghana have implemented mandatory English for Academic Purposes (EAP) course known as Communicative Skills (CS) aiming not only to bridge the gap that hinders studentsq academic achievement but also to provide learners with the strategies that will help them to deal with new language challenges in their academic studies. CS, therefore, assumes a preparatory, facilitative, and catalytic role for new students, ensuring their smooth transition from pre-university stage to the university

level. Unfortunately, this crucial role of CS is often treated in reductionist and denigratory terms as 'remedial', 'study skills', or 'adjunct' in the literature.

1.1   Teaching of English for Academic Purposes (EAP)

The concept of English for Academic Purposes (EAP) is found in English-medium universities worldwide. In the USA, it is usually labelled Freshman Composition or General Composition or, more recently, a variant called Writing in the Disciplines, in the United Kingdom (UK) and Canada it is often referred to as English for Academic Purposes. EAP in the UK arose in response to the increasing internationalization of higher education (Jordan, 2002), while Freshman's Composition and other allied programmes in the USA arose as a response to the perceived decline in the quality of writing of students (Bazerman & Russell, 1994). It might also be argued that given the international character of universities, instituting EAP programmes in Africa, Latin America, and Europe is inevitable. Even more important as a reason for the widespread institutionalization of EAP and similar programmes is the increasing role of English as an 'academic lingua franca' (Duszak, 1997: 21). Regardless of the region where EAP or similar writing programmes are found, there is one fundamental assumption in common: that reading and writing at pre-university level are very different from the reading and writing required at the higher education level (Alfers & Dison, 2000).

Ghana has had more than three hundred years of contact with three European countries . Portugal, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom. It is, however, the English language that has exerted the greatest influence over Ghana. It is an important means of inter-ethnic communication internally and a source of communication with the international community in the area of politics, trade, and science. In terms of education, English is used as a medium of instruction in Ghanaian educational institutions, including the universities.

In Ghana, both government and institutional level educational policies agree on the need for educated, reflective graduates. For example, even though each of the public universities was set up with specific mandates geared towards meeting the academic, professional, and manpower needs of the country, the stated aim of the universities is to provide higher education in accordance with principles that include the teaching of 'critical and independent thought' (Republic of Ghana, 2002: 123). At the institutional level, the academic programmes, policies and regulations of the University of Cape

Coast (UCC), which is the focus of inquiry in this thesis, outline the university's philosophy of teaching and learning as one with a focus on "nurturing and challenging [students] to grow ð intellectually" (University of Cape Coast, 2007a, p. 1). A UCC education, the document continues, will stress, among others, "inquiry and application of knowledge to real-life situations, critical thinking and the value of life-long learning" (p. 2).

To facilitate the development of language and study skills all students are required to take the mandatory EAP/CS course in the first year of university study. The CS course at UCC is three-pronged, emphasizing remediation, study skills, and writing skills. Students are required to pass it in order to move on to the next level. The underlying premise of CS is that language skills can be decontextualized from content and that academic language is unvarying across disciplines. The rationale for the introduction of the CS course in 1985 was partly to stem the downward trend in the quality of writing of students in various discipline-specific contexts (Gogovi, 2003), and at the time was well conceived. However, this acontextual notion presupposed the transferability of a generalizable set of skills and abilities from the CS classroom to a disciplinary context (Hyland, 2000). While it is acknowledged that certain skills are generalizable across all disciplines (Johns, 1997; Sutton, 1997; Kaldor & Rochecouste, 2002), it is overly simplistic to argue that one can transfer the same linguistic structures operative in one disciplinary community to another.

In contrast with common understandings about what it means to learn to speak, read, write and think in academic language, developing academic literacies has been described in recent times as encompassing a complex set of skills and accomplishments which are required on entry into higher education institutions, as well as for advanced learners make an effective 'departure' from universities as an independent researcher (Johns & Swales, 2002). This involves a much more complex process of entering new linguistic and academic communities which touches upon issues of student identities and roles in study, work, and life (Lea & Street, 1998).

There has been a shift in the notion of academic literacy from a homogeneous, monolithic or univariant set of skills which students are supposed to demonstrate, to the current notion of academic literacies which takes cognizance of diversity, multifacetedness, and contextualism (Dillion, 1991; Samraj, 2002), the implication of which is the need for universities to evaluate regularly their curriculum, including CS, to make it functional to society's needs.

The CS course at UCC, however, has not undergone systematic evaluation since it became a university-wide programme in 1987. Neither a formative evaluation (conducted during the development and implementation of a programme to provide valuable details about the programme's strengths and weaknesses) nor a summative evaluation (conducted after a portion of a programme has been completed to determine its effectiveness and value) has been conducted, even in the wake of doubts expressed by lecturers about the usefulness of the course in remedying students' weaknesses in language and learning skills.

As an insider and a professional doctorate student looking for a means to investigate praxis, this concern served as an opportunity for me to conduct research which will enable me to make a contribution to knowledge that might improve practice or impact policy within the institution (Bourner, Bowden & Laing, 2001), as well as an opportunity to engage in critical reflection and demonstrate experiential learning (Eraut, 1994). As part of my professional doctoral programme, while various modules prepared me for this research, my evaluation of the CS course and critical analytical review of literature on critical thinking and criticality have a direct bearing on this thesis.

I conducted a small scale evaluation of the CS course at the University of Cape Coast (UCC), where I was a student and am now an academic staff member. In consonance with Riemer's (1977) suggestion that rather than neglecting 'at hand' knowledge or expertise, researchers should turn familiar situations, timely events or special expertise into objects of study, the stage for opportunistic research was set. The thrust of my evaluation was to find out from students and lecturers the impact of CS on their courses. I used a mixed-method design for an objective-based evaluation to give greater depth and breadth which enabled better and more accurate inferences to be made (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2003).

It seems that an integrative and holistic approach which sees CS as an integral part of undergraduate programmes has the advantage of encouraging students to practice those higher order skills, including criticality, throughout their studies. This is more productive than an isolationist approach with a focus on passing examinations. If, however, as North (2003) asserts, disciplinary skills are learnt through participation in a situated activity within a discipline, it is difficult to see how the CS course alone can foster this.

1.1.1 A shift in perspective

The current theory of academic literacies foregrounds a multivariate position which flags multiliteracies, discipline-specificity, and context. This is what currently drives the gradual changes in most EAP programmes all over the world. The relationship between discipline-specific lecturers and EAP/CS lecturers regarding students¢acquisition of the epistemology and rhetoric in their respective disciplines should, therefore, be a matter of concern.

The literature highlights the advantages of team teaching where both discipline-specific lecturers and CS/EAP lecturers collaborate in teaching those aspects of writing which are valued and privileged in specific disciplines (Dudley-Evans, 1995 & 2001; Jones, 2004). Another approach suggests the centrality of the discipline-specific teachers in EAP courses (Johns, 1992; Zhu, 2004). Such a position is in consonance with the findings of a study conducted at the University of Ghana (Adika & Owusu-Sekyere, 1997).

In order to explore how best teachers can foster criticality in their students the literature on critical thinking and criticality was reviewed in a critical analytical study, which is summarized in the literature review in Chapter 2. An examination of the literature, however, reveals that definitions of critical thinking are wide-ranging. The key categories composing the construct of critical thinking and criticality include interpretation, analysis, evaluation, inference, presenting arguments, reflection, and dispositions. The individual¢s willingness to engage critically is influenced by factors such as: the individual¢s personality traits, and their willingness to engage in cognitive processes, as well as discipline related factors (Van der Wal, 1999). While the individual¢s personality traits cannot easily be changed one¢s environment, and how one relates to learning experiences in that environment, to a large extent tacitly influence the tendency to be critical. The extent to which teachers encourage or use students¢ideas, the amount and cognitive level of student participation in class, and the amount of interaction among students in a course are three instructor-influenced classroom interactions which, it is noted, consistently and positively relate to gains in critical thinking (Tsui, 2002).

There is no shortage of complaints about the quality of student learning and, by implication, methods of teaching (*The Mirror*, 2008; Gobah, 2007; Viala, 2007). When university teachers themselves discuss publicly in various fora what they perceive to be a lack of critical perspective in students it begs the question: what is it that our

graduates are taking from higher education as they move into employment? It could be argued that it is the pedagogical relationship between teachers and students that actively works (or fails) to elicit the disposition that in turn enables the student to appropriate the curriculum in ways meaningful to him/her. Pedagogy, Barnett (2009, p. 432) suggests, may be construed as the formation of a set of principles upon which teachers can assist students in moving effectively and efficiently from a relative state of ignorance to a state of well-formed knowing. The problem then with %uncritical thinkers+ might not be a deficiency in a general skill such as logical ability but rather a more general lack of education. Traditional methods of schooling may have failed to promote independent, productive thought because teachersq understandings and models of teaching, learning, and assessment produced models consistent with transmission or behaviouristic theories (Akyeampong, Pryor & Ampiah, 2006; Pontefract & Hardman, 2005; Ackers & Hardman, 2001).

1.2   Motivation for this Study

This study is both pedagogically motivated and curiosity (theoretically) driven. It is pedagogically motivated because of the researchers involvement in English Language education. My early experience as a teacher of English Language and Literature at the secondary and later at the university level was instrumental in sensitizing me to issues involving literacy. Interaction with colleagues in my community of practice and in other public universities in Ghana suggests that studentsq problem with criticality is not uncommon in universities in that country.

Teaching and learning are not two distinct phenomena. Qualitatively different approaches to teaching are associated with qualitatively different approaches to learning (Ramsden, 2006; Trigwell, Prosser, & Waterhouse, 1999), and subsequently to studentsq learning outcomes (Lizzio, Wilson, & Simons, 2002; Trigwell & Prosser, 1991). Research demonstrates that if transmission of knowledge dominates teaching, students are more likely to focus on memorization of material and the reproduction of knowledge, adopting a surface approach. If, on the contrary, a teacher adopts an interactive, participatory approach to teaching, students are more likely to negotiate meaning and, therefore, focus on understanding the phenomena they are studying adopting a deep approach (Entwistle et al., 2000; Trigwell, Prosser & Waterhouse, 1999).

Teachers constitute an important part of the learning context for students in higher education, just as students in turn constitute an important part of the teaching environment for teachers. Even though the university administration, the state, and accrediting agency have the power to shape an environment that is favourable to good practice, it is the teachers and students who hold the main responsibility for improving undergraduate education. If students do not want to engage critically and lecturers do not stimulate critical engagement, not much critical thinking will take place and the development of a critical perspective will not be fostered. There can be no evidence of critical thinking if students can complain that this is not part of teaching and learning and their assessment tasks. My experiences from teaching, coupled with observations by lecturers and students alike, provide the primary impetus for this study.

Apart from wanting to investigate the perceived lack of criticality in students, there is an element of personal curiosity or interest in investigating in a systematic way the functioning of undergraduate classrooms in the expanding higher education system, and in particular how literacy practices are negotiated in the first year of university. The University of Cape Cost (UCC) is the focus of this qualitative case study and although the results are not generalizable in the probabilistic sense, the experience of lecturers and students in two other public universities is drawn upon for a wider theoretical resonance.

1.3   Research questions

Criticality cannot just be switched on. Students need an environment where these thinking skills can be practised and learned to the point of automation. This study, therefore, explores how criticality is engendered through academic literacies in undergraduate courses at the entry level in UCC. The research questions are formulated as one overarching question and a set of specific subsidiary questions, as follows:

What kinds of criticality, if any, are undergraduate students learning in their courses?

1. What do lecturers say they are doing to foster criticality in students?
2. How does this vary with the seniority and level of experience of the lecturer?
3. What structural and contextual issues help or hinder lecturersq attempts at fostering criticality in students?

4. What expectations do new students have of appropriate literacy practices on entering university?

5. To what extent do they find these expectations met?

6. What practices do different students consider to be helpful for their learning?

7. How do these vary between male and female students?

8. What institutional support is available for teaching and learning and is it making any difference?

9. How do practices described by students and lecturers correspond to university policies?

Having articulated the research questions, the scope, assumptions, and significance of the study will be explored.

1.4   Scope of the study

A total of ten lecturers and fifty-six students from three public universities in Ghana participated in the study. The study examined three key parameters to enable a manageable scope for this research to be maintained: the level of undergraduates involved in the study, the background of the students in the study, and the mode of inquiry of the research. To ensure a reasonable measure of homogeneity in terms of educational background, the study was limited to Ghanaian undergraduate students, who represent a group with distinct cultural and educational traditions. Within this group, first year undergraduates entering university direct from secondary school were selected.

First year students were selected for study because the audience and purpose of universities are played out within the first year of study, the period of transition to higher education. Students entering higher education for the first time are faced with a number of challenges. They must rapidly come to terms with the demands of the academic environment, acquire new disciplinary discourses and develop appropriate study strategies that will help them achieve academic success. They must also establish a social identity within this new environment. It is important that the first year fosters in students a sense of control or regulation over their own learning and a willingness to participate actively in the learning experience (Yorke, 2005). The first year should thus lay a foundation for the development of learner autonomy that can be built on in later years. As pre-university institutions are seen to have a culture and practices different from those of universities or higher education institutions (Alfers & Dison, 2000), the

first year experience is most likely to represent the extent to which students and universities negotiate their engagement with one another, and of the effects and efficacy of those negotiations.

Notwithstanding the general characterization of students in the present study, it is possible to allude to other bases of distinctions among the undergraduate population. One basis of distinction is ethnicity, given the fact that Ghana is a multi-ethnic society, the dominant ethnic groups being Akan, Ga, Ewe, Ga-Adangbe, Mole-Dagbani, and Nzema (Bodomo, 1996). Other ways of distinguishing undergraduates include their socio-economic backgrounds. While no account is taken of ethnicity in the admission of students to universities as a result of the democratization of higher education, socio-economic backgrounds are subtly alluded to. A quota of admission places is set aside for students from %deprived+ or underprivileged schools, an affirmative action aimed at attracting students from schools with poor facilities, who pass their exams but cannot meet the competitive entry aggregates for admission to get into the university. Student-participants were mainly volunteers and consequently these bases of distinction did not come into the foreground. However, once awareness of their pre-university schools was developed, attention to their socio-economic backgrounds could be taken into account during group interviews.

1.5   Assumptions underlying the study

Three key assumptions underpin this study. The first is that effective learning in higher education depends on being able to transform the knowledge presented, and so be able to use it in novel contexts (Entwistle & Entwistle, 1991). Such ways of thinking do not develop automatically. They are acquired through instruction and practice and are crucial to success in all academic disciplines.

The second assumption is that from a constructivist view of learning (which suggests that knowledge is not possessed, rather, it is constructed and at best contingent upon sources of new knowledge), criticality might most usefully be seen as a social practice embedded in academic literacy practices. Consequently, the development of critical thinking, and subsequently criticality, are products of cognitive activity performed in social acts of communication.

Finally, it is assumed that certain teaching practices might develop greater synthesis and critical analytical skills within the student and encourage more reflective and

questioning approaches to studies which would encourage deeper learning. To foster critical thinking, independent learning, and an innovative attitude, pedagogical models and, more generally, academic literacy practices within courses ought to guide students towards this goal.

1.6   Significance of the study

The significance of this study is two-pronged: theoretical and pedagogical. Theoretically, an exploration of critical thinking and criticality within academic literacies is a way of engaging with issues in the classroom, the working of the institution and the ways that they impact on student learning. This research may serve a useful purpose by producing evidence about classroom practices that might serve as a springboard for a system-wide analysis and discussion.

Pedagogically, such a modest research study into praxis is likely to be interesting to other practitioners who may be inspired by results that resonate sufficiently with their own experiences. It might provide not only a fruitful area for further research, but also for teacher education.

On a personal note, the results of my study should be a source of reflection on my own praxis and provide a platform for further research. Pushing myself hard to be honest about purpose, there is a personal gain in achievement of a higher degree.

1.7   Organization of the study

This thesis comprises seven chapters. **Chapter One** covers the background to the study, its genesis, the research questions, the scope, and significance of the study with the view to forging a link between the extant knowledge and the goals of the present study. **Chapter Two** focuses on the conceptual framework of the study. Fundamental concepts underpinning the study such as critical thinking and academic literacy are discussed. The review of relevant literature attempts to place the present study in an overall scheme, and to build on and establish existing knowledge. **Chapter Three** describes the context of the study, setting the scene for the study which constitutes the research site.

The second half of the thesis touches on how the data was collected and analyzed. In this vein, **Chapter Four** concentrates on three aspects: the methodology and analysis, issues of ethics, and problems encountered during fieldwork and how they were

solved. **Chapter Five** presents the results and interpretation of findings. **Chapter Six** discusses the findings and concludes with recommendations for future research.

Chapter 2: Literature review

2.0 Introduction

In the opening chapter I outlined the motivation for this study by first referring to my personal involvement in the teaching of English, especially at undergraduate level. This interest was then related to observations by colleagues in my community of practice, that students'problems with criticality appear not to be uncommon in universities in Ghana. The overall goal of chapter two is to provide the necessary conceptual framework to support the aims of higher education and the role of the disciplines in promoting such aims.

2.1 Higher education and the quality of learning

In Ghana, higher education refers to education provided by universities. Tertiary education refers to other post-secondary institutions such as polytechnics and teacher training colleges. In this study higher education is synonymous with university education. Within the realm of teaching, it includes both the undergraduate and the postgraduate (or graduate) level. This study focuses on the undergraduate level, particularly on the first year experience of university teaching and learning. The nature of learning which takes place in universities forms distinctive characteristics of degree level courses. Although there are disparities in the specific types of learning required across the many different subject areas in universities, certain general features can be identified in the literature.

Literature on the aims of higher education indicates that besides the obvious aims of ensuring that students acquire an extensive body of technical knowledge, together with subject-specific skills and procedures within that academic discipline, students in all subject areas are expected to develop a conceptual understanding and critical, independent thinking. This way of thinking has been variously described as critical thinking (Entwistle & Percy, 1974) or post-conventional thinking (Ashby, 1973). Its general characteristics however include:

- adopting a distinctive way of thinking about concepts, evidence and theories;
- taking a distanced, critical stance towards subject matter, assumptions, and explanations;

- examining the adequacy of evidence and checking alternative interpretations of it;
- tackling issues systematically, logically, and effectively;
- being able to set and solve problems by applying concepts and techniques appropriately;
- demonstrating a thorough understanding of complex, abstract concepts within the discipline;
- writing clearly and cogently, following appropriate academic styles and conventions.

The way students structure information and how that enables them to use it is of great importance (Biggs, 1999). How well students can recall their learning, combine parts of it, make judgments based on it, synthesize, extrapolate, apply, and use it in innovative and creative ways impacts positively on learning, rather than on a quantitative accretion of facts and procedures (Ramsden, 2006). This statement is congruent with the constructivist view that students must engage with and take responsibility for their learning, although the teacher is still largely responsible for directing that learning by determining the content, activities, processes of teaching and learning, and assessment that will help the learner to actively construct knowledge.

2.2 Methods of teaching in higher education

Good teaching cannot be reduced to technique. There are commitments, duties and responsibilities that are central to the activity of teaching. Rowland (2000) notes that the fundamental aim of teaching is to imbue students with a love of the subject. D'Andrea & Gosling (2005) however suggest that teachers have other commitments to their students which are equally important. These include ensuring:

- that alternative views should be respected
- the development of students' capacity to be critical
- the provision of students with feedback on their learning within a time period that is useful to them in their studies

D'Andrea & Gosling (2005) note, however, that in reality we all fall short of our ideals as we are faced with dilemmas in our professional lives such as pressures, role conflicts, or personal failings which require us to prioritize our principles.

The implicit promise higher education makes to students in its role as a source of trained and educated personnel for the country's economy is that students' lives can be improved by engaging in study, not necessarily materially, but by being better able to think clearly, to gather and analyze evidence, and to be autonomous, self-directed persons who appreciate the value of knowledge (D'Andrea & Gosling, 2005, p. 34). The various methods of teaching in higher education can be placed on a continuum, from methods in which lecturer control is dominant, such as lectures, to methods which strengthen learner autonomy and relax teacher control, such as in laboratory work and self-directed study. This continuum is explored in detail in the sections below.

2.2.1 The lecture

One of the distinguishing features of higher education is the mass delivery of information through lectures, which for many students epitomizes their university experience (Ramsden, 2006). Students are expected to be active, discerning listeners in lectures and make critical distinctions between key points and illustrative examples, just as they do when they read and write. However, the delivery of lectures is often a one-way affair, which provides students with little opportunity to engage critically with the lecturer's ideas. Although students have no control over the content, they do have a degree of choice concerning what aspects they wish to note. In a live lecture, they may choose to ask questions. When carefully planned and presented well, lectures can offer a clear outline of the subject and explanations appropriate to the group of students, provide background information and ideas, basic concepts, as well as model how a particular discipline deals with questions of evidence, critical analysis and problem solving (Horgan, 2006). Lectures can also provide valuable social functions for learning, providing a regular occasion for the lecturer to meet and talk with students and for students to talk among themselves.

Criticism of lectures has, however, been widespread because of the tendency to ensure adequate coverage, or to use lectures to present detailed material, with students being required to copy down considerable amounts of information. Horgan (2006) describes many lecturers as being too busy covering material, so that they miss the chance to 'uncover' it. Students in such a situation become little more than note takers. The tendency to 'cover' the subject thoroughly often leads to overload, which in turn means that students can learn much of the material only superficially.

The use of the traditional lecture may, therefore, be detrimental to the quality of student learning, in that it leads students to expect learning to be a passive experience and does not provide them with opportunities to engage with the subject matter (Ramsden, 2006). Both the literature on student learning and our own experience of teaching and learning tell us that students learn better if they think about what they are learning and have an opportunity to engage with the material, rather than see it and hear about it.

Active engagement and imaginative inquiry are much more likely to occur if teaching methods that necessitate student activity, question-asking and student problem solving are employed (Ramsden, 2006). Activities that will critically engage students with the subject include analyzing, imaginative synthesizing, and evaluating ideas (Vardi, 1998). Such an approach, however, is often not taken in lectures. Consequently many lament the %transmission of knowledge+through lectures, which does not encourage the sort of questioning and interest in the sources of ideas which foster criticality (Laurillard, 2002; Paul, 1992).

2.2.2 Lectures in large classes

The widening of participation in higher education in Ghana has keyed into international movements (Morley et al. 2010). As a result modularization, increased student numbers, and lower staff-student ratio have all been adopted to cope with expansion but, as elsewhere, these measures may have reduced opportunities for effective teaching/learning practices (Nicol, 2009). In spite of criticisms of lectures, this method represents a cost-effective means of teaching large groups of students in the context of Ghanaian mass higher education. When supported by discussion groups and supervised laboratory work where required, the lecture method may still be appropriate for most first year classes. In order to cope with numbers and also to provide additional flexibility, the use of educational technology is advanced internationally as a means to support teaching and the provision of learning, as well as assessment (Fry, Ketteridge & Marshall, 2006). However, as will become clear from the fieldwork for this study, the technology is not always functional.

2.2.3 Tutorials and discussion groups

The major objective of group discussion is to teach students to think and to engage with their own and othersqlearning through the articulation of views. The enormous potential of small groups to promote learning through participatory experience lies in its use in a variety of forms to serve a range of purposes appropriate to different

disciplines. The skills of self-reflection, analysis, decision-making, autonomy, and communication valued by academics as the most important characteristics of graduates may be fostered and reinforced through effective tutorials and academic guidance in small groups and one-on-one interaction between the student and the teacher.

Tutorials and discussion groups thus present opportunities to clarify, elaborate and consolidate ideas presented in lectures that might facilitate the development of the skills of thinking required in a particular discipline (McKeachie, 1994). When they are planned to engage most of the students actively in expressing and developing their ideas therefore, tutorials and discussion groups effectively support the actual process of thinking.

2.2.4 Tutorials in large classes

Tutorials by academic staff have a long history in Ghanaian higher educational institutions and this teaching and learning method has been regarded as central to engendering holistic guidance and support for students. However, the impact of massification upon personal tutoring relationships has only recently been acknowledged by lecturers amidst concerns about how they can be sustained in the face of worsening staff-student ratios. The alternative option of using technology to support small group discussions in ways that would retain a strong tutorial culture has been advanced in many situations (Laurillard 2002). This is talked of extensively in Ghana but is yet to materialize.

2.2.5 Practical activity

Practical activities in a laboratory setting play a major role in the education of scientists as they create the environment vital for students to develop professional skills. Beaty (2006) notes that practical activity entails practice of technique, skill of observation and recording, while demonstrating the relevance of theory to outcomes. Overton (2006) observes that the experience of gathering data, making links between theory and practice, manipulating and interpreting data, forming and testing hypotheses, using judgment, and developing problem-solving skills is vital for the development of intellectual and transferable skills. In the context of massification in Ghana, students work in teams. This constraint can be turned into opportunities for group learning and reflection. As Overton (2006) observes, when students work in teams, practical activity offers much scope for critical reflection and deliberate focus on the significance of

observations. However, if this experience is allowed to degenerate into routine procedures of following instructions and writing up results, it will serve very little purpose.

2.2.6 Independent learning

Literature referring to developed countries speaks of the importance of adequate space and accommodation for a greater pursuit of independent study. This is of vital importance in a supportive learning environment (McKeachie, 1994). Library provision for example is an important resource for students and staff in teaching and learning. In the Ghanaian context, however, where available library facilities have not kept pace with increased enrolment, library provision becomes increasingly inadequate, particularly for large first year classes. Supplementary materials might be necessary to provide the independence required. However, as McKeachie (1994) notes studentsq study methods and learning are influenced by the sort of test questions they expect. Thus many students can read thoughtfully if tests require deeper understanding and thinking.

2.2.7 Assessment

Assessment is an integral component of the teaching and learning system. It is, therefore, not surprising that research has identified assessment as having the single greatest influence both on the effort put into studying and on the quality of learning. The extent to which students believe that their efforts can make a difference to their success is an important factor in their motivation. Students will not put their best effort into work that is not going to count. Feedback on studentsqwork (information about how the studentq present state of learning and performance relates to goals and standards) is necessary to enable them to monitor and adapt to the demands of the course (Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006, p. 205).

Students in the first year must have a clear understanding of what is required of them in the context of academic study. Such understanding can be facilitated through early and regular formative assessment tasks. Such tasks are specifically intended to generate feedback on student performance, making judgement about what is good learning, with a view to improving and accelerating that learning. Such formative assessment can help clarify the meaning of goals and criteria and provide feedback to students so that they can continue to realign their work to what is required (Nicol, 2009).

In a mass higher education system, as in the Ghanaian context, studentsq literacy needs are likely to be varied. Many of the problems experienced by the student in the first year can be addressed through assessment practices. For example, Yorke (2005) discusses the important role played by formative assessment tasks in clarifying expectations and suggests that early successes in assessment and feedback are particularly important for students who doubt their ability to succeed. Indeed, Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick (2006) argue that in higher education, formative assessment and feedback should be used to empower students as self-regulated learners (students who can regulate aspects of their thinking, motivation and behaviour during learning). Unless feedback is applied and used to demonstrate improvement, therefore, there is no way to tell it has been effective (Boud, 2002, p. 162). In situations where lecturers use formative assessment to grade or evaluate the effectiveness of the curriculum, feedback tends to focus on the successful completion of the task in hand. Assessment in such a case measures studentsqperformance instead of giving guidance and is not useful for guiding learning on a day-to-day basis (Pryor & Crossouard, 2008).

Gibbs & Simpson (2004) note that assessment tasks might support student learning and increase the likelihood of academic success when they:

- Capture sufficient study time and effort (in and out of class)
- Are spread evenly across topics and weeks
- Lead to productive learning activity (deep rather than surface learning)
- Communicate clear and high expectations.

Feedback is also required, that:

- Is sufficient (in frequency, detail)
- Is provided quickly enough to be useful
- Focuses on learning rather than marks
- Is linked to assessment criteria/expected learning outcomes
- Makes sense to students
- Is received by students and attended to
- Is acted upon to improve work and learning

(Gibbs & Simpson, 2004).

Giving and receiving feedback is, therefore, important in any learning process. Indeed, research has shown that formative feedback does improve learning, and the gains in achievement are among the largest ever reported for educational achievements (Wakeford, 2006; Knight, 2002). If students are to have a sense of control over their own learning, then formative assessment practices must help them develop the skills needed to monitor, judge and manage their learning. The ability to monitor, critically assess and correct ones own work is a key goal of higher education and of lifelong learning (Nicol, 2009).

In a mass higher education system such as that in Ghana, some of the problems around formative assessment identified in the literature are even more obvious. Many university teachers handling large classes might find it difficult to provide formative feedback to students within a semester time frame (Knight & Yorke, 2003; Hounsell, 2003). Receiving feedback at the end of the semester is often too late and may be insufficient, if only given as a mark or grade, to impact on learning. It has been stressed that feedback needs to be interactive, purposeful, understood, timely and appropriate if it is to have a substantial impact on student learning behaviour and upon learning outcome (Knight & Yorke, 2003; Hounsell, 2003).

2.3 Student learning

Research on student learning has identified two basic approaches to learning, with a crucial distinction being drawn between the ±deepqapproach and the ±surfaceqapproach to learning; the choice between these approaches depends essentially on the intention of the student (Ramsden, 2006, Haggis, 2003; Entwistle, McCune, & Walker, 2001). Quantitative, memorizing and acquisition conceptions underlie a 'surface' approach (in which the student's intention is to memorize the text), and abstraction, understanding reality and developing as a person underlie a 'deep' approach (in which the student's intention is to understand the meaning of the text) (Haggis, 2003).

In a ±deepqapproach to learning, the learner qualitatively seeks meaning in order to understand, associate learning with active conceptual analysis, and see reality from different points of view by linking information and ideas together in ways that make meaningful learning. Such practices make it easy to transfer the knowledge acquired to other contexts. On the other hand, students who adopt a ±surfaceqapproach to learning engage in quantitative increase in knowledge through the acquisition of facts for reproduction. The result is routine unreflective memorization, little procedural problem

solving, and little personal engagement with the material. Such practices are at variance with critical thinking. The inevitable outcome is restricted conceptual understanding (Entwistle, Tait & McCune, 2000, Drew, 2001; Johnston, 2001; McLean, 2001).

Case & Gunstone (2003), however, note that approaches to learning are not inherent cognitive characteristics of learners. Rather they are elicited and shaped by particular contexts. A deep or surface approach in this case is not therefore an absolute classification. Ramsden (2006, p. 20) also describes what students learn in terms of a series of qualitative levels. At the most abstract level are general abilities such as thinking critically and imaginatively or being able to communicate effectively. At the second level are more specific content-related changes in understanding linked to particular disciplines, as well as the way of thinking when faced with a problem in the subject (like a mathematician or a historian). At a lower level are knowledge of factual information and specific problem-solving techniques.

Knowledge at all these levels and the ability to connect knowledge at each level to each of the others is what marks out an educated person. One might thus view the deep and surface binary along a taxonomy of learning that every learner progresses through on the way up the road. The deep approach is on the higher level of analysis, synthesis and evaluation, and the surface approach on the lower level of recall. Differences in the quality of learning are due to differences in the ways that learners go about their learning, and these differences can in turn be explained in terms of their experiences of teaching. Table 2.1 below explains the characteristics associated with the two approaches to learning:

Table 2.1 Defining features of approach

Deep approach	Surface approach
Focusing on meaning/understanding of material rather than on literal aspects	Focusing on selected details and reproducing them
Interacting critically with content, reflect, discuss, integrate ideas and elaborate information	Memorizing facts and procedures routinely
Examining the logic of the argument	Accepting ideas and information passively
Relating ideas to previous knowledge and experience	Concentrating only on assessment requirement
Relating evidence to conclusions	

Source: Integrated from Biggs (2003, p. 15-17)

It has already been seen that one can only learn content in a deep or surface way, not be a deep or surface learner. Students may apply deep learning to certain tasks or subjects and a surface approach to others. The content of a subject being learned is inextricably linked to the approach adopted. The nature of learning tasks vary between different disciplines and, as such, the way in which approaches manifest themselves also varies. The relational nature of the concept also implies that what constitutes an approach to learning, whether a deep or surface approach, may be in some way a function of the nature of a subject/discipline (Ramsden, 2006; Kember, Leung & McNaught, 2008). For example, a student may use a deep approach in a geography course but use a surface approach for computing. Although there is the possibility that the same student is capable of using different approaches on different occasions, it is also true that the general tendency to adopt a particular approach is related not only to the different demands of courses, but also to previous educational experiences (Ramsden, 2006).

One can also not rule out the extent to which the concept would play out differently in different cultures. Mann (2000) argues that social structures have great impact on the students' identities. Identity, defined as an ongoing social process of self making in conjunction with others through interaction, can consequently influence the way students approach their learning inside and outside of higher education. Lea and Street (1998) argue that identities are constructed differently in different academic settings. This implies that the same literacy tasks might be approached differently in different contexts by the same student (Kember, Leung & McNaught, 2008; Lindblom-Ylanne et al., 2006; Kember and Kwan, 2000). The interaction between students and contextual factors such as institutions and disciplines thus affects the way students approach their learning. The notion of institutional culture discussed in terms of learning environment (Krause & Coates,, 2008), has considerable impact on the students' learning experiences (Yorke and Longden 2008; Robinson-Pant, 2005) and consequently on their approach to learning. Haggis (2003) points out that the generalizability of the model is in fact a weakness when applied to culturally diverse contexts.

Deep approaches to learning, that is the high structure, strong knowledge base, integration of knowledge, and the ability to apply one's own and other people's ideas to new situations are undoubtedly associated with the more sophisticated learning

outcomes privileged in higher education than are the surface approaches. Table 2.2 shows contexts that impact on studentsqapproaches to learning.

Table 2.2 Characteristics of the context associated with deep and surface approaches

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Surface approaches are encouraged by õ
Assessment methods emphasizing recall or the application of trivial procedural knowledge
Assessment methods that create anxiety
Cynical or conflicting messages about rewards
An excessive amount of material in the curriculum
Poor or absent feedback of material on progress
Lack of independence in studying
Lack of interest in and background knowledge of the subject matter
Previous experiences of educational settings that encourage these approaches

Deep approaches are encouraged by õ
Teaching and assessment methods that foster active and long-term engagement with learning tasks
Stimulating and considerate teaching, especially teaching which demonstrates the lecturerqs personal commitment to the subject matter and stresses its meaning and relevance to students
Clearly stated academic expectations
Opportunities to exercise responsible choice in the method and content of study
Interest in and background knowledge of the subject matter
Previous experiences of educational settings that encourage these approaches

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Source: Ramsden (2006, p. 80).

Table 2.2 suggests that the deep and surface binary might run right through how we teach. Qualitatively different approaches to teaching are invariably associated with qualitatively different approaches to learning (Trigwell et al., 1999), and the points of intervention that would possibly enhance the quality of student learning may involve changing the curriculum we construct, the teaching methods we use, and the ways in which we assess our students as suggested in Table 2.3.

Table 2.3 A learning environment designed to support a deep approach

Action taken	Rationale from research findings
Curriculum	
Linking curriculum to defined course objectives	to ensure openness to students
Matching curriculum, teaching and assessment	to clarify goals and standards
Incorporating professional applications	to increase vocational relevance
Defining essential information	to control and rationalize workload
Selecting essential information	which encourage personal understanding
Teaching	
Analyzing the derivation of new terms	rather than encouraging memorization
Emphasizing principles and concepts	rather than accumulation of details
Creating opportunities for ±goodqteaching	rather than ±covering the syllabus‹
Actively engaging students	by learning from problem solving
Assessment	
Providing adequate feedback	to monitor progress and minimize anxiety
Constructing assessments which	require the demonstration of understanding
Marking strategies which	recognize and reward understanding

Source: Committee of Scottish University Principals (1992, p. 21).

The effectiveness of a course, Table 2.3 suggests, depends on more than the formal teaching provision. The learning resources available to students, the nature of assignments given, the quality and timing of the feedback provided on assignments, and the assessment procedures all contribute to the efficiency and effectiveness of a course. The contributory factors to high quality learning suggest the importance of certain forms of student activity, teacher management of the learning environment and of resource materials and tasks. Teachers can thus influence studentsqapproaches to learning by the activities and tasks they engage them in and, of course, by the learning environment they create in the classroom.

2.4 A case for explicitness

In a mass higher education system studentsqacademic abilities are likely to vary and teachers may respond flexibly along a continuum of explicitness within the context of

social interaction and participation. At one end of the continuum is %making the practices which may be causing confusion explicit, and, at the other, more unobtrusive acquisition through encouragement and questions+ (Ridley, 2004, p. 92-93). Ridley argues that if implicit acquisition through participation and immersion in the discourse is difficult for some students, opportunities for explicit learning within the same social framework should be made available by providing access to the keys which will unlock the doors to the various higher education discourses (Ridley, 2004, p. 106). The development of self-regulation (self-monitoring, control of cognition, motivation, and behaviour) in students can be facilitated by structuring learning environments in ways that make learning processes explicit, through meta-cognitive training and by providing opportunities to practice self-regulation (Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006, p. 205).

A discussion with students within each course about what a 'deepqapproach to learning might mean and the types of thinking and reasoning involved could be one form of explicitness (Mingers, 2000; Fulop, 2002). However, changing teaching methodologies and assessment tasks may alter the kinds of activities that students engage in and make explicit how students are expected to learn and probably contribute to changes in the way they approach their learning. In many disciplines the underlying principles are usually only implicit in course outlines and assessment instructions and:

> the complex nature of such processes, however, is rarely acknowledged, partly perhaps because the value system in which these processes take place dictates that students have to find their own way, without the major signposting or explicitness often described as 'spoon feedingq(Haggis, 2006, p. 99).

Thus, since students struggle to make sense of what academic practices are they are, therefore, likely to be hampered by their misconceptions about purpose (Ivanic, 2001). With their expectations mainly based upon their secondary school experiences, students may believe that the purpose of the course is simply to gain knowledge and prove this ±gainqby displaying it in assessment. The idea that subject teachers might explore the complexities of academic practices much more explicitly with their students, however, challenges many conventional assumptions about university teaching, independent thought and autonomous study, and may be seen as %dumbing down+ standards (Haggis, 2003). One might, however, argue that processes of thinking, understanding, and acting in specific disciplinary contexts can only be described, discussed, compared, modelled and practiced. Exploration of processes cannot be spoon feeding. Only content information can be spoon-fed (Haggis, 2006).

Focusing on academic literacies as the major operandi of higher education, it can be seen that academic literacies have great impact over how students express and present themselves. The skills to effectively listen, speak, read, write, and think critically empower students and are crucial to the construction and communication of knowledge.

2.5 Academic literacies

Academic literacies involve the complex linguistic, conceptual and skill resources for analyzing, constructing, and communicating knowledge within disciplines. They are the:

> ways of thinking, reading, speaking, and writing dominant in the academic setting: involving ways of receiving knowledge, managing knowledge, and creating knowledge for the benefit of a field of study (Neeley, 2005, p. 8).

Academic literacies sees the literacy demands of the curriculum as involving a variety of communicative practices, across genres, fields and disciplines (Lea & Stierer, 2000). Academic literacy practices are practices with which uses of reading, thinking and / or writing are associated in given contexts. This includes the nature of argument, searching out information, judging the worth of texts and the principles and practice of academic referencing. Students enter into discourse communities when they get opportunities to practice using the academic language in class, discuss their readings and reframe ideas in relation to concepts and theories they are learning.

Hoadley-Maidment (2000, p. 167) observes that students also undergo more general socialization into writing in an academic way in higher education. They are expected to grasp the general features of academic writing such as the organization of essays into introduction, body and conclusion; the use of sections with headings in scientific reports; and the rules followed by different disciplines for citing references and attributing quotations.

Lea & Stierer (2000 p. 35) observe the requirement to switch practices between one setting and another, the deployment of a repertoire of linguistic practices appropriate to each setting, and handling the social meanings and identities that each evokes as dominant features of academic literacy practices. Students have to learn to negotiate not one but a range of diverse æacademic culturesq(Lea and Street, 2000).

This implies that until lecturers immerse their students in literacy practices and those students begin the process themselves, they will not have a sense of which questions to ask and the skill of critical thinking and criticality will not develop. Students develop an academic attitude when they become familiar with the questioning of existing knowledge and engage in analysis and argument (Neeley, 2005). They would, therefore, benefit from more detailed work at the level of specific textual examples in their subject areas in terms of helping to build up situated, working understanding of what such elements of discourse actually look like and how they function in a range of different contexts (Haggis, 2003). Francis & Hallam (2000) support the need for students to be inducted into the 'communicative practices' of academic knowledge communities, and suggest that this has to be done within the teaching of the subject because:

> Awareness of genre should be cultivated directly in relation to the texts used within the practices of teaching and learning, and that prior genre experiences may not be suitable for new texts and new courses (Francis & Hallam, 2000, p. 295).

There is no doubt that the depth of thought expected in how students express and present themselves in higher education is likely to cause difficulty for most students, especially during the transition period. However as Robinson-Pant (2005, p. 8) notes, research on academic literacies has revealed the extent to which academics in higher education too readily assume that new students will be familiar with the academic discourse of the institution. Teachers have a great impact on how students learn to apply their knowledge. When the support is there, students know and feel free to apply themselves. The levels of literacy skills and new forms of expression take time to develop and need to be explicitly modelled, nurtured and sustained within the practices of teaching and learning of the subject. It is, therefore, important that feedback is used to direct students to develop their academic knowledge in specific ways within particular courses which are presented as ways of knowing (Lea & Street, 1998).

Developing an academic attitude involves a perspective that sees reading as a way of gaining knowledge and writing as a way of creating knowledge. This brings with it an orientation toward education that accepts the challenge of critical thinking and values the adventure of exploring alternative viewpoints before deciding on one's own. Through their academic literacy experiences, therefore, students should be able to "claim an authority ... both within and against a discourse ..." (Bartholomae, 1985, p. 158). This can happen if lecturers examine their teaching practices and provide

students with the bridge that allows them to move successfully from secondary school literacy to university academic literacy practices. Neeley (2005) distinguishes between students who:

> passively learn and demonstrate the reception of information, take exams, and enter the workforce wondering what kind of training will be "done" to them next; and students who claim their learning, practise thought patterns, research through and write within academia, and graduate looking forward to working with colleagues within a community (Neeley, 2005, p. 10).

Academic literacies go beyond study skills training and preparatory courses and borders on apprenticeship into new ways of thinking and expression within disciplines. Having and taking opportunities to practise literacy skills can mean the difference between "receiving" a university education and "claiming" a university education (Neeley, 2005).

Exploring aspects of process in conjunction with specific concepts in actual disciplinary contexts is learning how to think, question, search for evidence, accept evidence, and put evidence together to make an argument that is acceptable in that discipline. These activities may be carried out differently in different disciplinary areas. The fact that these processes are carried out in different ways in different areas does not mean that students are not, at the same time, developing the ability to transfer some of the thinking they are learning across contexts. Learning skills has to take place in specific contexts before any aspect of transfer can be made and not *vice versa*.

The university as a learning organization has both a moral and educational responsibility to ensure that they meet the teaching and learning needs of the students they admit (D'Andrea & Gosling, 2005). This does not of course detract from the role of the student, which is to make the best use of the learning opportunities on offer. Much as the student has the responsibility to engage critically in reading, writing and thinking within the discipline, the lecturer is largely responsible for directing students' learning. This is achieved not only by making the literacy practices of a discipline explicit, but also by creating teaching situations that immerse students in a wide variety of activities in which student positions and interpretations can form part of the subject of study based on oral and written texts, observation and experience, along with a requirement to write about these. These suggestions are in consonance with critical thinking pedagogy (Vardi, 1999).

2.6 Critical thinking, criticality and academic literacies in undergraduate studies

The literature on critical thinking and criticality indicates that definitions of the concept of critical thinking are wide-ranging, and vary in breadth and inclusiveness (Amua-Sekyi, 2007). Barnett (1997) notes that the concept of critical thinking is ambiguous and can carry a number of different meanings. Scott (2000) observes synonymous terms such as ±analyse, discuss, and evaluateqwhich cluster around critical thinking and frequent essay titles where they serve to indicate particular modes of enquiry within particular fields of study. Some define critical thinking as reasoning abilities (Ennis, 1962; McPeck, 1981; Schrag, 1988; Gibson, 1986; Lipman, 1989). Others define it as problem-solving skills (Shor, 1980; Ennis, 1985). The Critical Thinking Community defines critical thinking as %he intellectually disciplined process of actively and skillfully conceptualizing, applying, analyzing, synthesizing and/or evaluating information gathered from, or generated by observation, experience, reflection, reasoning, or communication as a guide to ... action+ (Foundation for Critical Thinking, 2009).

Facione (2006) observes that consensus among experts in the field concludes that critical thinking is a %purposeful, self-regulatory judgment which results in interpretation, analysis, evaluation, and inference, as well as explanation of the evidential, conceptual, methodological, criteria, or contextual considerations upon which a judgment is based+ (p 21). All of these definitions imply that critical thinking involves complex cognitive processes and strategies involved in analysis, evaluation, decision making, problem solving or inquiry. Indeed, Lipman (1988) observes that critical thinking is more complex than ordinary thinking; it is based on standards of objectivity and consistency. He suggests that students must be taught to change their thinking from guessing to estimating, from preferring to evaluating, from grouping to classifying, from believing to assuming, from associating concepts to grasping principles, from supposing to hypothesizing, from offering opinions to offering opinions with reasons, and from making judgments to making judgments with criteria. The adjective ±criticalqdescribes the way thinking is done.

Critical thinking always manifests itself in connection with some identifiable activity or subject area and is never something in isolation (McPeck, 1981). Knowledge produced in higher education has a disciplinary structure and it is those disciplinary differences that determine how knowledge is produced and the methods of evaluation that are employed. For example, Brennan et al. (2000) show how in the physical sciences

lecturers acknowledge the integration of knowledge and skills, consider it possible to sequence learning, express belief in the scientific method but are unfamiliar with a critical perspective. In the social sciences, lecturers acknowledge the potential for sequential learning and consider a critical perspective important, while lecturers in the humanities object to sequential learning and stress a critical perspective. Arguably, critical thinking takes different forms across disciplines, partly because of the different cognitive interests promoted by the varying objects of the disciplines.

Just as there are innumerable activities and types of activities that can be thought about critically, there are innumerable ways in which critical thinking can be manifested. Nonetheless, while context or familiarity with a subject matter is undoubtedly necessary to a student's critical thinking, those strategies that are defined as comprising critical thinking can be applied beyond specific disciplinary subjects, and can be identified *sui generis* (in general). The term critical thinking might thus have identifiable meaning, but the criteria for its correct application may vary across disciplines. A range of intellectual resources such as background knowledge; knowledge of key critical concepts; and a knowledge of heuristics are useful in thinking critically and certain habits of mind are necessary for critical thinking to take place and provide the context in which critical thinking can be practised (Bailin et al., 1999).

Much of the literature on critical thinking, especially the early work, seemed to be devoted to lists and taxonomies of what a "critical thinker" should know and be able to do. More recently, however, various authors in this tradition have come to recognize that skills are of minor importance if learners do not also develop the dispositions or inclination to look at the world through a critical lens. Trishman, Jay & Perkins (1992) present a skill-plus-disposition view of critical thinking which gives criticality a new dimension. To be critical, one must not only be capable (have the skills) of seeking reasons, truth, and evidence, but also have the drive (or disposition) to seek them. Dispositions, Barnett (2009) notes, are those "tendencies of human beings to engage in some way with the world around them – they are fundamental in that it is they that supply the energy ... to press on and keep going" (p. 434). Dispositions such as a will to learn, a will to engage, a preparedness to listen, a preparedness to explore and to hold oneself out to new experiences, and a determination to keep going forward are needed for a student to make sustained and significant progress (Barnett, 2009, p. 436). A strong claim to being a critical thinker, therefore, is having the right thinking disposition (Trishman, Jay & Perkins, 1992), to continually question and make meaning

from everything we learn (Freire,1973). This disposition/tendency/willingness/drive to think critically is what constitutes criticality.

2.6.1 Criticality and the individual learner

Van der Wal (1999) identifies factors that influence a person's willingness to engage in critical thinking processes as: the individual's personality trait; the individual's willingness to engage in cognitive processes; and discipline related factors. While an individual's personality traits cannot be significantly changed, one's environment and how one relates to learning experiences in the environment can, to a large extent, influence the tendency to be critical. Part of what it is to be a critical thinker is to be engaged in certain kinds of social relations with others; the kinds of social circumstances that promote or inhibit such relations must, therefore, be part of an examination of what criticality is.

In circumstances where lectures revolve around the activity and control of the lecturer, teaching practices are unlikely to reflect an emphasis on the development of critical thinking (Lowe and Cook, 2003). However, the higher education experience is to enable students to achieve the type of education that liberates them from dependence on lecturers and teachers, to encourage them to learn to think on their own and in collaboration with others, and to enable students to challenge, question and express dissent in order to lead them away from the naive acceptance of authority.

Activities such as class discussions allow students to test out their ideas, reflect on the views of their peers and critically modify their own views through incorporating feedback from others. In reciprocating this kind of exchange, participants in a discussion are forced to be more critical and analytical in terms of whatever they say. To foster criticality requires the need to convert lecture-driven classes into forums for discussions and dialogue.

2.6.1.1 Student engagement

The more students practice and get feedback on their talk, writing, analysis, or problem solving, the more adept they become (Kuh, 2003). Tsui (1999) observes that three factors influenced classroom interactions that are consistently and positively related to gains in critical thinking: the extent to which teachers encouraged or used student ideas; the amount and cognitive level of student participation in class; and the amount of interaction among students in a course. This finding is supported in recent studies by

Carini, Kuh & Klein (2006); Umbach and Wawrzynski (2005); and Tsui (2002 & 2000). The issue here is not just a question of participation, but also one of participation by a majority of students. Engaging students in a nurturing environment, modelling, and explicitly teaching critical thinking, as well as designing assessment to take care of studentsqmultiple understandings might facilitate criticality.

Barnett (2009) notes that curricula should offer contrasting insights and perspectives, such that %openness+may develop. Pedagogies should, therefore:

- require students to engage with each other such that a preparedness to listenq might be engendered;
- make explicit the relevant standards;
- be encouraging, such that a student might develop the preparedness to keep going forwardqand hold his/herself out to new experiences;
- enthuse the students, and so usher forth their will to learnq
- require students to put forward their own profferings in order that the courageq to take up a position and stake a claim might be developed;
- require students to give of themselves and be active in and towards the situations that they find themselves in and so develop a will to engageq (Barnett, 2009, p. 438).

Browne & Freeman (2000) maintain that classrooms that encourage critical thinking possess distinguishing features that assist teachers themselves to assess whether critical thinking is a regular occurrence in a particular classroom. Critical thinking is most likely fostered in classrooms where:

- frequent evaluative questions are used. The teacher does not ask almost all the questions, and neither do students ask questions only when invited or if they fail to understand. The teacher asks some questions, and students ask others, often of one another. Questions that systematically ask %why?+ are significant because of their importance as stepping stones towards the evaluation of reasoning. Freire (1973 &1970) proposes a pedagogy of questions which forces learners to think creatively and critically and to adopt a critical attitude.

- active learning is encouraged by creating the kinds of activities that promote participation and emotional engagement with course materials. This maximizes personal involvement with the materials and provokes students into discussion

and evaluation. Ideas become more meaningful as more connections are synthesized.

- students are confronted with conflicting perspectives, each of which answers the same question in a unique and seemingly reasonable way. This will increase the probability that evaluative behaviour will occur and provide the stage for building critical thinking skills. By evaluating controversies brought into classrooms, lecturers will promote an atmosphere of reflection that can result in acceptance or rejection through reasoned judgment.

- students understand the importance of multiple perspectives and of context. They are likely to learn to accept the contingency of personal conclusions and to allow further information to continually shape their opinions (Browne & Freeman, 2000).

Class size matters for effectiveness, and classes ought to be small enough to allow each student adequate opportunity to participate meaningfully in discussions. Current explorations of what makes undergraduate education work have indicated such factors as discussions, timely and frequent feedback to students, and active problem solving as practices that make smaller classes more effective. Smaller classes are, therefore, effective not simply because they are smaller, but because they offer an educational setting which is easier and more feasible for discussions, group interactions, active problem solving and frequent teacher-student feedback to occur (Center for Excellence in Learning and Teaching, 1992). Since large classes will undoubtedly continue to be part of our institutional set up, the question lecturers should be asking is how to incorporate into large classes the elements that make small classes effective.

2.6.1.2 Lecturer/student relations

The role of lecturers in student engagement and learning is crucial as their behaviours and attitudes affect students profoundly and may play the single most important role in creating a culture that fosters student learning and critical thinking (Umbach and Wawrzynski, 2005). Criticality is challenging to conventional power relations. To incite criticality in students lecturers may have to dismantle the authoritative structure that tends to reign in traditional, hierarchical classrooms. Tsui's (2001) study found out that greater degrees of faculty enthusiasm for teaching and faculty perception of teaching as a process of mutual learning were detected at institutions where students reported

change in critical thinking. Lecturersq perception of teaching as a mutual learning experience can influence the development of studentsqcritical thinking by affecting the manner in which the course is taught. The treatment of teaching as a process of mutual learning may impact the development of studentsqcritical thinking skills by influencing studentsqwillingness to practice critical thinking skills in class.

2.7 Research on critical thinking and academic literacy practices

There is a dearth of published research which examines the development of criticality during degree-level courses (Tsui, 2002; Pithers & Soden, 2000). What there is, however, focuses on specific contexts such as Australian and British universities, or the classrooms of overseas students in the United States of America and elsewhere (Mitchell et al., 2003). Besides, much of the research emerging from within the disciplines on how to teach critical thinking more effectively within subject areas focuses on the level of individual courses, usually the researcherq own. These are often published in discipline-specific journals and tend to be silent on cross-disciplinary implications (Misra, 1997; Walters, 1997). Nevertheless, findings from the research literature send clear messages about academic literacies which are applicable in the Ghanaian context.

Canagarajah (2002) throws light on how oral practices play a greater role in developing critical thought. He notes that making students observe and describe the communicative norms of their discipline is an important pedagogical tool. Lecturersq choice of a discourse mode accompanied by a set of questions that will help students make disciplined observations will help them to develop a sensitivity to their own discourse conventions.

Reid, Kirkpatrick & Mulligan (1998) investigated literacy practices across a number of disciplines (business education, social sciences and applied sciences) in a large Australian university. Their findings indicated that literacy practices impact on studentsq views of written materials. The social sciences students, who were required to read widely and critically, revealed that they queried knowledge presented in texts. Students in the health sciences, where the reading requirement was minimal and critical evaluation of the information presented was not required, accepted written texts as ±truthq(p. 37). This research suggests that where students are given a clear message about critical engagement, they tend to translate that into literacy practices.

Similarly, Wilson et al.'s (2004) study of students' acquisition of critical reading skills suggested that many students were not accustomed to engaging with academic texts and that this was a challenging, rather foreign aspect of university work. They described critical reading as a dialogical partnership which involves both listening to the heterogeneous voices of the text and relating this to one's own ideas or experiences in order to reshape one's own understandings in the light of the text. Luke's (2002) outline of critical reading formed the basis of a description of a critical reader which involves a set of practices such as:

- both listening to the voices of the text and responding to them as code-breakers or listening and trying to understand the content of the text (engaging in dialogue with texts)
- using the text to support writing (text user)
- engaging with the text from one's own experience, allowing the voices of the text and the reader to intersect and spark new meanings (text participant)
- being aware of biases, intentions and pressures of the voices in the text and deciding how far to align oneself with the voices (text analyst).

Thus, critical readers ask questions, think of examples to corroborate or challenge the text, relate the text to their experience, relate the text to other sources, and criticize it by way of looking for biases, poorly developed logic or hidden assumptions (Wallace, 1995). These suggest also that certain teaching practices might encourage students to practice critical reading, while others (which may have led to excellent learning outcomes in other areas) would not foster students' engagement with texts. Practices that might foster critical reading are:

- Integrating reading closely into the subject. The intersection between reading, writing and discussion is a fertile ground for learning and as such total integration between reading, writing, teaching and assessment encouraged critical reading
- Scaffolding or demanding work of a much higher standard than students are currently capable of, but providing a supportive learning environment which will enable them to learn
- Feedback on reading is an important aspect of supporting critical reading practices
- Promoting meta-cognition by encouraging students to interrogate the text

- Relating to the reading such as calls for personal opinion are more likely to foster criticality (Wilson et al., 2004).

Paltridge (1999) also throws significant light on how a wide range of differing writing requirements are evident across a number of disciplines in two Australian universities; studies in other universities across the world have shown similar outcomes (Kaldor, Herriman & Rouchecouste, 1998; Braine, 1995; Canseco & Byrd, 1989). These studies revealed that a significant number of writing tasks did not require students to think critically or engage with the material. For example, Paltridge (1999) reports that tasks that required descriptions and summaries accounted for 32.1% of undergraduate writing. Tasks which required some elementary engagement with the material such as compare and contrast, or required students to explain, accounted for 26.4% of undergraduate writing tasks. Discussion and evaluation writing tasks, on the other hand, only comprised 31.3%. With a significant number of writing tasks not requiring critical writing, one might argue that some students are minimally exposed to critical thinking and, when they are, only a limited range of critical thinking skills, along with the ability to write about these thoughts, are developed. They are, therefore, likely to have difficulty when presented with something conflicting such as critical evaluation or an argument.

Findings from these research studies suggest that criticality does not emerge from *ad hoc* practice. Rather, it is nurtured through sustained literacy practices on a longitudinal basis as an integral part of courses when explicit instruction and the use of explicit description (models) of what is involved in thinking effectively raise studentsq meta-cognitive awareness of learning (Fulop, 2002; Mingers, 2000; Paltridge, 1999; Vardi, 1998; Chanock, 1998; Trishman et. al., 1992).

2.8 Conclusion

This chapter reviewed literature relevant to this study and laid out the conceptual framework for the study, clarifying the use of key terms and concepts underpinning the research. In the process, a general overview of the quality of learning expected in higher education, as well as methodological issues in developing critical thinking and criticality were presented. It was found that criticality is fostered when lecturers pay attention to student engagement practices: use of language, the types of reading required, and the writing and assessment tasks that take place in courses. Criticality is

fostered through sustained literacy practices. In the next chapter, the scene is set for the present study in terms of the institutional context.

Chapter 3: Context of the study

3.0 Introduction

The previous chapter reviewed literature relevant to this study, making connections between past research and the goals of the present study. This chapter describes the context of this study, focusing on the use of language, since this is the aspect of the cultural context which is most germane to this study.

3.1   Institutional context

University of Cape Coast (UCC), the setting for this study, is one of five public universities in Ghana. Established in 1962, the University of Cape Coast was mandated to train highly qualified and skilled teachers for the education sector in response to the need for trained educators and administrators for secondary schools and teacher training institutions (Manuh, Gariba & Budu, 2007; Dwarko & Kwarteng, 2003). It now shares that responsibility with the University of Education of Winneba. Over the years, the university has expanded its original mandate and now offers programmes in business studies, computer science, laboratory technology, actuarial science, nursing, and medical sciences.

Located in Cape Coast, a former capital town of Ghana during British rule, UCC conducts its teaching, learning, and research through four faculties (Education, Arts, Science, and Social Sciences) and a School of Business, enabling it to provide several academic programmes to over 20,000 local and international students. A credit in English, together with Mathematics and Integrated Science, remains a major requirement for entry into UCC as in other Ghanaian public universities. Prospective university students in Ghana are expected to have been exposed to 12 years of English from the primary school level to the secondary school level. In addition, on entry into Ghanaian universities, students are supposed to take the mandatory EAP/CS (English for Academic Purposes/Communicative Skills) course.

In no aspect of the national life of Ghana is the dominance of the English language more significant than in education as outlined in the national language policy (Owusu-Ansah, 1998; Sackey, 1997; Apronti, 1974a, 1974b). First, English is the medium of instruction at all levels of education . primary, secondary, and higher education. Second, the influence of English on the educational system in Ghana is reflected in it

being a core school subject from primary school to senior secondary school (SSS). This is meant to assist students in studying other subjects which are taught using the English language. Students may also study English as an elective in secondary schools or in universities, either as a requirement or out of interest because of the positive impact it may have on their career objectives. Finally, the hold of English on the Ghanaian school system is evidenced by national examinations. A credit (grade C) in English together with Maths and Science is needed for a candidate to qualify and advance to the next level of education. In other words, students who excel in all other subjects but fail the English paper are deemed to have failed, and cannot move up the education ladder. Also, Ghanaian universities insist on a student passing EAP/CS before being awarded a degree, as in the case of UCC.

Historically, the English language in Ghana has been closely associated with the British colonial administration and missionary educators (Boadi, 1971; Spencer, 1971). Pragmatically, English has also since colonial times maintained its dominance in official domains, and education in particular, to serve the practical needs of the country both internally as a *lingua franca* for interethnic communication and externally as a language for international affairs (Dseagu, 1996; Sackey, 1997). English remains an official language towering over all the others, including indigenous languages. The linguistic context in Ghana thus contrasts with that in some Commonwealth countries such as Singapore, India, and South Africa, where indigenous languages are accorded a much higher status, as official languages (Afful, 2007).

The choice of UCC as the institutional context for the present study is underpinned by two reasons. First, UCC has not benefited from any major research activities into undergraduate studies, the exceptions being Afful (2007), Appiah (2002), Gogovi (2001), and Yankson (1989). Thus, the choice of UCC attempts to fill a gap, and consequently to widen the coverage of studies on undergraduate studies. The second reason is that with my status as a member of this community, I could draw on the benefits of being an %insider+ in accessing vital documents which are likely to be kept from %outsiders+.

UCC is considered primarily as a social unit, revolving around academic matters or rather academic literacy. Academic activities . teaching, learning, and research . take place in five broad administrative units, or, faculties: Education, Arts, Social Science, Science, and the School of Business. These activities revolve around two important groups, students and academic staff, who feature in the present study. Based on

University of Cape Coast (2007b), a small handbook that contains the statistics on both students and academic staff, Table 3.1 displays the distribution of these two distinct groups from whom the primary and secondary data informing the present research are obtained.

Table 3.1 Distribution of Undergraduates and Academic staff

Faculty	Gender	Undergraduates	Academic staff
Arts	Male	643	64
	Female	599	8
	Total	**1,242**	**72**
Education	Male	4,317	120
	Female	5,292	18
	Total	**9,609**	**138**
Science	Male	3,482	87
	Female	885	27
	Total	**4,367**	**114**
Social Sciences	Male	1,476	58
	Female	611	3
	Total	**2,087**	**61**
School of Business	Male	1,454	11
	Female	744	2
	Total	**2,198**	**13**
Total	Male	11,372	350
	Female	8131	48
	Total	**19,503**	**398**

Source: University of Cape Coast, 2007b, p. 13.

The Faculty of Education has the greatest number of undergraduates (9,609), followed by the Faculty of Sciences (4,367). The Faculty of Arts has the smallest number of students (1,242). With respect to the teaching staff, similarly, the Faculty of Education has the greatest number (138) out of a total university teaching staff of 398, with the smallest number of academic staff in the School of Business (13). The huge numbers of both students and lecturers in the Faculty of Education can be attributed to a national policy which makes UCC partially responsible for the training of teachers for the nation's junior and senior secondary schools as well as training colleges. The four faculties and the School of Business have departments and administrative units through which various undergraduate and graduate programmes are offered. These programmes involve various disciplines. Currently undergraduate programmes are of 4-year duration (Levels 100 . 400).

3.1.1 Coordination, Regulation, and Accreditation

Like the other public universities, UCC was modelled on the traditional English university, in terms of the independence of Council and the autonomy to determine the content of academic programmes, plan their own programmes of teaching and research, appoint their own teachers, maintain their own standards and to pursue their own methods of instruction subject to appropriate oversight for the maintenance of standards by the National Accreditation Board (NAB) (Manuh et al., 2007). The National Accreditation Board plays a coordinating/regulatory role in higher education. It is enjoined, among other things, to accredit higher education institutions on the content and standards of their programmes.

The National Council for Tertiary Education (NCTE) is under the Ministry of Education, Science, and Sports (MOESS) which is the coordinating body responsible for implementing policy measures and has a mandate to advise the Ministry on matters relating to the development of higher education in Ghana (Effah & Senadza, 2008). Apart from these governmental bodies, universities themselves have bodies that coordinate their activities. These include the Committee of Vice-Chancellors of public universities, and the Academic Board of Universities.

3.1.2 Financing of the University

From the beginning higher education in Ghana was entirely funded by the government through grants to the institution in the form of subventions to cover students' tuition, boarding and lodging as well as for direct development of infrastructure (Effah & Senadza, 2008; Manuh et al., 2007). However, with dwindling government subvention a process of cost recovery and cost sharing at the higher education level was initiated as part of recommendations of the Universities' Rationalization Committee (URC) report of 1988. The government, however, maintained its tuition-free policy on higher education. In spite of cost-sharing and the university's own fund-raising efforts it still continues to depend largely on government budgetary subvention.

3.1.3 Recent trends in student numbers

The most dramatic change in government-university relations, Manuh et al. (2007) note, was the education sector reforms initiated by the government in 1986 at the request of the World Bank. This affected all levels of the education sector. The six years of primary education, four years of middle school education, five years of secondary education and two years of sixth form education (where applicable), and the

three-year university education (apart from programmes such as medicine and law) were replaced by six years of primary education (which was maintained), three years of junior secondary education (JSS), three years of senior secondary education (SSS), and four years of university education (apart from programmes such as medicine and law).

Until 1994, students had to sit the General Certificate of Education (GCE) Advanced level examination at the end of two years of sixth form study. This screened and restricted access to university education. With the abolition of this examination the number of candidates seeking admission to higher education after secondary education picked up significantly (Effah & Senadza, 2008). Government insistence that universities expand access without a commensurate growth in staffing, infrastructure, facilities and spending on students has led to major concerns over quality. There are concerns that expansion has not been resourced or planned, and about the capacity of higher education to meet the increasing demand in terms of staffing and funding (Morley et al., 2010). Figure 3.1 below shows trends in student enrolment:

Figure 3. 1 Enrolment trends in the University
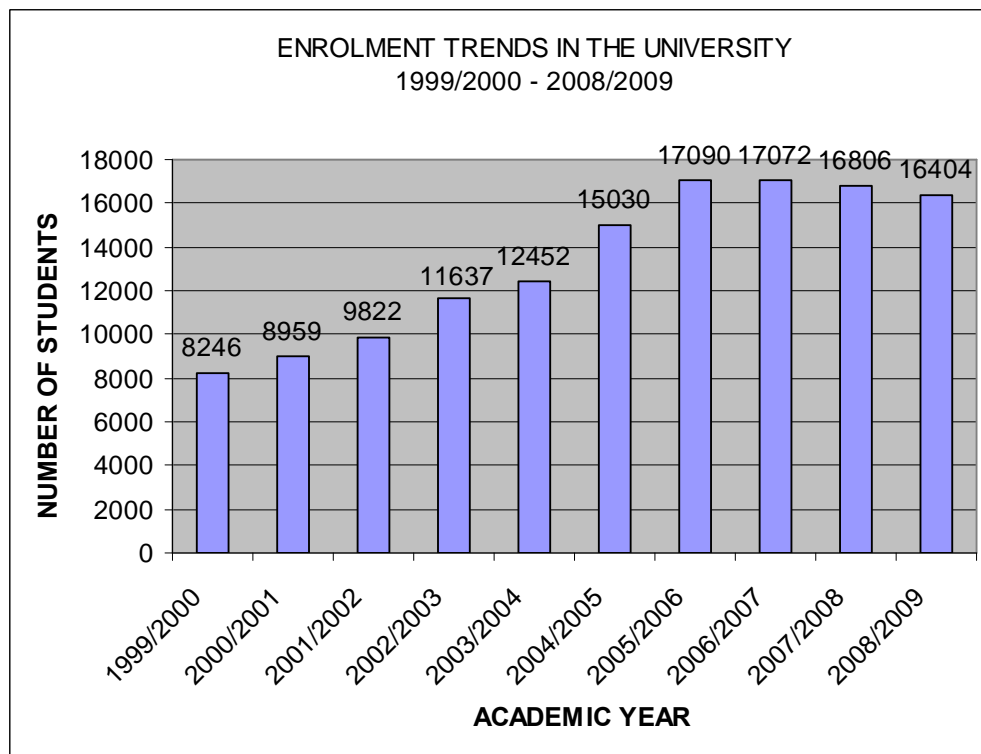
Source: University of Cape Coast (2007b, p. 13).

Over the decade between 1999 and 2009, student enrolment in the university doubled. The foundation for massification was thus laid. Trow (2000) categorizes national enrolment ratio in higher education into elite, mass and universal. Elite represents a ratio of up to 15%, mass, a ratio of 50%, and universal a ratio in excess of 50%. It could be argued that a student population of 28,000 is not uncommon in universities globally. However increases in student numbers without commensurate expansion in physical and academic facilities leave universities to bear the strain of coping. At UCC key among the factors has been the mismatch between student numbers and teaching and infrastructure resources. Lecture rooms, library and laboratory spaces and materials are insufficient or unavailable (Effah, 2005). The capacity challenges and under-funded expansion were felt strongly by most students (Morley et al., 2010).

Morley et al.'s study in Ghana suggests that while widening participation is seen as desirable by lecturers and policymakers, the resourcing and infrastructure of higher education were problematized by both male and female lecturers with reference to: overcrowding, staff overwork, lack of resources, and the threat to quality and standards. While widening participation is a policy goal, it was not being monitored. According to Morley et al. (2010) students reported both positive and negative experiences. On the one hand students talked about supportive and accessible lecturers, enjoyable well-taught programmes of study, self-confidence and self-efficacy. On the negative side was lack of, or poor quality, facilities and resources, large classes, poor teaching, lecturers' lack of professionalism and problems with assessment. The aspect of higher education that created the strongest positive and negative feelings amongst students was assessment. For many, the experience was unstable and unreliable. Although students generally believed that they had broadened their repertoire of social skills, networks and ways of thinking, actual subject/disciplinary knowledge received much less coverage in the study. The affective and social aspects of participation in higher education, especially the acquisition of self-confidence and social skills, were discussed more than subject knowledge.

With academic staff numbering 398 to 19,503 students (University of Cape Coast, 2007b), the staff/student ratio is overwhelming. The National Council for Tertiary Education's student/staff ratio norm of 18:1 for the Arts; 18:1 for Social Sciences, 15:1 for Education; 18:1 for Business and 12:1 for the Sciences no longer works. The difference in the rate of growth of academic staff compared to that of student numbers can only be an indication of crisis in the pursuance of the mission of the university. Arguably, the benefit of close interaction with the lecturer which comes with small

groups of students is lost. Students in the Sciences often do not have the opportunity to handle instruments and equipment nor to engage directly with experiments, especially in large first year classes.

The government is embracing massification, yet there is no indication of a willingness to draw the appropriate conclusion from this enthusiasm for expansion: that either requisite funds need to be provided or that universities should be allowed to charge realistic fees. Rather, it seems to have tried to square the circle through tighter management, but management cannot make up for lack of resources (The Economist, 2005). Inadequate financial resources have led to the inability to sustain growth of enrolment and to improve quality.

The situation was compounded by the introduction of the semester system. Until recently, each of the departments in the faculties ran programmes from which students graduated with the appropriate honours degrees. General degrees were obtained by combining courses from more than one department. This however changed from 1992, when the universities in Ghana replaced the term system with the semester and course-credit system. With the term system, the academic year consisted of three terms with its course unit running continuously throughout the year with examinations taken at the end of the academic year. Different faculties were responsible for various courses within a unit. There were no free electives and the department controlled courses offered to students registered with it and was responsible for their grades at the end of the academic year. In contrast, with the semester system each course is a complete unit to be examined at the end of the semester when teaching is complete. Students can take courses in different departments and faculties. While the course credit system may have enhanced interdisciplinary training, preparation towards its effective implementation seemed inadequate, with little appreciation of all its implications.

The combination of the enrolment explosion and the requirements of the modular structure in the semester system for marking at the end of each semester is a burden on academic staff. The workload of most academics teaching undergraduate courses has risen from the recommended 9 credits a week to more than 21 credits a week. Apart from taking time away from teaching preparation, the greatest challenge is to the quality of teaching and learning and to the administration of the number of examinations required by the system.

A major challenge of massification to the country's economy is that the increase in the number of graduates threatens to run ahead of the economy's ability to absorb them. The increase in the number of graduates has resulted in the reclassification of non-graduate occupations into graduate occupations (Morley & Aynsley, 2007). There is evidence of graduate under-employment as graduates enter non-graduate occupations (Yikpabongo, 2011).

3.2 Conclusion

This chapter discussed a key aspect of the research: the setting. This sets the scene for the conduct of the entire study by describing the institutional context: the change in enrolment trends resulting in massification without commensurate increase in staff numbers; infrastructural facilities and spending on students resulting in major concerns over quality. The next chapter lays out the methodological procedures adopted for the entire research.

Chapter 4: Research methodology and methods

4.0 Introduction

The prime methodological concern of the current study was to conduct research into academic literacy practices in first year undergraduate classrooms of UCC, a public university in Ghana, and to seek out emerging resonances in other public universities in the country in the belief that qualitative research should produce explanations which have a wider resonance (Mason, 2005). This chapter traces the methodological procedures that took place during this research process. It examines the research design, including the methods of data collection and analysis, and the limitations of the study.

4.1 Research design

A case study design seemed appropriate particularly with the kind of insider research that is trying to get at the complex issue of experiences, actions, behaviours, and beliefs. My interest in exploring social practices, social relations and experiences rather than testing hypothesis by or against empirical research is matched to qualitative research. While quantitative methods can effectively identify broad trends and common associations, in many cases qualitative methods are more suited for in-depth and detailed analysis of contextual elements. Consequently, I anticipated that a qualitative approach to data collection, involving observation of what transpires in the classrooms coupled with probing interviews, would yield valuable data and insights. Moreover, quantitative methods that have structured response categories or operational variables would constrain valuable data by imposing a limited overview on participants (Marshall & Rossman, 2006), and run contrary to the general objective of developing a full an understanding as possible of what goes on during the teaching/learning encounter.

In gathering data to seek to answer the research questions, therefore, I worked within a qualitative framework. The strategy was to identify and detail pertinent factors to understand how participants themselves characterize and describe the teaching/learning activity in order to convey their explanations for why, how or which particular practices happen. An institutional case study which involved a collective case study (Stake, 2000), of five first year courses across faculties was undertaken.

4.2 Field Work

Two issues were pivotal in the field work. These were the sampling of participants and the actual data collection.

4.2.1. Sampling of participants

Participants were selected purposively. I was interested in the transitional experiences of undergraduates, what academic literacies are being engendered in first year courses and how they foster criticality. Random sampling might have resulted in settling on participants who would not have helped in addressing the specific research questions explored in this study (see Section 1.2). The purposive sampling procedure enabled quick access to the research participants as there was a time constraint to the entire research for data collection. A total sample of 10 lecturer-participants (8 males and 2 females) and 56 student-participants (28 males and 28 females) took part in the study. The gender imbalance among lecturer-participants was due to staffing issues.

In UCC 5 lecturer-participants (4 males and 1 female) and 40 student-participants (20 males and 20 females) from the Faculties of Arts, Science, Education, and Social Science and the School of Business were engaged in individual interviews and focus group discussions respectively. A mix of disciplines was used to elicit more variation in perspectives. A list of all first year courses was obtained from the data processing unit of the university. Introductory courses were selected and lecturers teaching those courses were contacted direct to negotiate access. With my position as an insider (as noted above I am a member of academic staff at UCC) access to the research setting was privileged. However, my position as an insider played out differently in the different institutions. At UCC, my university, it facilitated the making of contacts and I drew on my status as an ±insiderq for the benefit of this research. At KNUST, I had to be introduced. I realized I was on their territory. I had to understand the power relations at play. At UG, I felt like an outsider encroaching on lecturersq time. Perhaps, another woman, a colleague though but not someone to work with. I realized the struggle between the interviewer and interviewee in establishing a relationship.

Most first year classes are put in groups taught by different lecturers because of the large numbers of students. Consequently, the issue arose of which of the lecturers on a course to observe. I was of the view that seniority did not necessarily translate into experience; the seniority of lecturers is determined by promotion, which in turn is dependent on the number of publications one has rather than on the number of years of teaching experience. Since my interest is in participantsq experiences and

perspectives, the option was to contact the lecturer with the longest record of service and work my way down if he/she declined to participate in the study. In all cases though, my initial contact was successful. Lecturers engaged in the study have between three and 21 years'experience of teaching. If I should categorize teaching experience from 0 to 3 years as novice; 3 to 5 years as experienced; 5 to 10 years as advanced; and over 10 years as seasoned, I would say that all the lecturers who participated in the research were at least experienced as far as teaching in the university is concerned.

Student-participants were selected from those taking the courses observed who had volunteered to take part in the study. This was done with the permission of the course lecturers. Students willing to participate in the research were requested to contact their course representatives to have their names written down. Since the focus of the research is on the transitional experiences of school leavers to university, only students who had entered university direct from secondary schools were included in the study.

Two lists, one for female students and one for male students were drawn up for each selected course. Every third student was selected from each list, depending on the total number of students who had volunteered to participate in the study. Going by these lists, four male and four female students were selected to form a sample of eight students for each of the five focus groups from the five courses chosen from the five faculties. Insofar as this research represents a descriptive and exploratory study, this self-selecting sample of five groups of students was deemed to be appropriate both to provide data that could be pursued in the study and in accordance with the need for participants'consent in research.

Participants from two other public universities, the University of Ghana (UG) and Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST) were purposively selected in order to seek out emerging resonance. Both lecturer-participants and student-participants in these universities were contacted through the researcher's social network. Lecturers were contacted through colleagues, and students either through lecturers who had agreed to participate or through student-participants at UCC. One lecturer each from the Faculties of Arts and Social Science in UG volunteered to participate in the study while the third lecturer from the Faculty of Science, who had initially agreed to participate, repeatedly failed to make appointments and later would not pick up calls. At KNUST, three lecturer-participants volunteered from the Faculties of Social Science, Engineering and Pharmacy. I arranged to meet

participants at UG and KNUST and travelled the 200 and 450 kilometres respectively, a couple of times to negotiate access with participants, explain the purpose of the research and what it would entail, agree on the dates, times and venues for the interviews. Two lecturers from UG, both male, and three lecturers from KNUST (2 males and 1 female) participated in interviews, while eight students from UG and eight from KNUST (4 males and 4 females in each case) participated in focus groups. A total of five lecturer-participants and sixteen student-participants from UG and KNUST participated in the study. In all, a total of ten lecturers and fifty-six students took part in the study.

4.2.2 My role as an insider researcher

As an insider, I have a particular pre-understanding of the functions of the institution. I know how the informal organization works and to whom to turn for information. This gave me good access. However, what gives good access can sometimes be problematic in terms of actually doing the research. I could use the internal jargon to draw on my experience in asking questions and interviewing, and follow up on replies and so obtain rich data. What I could not do was to look at things from the fresh perspective of someone from outside. Spindler and Spindler (1982), among many other insider researchers, point out that researching your own culture involves making the familiar strange, seeing those things about a situation that are taken for granted and yet which are, on closer examination, worthy of note. This means an effort from the researcher which, as Coghlan & Brannick (2005) suggest, involves confronting the dilemmas of loyalty, behavioural claims and identification in terms of relationships with participants and the institution and includes difficult role conflicts.

As far as loyalty was concerned my engagement with the EdD study meant that by now my first concern was with the study. I was therefore less concerned about identification with lecturer colleagues and more concerned about the quality of the data and problematizing the issues which I have been thinking about for a number of years. This is not to say that I did not respect or put aside my sympathies with lecturers who were after all facing the same conditions as myself when teaching at the university, but rather that I was always trying to go beyond the selective description of classroom experiences that tends to be self justifying. At the same time, the majority of my observation time was spent literally getting a student's-eye view of the lectures I was observing. The number of hours that I spent sitting with the students and associating with them was helpful in interrupting my lecturer's-eye view of the classroom. Rather

than being able to remove my disposition to think as a lecturer, what I was doing was trying to experience the teaching/learning encounter with students. Also, being part of an international cohort of EdD students at a UK university gave me another perspective towards research. It enabled me to think differently about the project and the data. Reporting on the research to my doctoral colleagues and supervisors challenged me and made me a different researcher than if I had done the doctorate at home.

Being an insider involves not just gathering information but communicating with participants and interacting in a dialogic manner with the research participants to co-create data (Bishop, 2005). This role duality drew on the tensions between my role as an educator and researcher. I interacted with both students and lecturers after observing their classes. I asked questions that sought for explanations or clarifications on things I had observed. This helped me to capture data on the perceptions of participants from the inside, through the process of deep attentiveness, of empathetic understanding, and explication of the ways participants understand, account for, take action, and otherwise manage their day-to-day situations, thereby suspending whatever preconceptions I might have about the topics under discussion.

As an insider researcher there were several ways that I could approach the way I wanted to make the lecturer respondents see me. What I did not want was them to see me as some kind of inspector who was evaluating them. Instead, I emphasized my own role as a lecturer, in the same position as them, discussing the lectures I had observed professionally. My relationship with lecturer-participants was collegial. I tried to make sure that we talked as equals, as people who had the same difficulties, in order to unlock what they were thinking. Whilst it is possible that they still felt that I was judging them to a certain extent, this did seem to make them talk in ways that seemed useful. This involved me suggesting alternatives but I was careful to present this as a way of sharing ideas and therefore paying them back for letting me observe them. On the whole they seemed to think this useful and the rapport which we developed was demonstrated by the fact that four out of the five lecturers at my own university sought me out to talk about teaching issues outside my observation periods.

It is impossible for someone of my age to pass as an undergraduate student in mainstream courses in Ghana. However, I was anxious not to play up my difference from them. I tried to be like a student as much as possible, arriving at lectures with them, dressing down to blend in, mixing with them, having chats and discussing academic work. The result of this was that I experienced the respect due to an older

person but not that which would have been normal in these circumstances. They treated me more as a friend or relation who happened to be a lecturer. This cordial relationship enabled the students to open up and they spoke frankly and very critically about their experiences which I would not have expected if I had not made this effort. For example they were not afraid to tell me stories about my colleagues, mentioning specific names. This seemed to show that they felt safe because anonymity and confidentiality had been assured. They encouraged me to verify what they said with other students and lecturers themselves if I was minded to do so.

One of the outcomes of my taking the role of participant observer was that I developed a more intimate and informal relationship with the participants I observed. It involved simultaneous emotional involvement and objective detachment. I tried to be both an engaged participant and a dispassionate observer. It was difficult to study the social world without being part of it (Dunne, Pryor & Yates, 2005). However, maintaining a reflexive stance, being aware of my own biases and trying to keep an open mind minimized the extent to which my researcher identity as an insider might distort the research. Undertaking research in one's own organization seems political and might even border on the subversive because it emphasizes questioning which may be threatening to existing organizational norms. For example, what constitutes valid information may be intensely political (Kakabadse, 1991). I had to work in ways that are in keeping with the political conditions without compromising my research or my career and this made very heavy demands on my political skills.

This issue is also evident in the writing up of the thesis, for instance the difficulty of maintaining the anonymity of lecturers. However, beyond this I want the thesis to be read and for it to make a difference to the way that teaching and learning is conducted. This means that I have had to be very careful in the way that I have presented evidence and formulated conclusions because it would be possible to alienate people in ways that would be counter-productive.

In summary, the insider researcher position was one which enabled me access but created some problematic issues which I attempted to address in the research.

4.2.3 Methods of data collection

The second major stage of the study was the actual data collection. This took place over a 16-week period (August to December, 2007) in the first semester of the

2007/2008 academic year at UCC. It involved a two step process of observation followed by interviews with lecturer-participants and focus groups with student-participants. Data collection at UG and KNUST involved interviews with lecturers and focus groups with students and took place between February and March, 2008, the second semester of the academic year. Table 4.1 shows a summary of data collected.

Table 4. 1 Summary of data collected

	Research method	Participants		Dates
UCC	Observations	Sociology: Education: African Studies: Business management: Biology:	12 lectures 8 lectures 8 lectures 12 lectures 12 lectures	August - November 2007
	Interviews	5 (one lecturer in each course observed)		December 2007 . February 2008
	Focus groups interviews	5 (one focus group for each course observed)		November . December 2007
	Documentary data	Course outlines, student handbooks, university management statistics		
KNUST	Interviews	3 . (one lecturer each from Sociology, Engineering and Pharmacy		February, 2008
	Focus group interviews	1- Students from Sociology, Engineering and Pharmacy classes		February, 2008
UG	Interviews	2 . (one lecturer each from Sociology and Philosophy		March, 2008
	Focus group interviews	1 (students from Sociology and Philosophy classes)		March, 2008

Source: Fieldwork (2007/2008).

4.2.3.1 Observations

Observation is a very good way of getting at behaviour. The purpose was to note what happens in classrooms in order to better understand the context within which academic literacy practices occur. I observed classes in this study not so much on account of their strength in giving direct access to events and interactions (Simpson & Tuson, 2003), as their capacity to tell a story (Dunne, Pryor, & Yates, 2005). I was of the view that what participants might take to be routine or obvious is best established through watching and listening to what they do, rather than just asking them directly (Silverman, 2005). I immersed myself in classes for a semester, observing what participants do, listening to what they say, and asking questions as a participant observer.

My role was to be there while the action took place, participating in activities to a lesser extent, by watching, listening and writing (Dunne, Pryor & Yates, 2005), and to

influence the flow of events as little as possible. My aim was to record as much as possible academic literacy practices . the speaking, listening, reading and writing activities of participants in the the various disciplines in an attempt to develop a narrative account of academic literacies (Bryman, 2004). I observed classes without a schedule rather than use a pre-structured schedule onto which to fit what was observed. I was not interested in generating information on aspects of behaviour that can be treated as variables.

All except one lecturer introduced me to his students. I settled in very quickly after an initial awareness of being an observer in the class. I settled down with students prior to the arrival of lecturers and by the third week it was obvious I had blended in, as students seemed to ignore me and asked me to pass on reading materials given by the lecturer.

Observations commenced on 10 September, 2007 and ended on 16 November, 2007. I observed each course for two hours a week over a ten-week period. Each course had three credit hours: two hours for lectures and one hour for tutorials. However, the slots for tutorials were either used to cover lectures or were used as and when by teaching assistants who explained or summarized topics students did not understand at lectures.

On Mondays I observed the Sociological and Philosophical Foundation of Education class. Introduction to Sociology was on Tuesdays. Wednesdays was for Introduction to Biology and Introduction to Business respectively. Thursday s slot was for the African Studies class on Sexual and Domestic violence. I noted the classroom environment that could affect learning activities and the nature of communication . speaking, reading and writing in the classes. The observation entailed systematic note taking and recording of activities and behaviours in the classroom. This enabled me to generate detailed contextual data about things that participants might be unwilling to talk about in the interview, making it possible for me to move beyond the selective perspectives of participants. I avoided physical descriptions of participants to maintain anonymity.

I made short notes of classroom activities in the left hand column of my notepad, including notes that lecturers wrote on the board. The column on the right contained comments and questions on the observations (Marshall & Rossman, 2006; Dunne, Pryor & Yates, 2005), which I pursued with the lecturer after the class, contacting her/him soon after if that was not possible. I thought any discussion on my

observations had to take place as soon as possible lest participantsqrecollections of events might be inaccurate. My field notes proved useful as they suggested probes for the interviews (Erlandson et al., 1993).

My enthusiasm as a researcher/learner proved somehow problematic. At times, I found the course content information so interesting in the Business Management class that I took notes for my benefit, having to remind myself to watch on-going classroom activities. Although this propensity could have turned into a major problem in my observation skills, I later found that my interest in the topics allowed me to be a better interviewer, making the interview feel more like a casual conversation.

4.2.3.2 Interviews

The objective of the interviews was to encourage participants to talk freely about their literacy practices: the speaking, listening, reading, and writing activities in their disciplines, and to allow their perspectives to unfold. Interviews with participants were necessary to elicit lecturersqand studentsqaccounts and reported experiences and their judgement about these experiences. From this data it was hoped to be able to discern participantsqideas about academic literacies and how they negotiate their experiences. Interviews with different lecturers were to provide data on different individualsqversions of and positions within this negotiating process. Single interviews were designed to allow lecturers to focus in depth on their individual experiences in managing and teaching their courses. The interviews took the form of a £conversation with a purposeq (Mason, 2005, p. 62) enabling the establishment of rapport and a relaxed interaction. Focus group interviews with students were to give them a voice, to provide them with a comfortable and safe setting to explore sensitive questions, and to compare and share their ideas and experiences (Cousin, 2009).

Informal conversational interviews with lecturer-participants would allow questions to emerge from the immediate context and therefore increase the salience and relevance of questions. However, this may allow different information to be collected from different participants with different questions. There was the need ensure systematic data collection from each participant, while keeping the interviews conversational and situational. Semi-structured interviews provided this flexibility, while preserving the sense of direction needed for the research (Gray, 2004; Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2000). Both the individual interviews and the focus groups were guided by semi-structured interview schedules. The interviews were structured to the extent that each

group of interviewees (course lecturers and focus groups of students) was asked the same questions, and interviewed under the same conditions. They were semi-structured to the extent that the researcher was free to probe and explore in depth participantsqresponses to each of the questions, thus providing an understanding of how participants viewed their literacy practices and how they saw their participation in their discipline (Hyland, 2000:138).

The focus group schedule centred on a number of key discussion points, which echoed the areas addressed in the single participant interviews. These included academic literacies, the activity of teaching, and the teaching and learning environment. The questions for interviews were piloted on two colleagues and a group of students. Piloting the research instrument was useful to varying degrees. It provided information on the effectiveness of the language and the substance of the questions I had used, the overall duration of the interview, how the introduction to the interview worked, participantsqresponses to the style I adopted, and the management of the recording equipment.

Given that lecturers interviewed taught the courses observed, it was anticipated that they would be able to provide information that would enrich the findings of the observation. Students interviewed were likewise expected to be able to contribute information from their perspective and thereby either corroborate or refute the responses from their lecturers. The interview with lecturers focused on their beliefs about university teaching and learning, academic literacies and their observations on the quality of studentsqreading and writing practices. In contrast, the substance of the interview with students dwelt on their expectations of university academic work and their awareness of academic literacies.

Throughout the interviews, which were administered single handedly, I cast myself in the role of detached listener, as suggested in the literature (for example Gersona & Horowitz, 2002), by not giving evidence that I had been affected by the responses of the interviewees. But as an interested listener, I also attempted to demonstrate the capacity to empathize with statements made in the interview, bearing in mind Grayqs (2004) idea that the interviewer plays a crucial role in administering the interviews since the disposition of the interviewer can affect the kind of responses given. This allowed for a judicious blend of detachment and interest (Bouma & Ling, 2004).

The interviews involved a process of active listening and rapid interpretation (Eraut, 1994), constantly monitoring as the interview progressed and probing or leaving the interviewee to reflect on his/her thinking. Since I could not rely on my recollections of details of conversations, the interviews were recorded in order to increase the accuracy of data recollection and to enable me to be more attentive to the interviewees. All interviews were taped with the participantsqknowledge, using an Olympus digital voice recorder. This gave access not only to the actual language used, but also allowed the degree of conviction expressed through intonation to be checked. I tried not to write too often, and noted a word or a phrase at the moment while watching facial expressions and gestures to help me get the %eel+of each participant. I wanted to see if they were eager to share information, for instance.

My main role in the focus group was to act as moderator and create a comfortable environment for interviewees to share their views (Maxwell, 2005, p. 83), bearing in mind that the interactivity might revolve around some dominant members of the group, thus disempowering others who may find it difficult to contribute their thoughts and views. I facilitated discussion only when participants had begun discussing issues outside the parameters of the research in order to move discussion along to enable all questions to be covered within the allocated time (Krueger, 1997).

4.2.3.3 Focus group interviews with students

The focus groups took place at the end of the first semester, during the revision week, after a substantial proportion of teaching and learning had taken place. A logistical problem was to find a neutral place to meet. I worried that a hall of residence might be too noisy, and my office, though large, would be perceived as too connected with the university and my authority. I asked students to confer and decide on a venue and a time convenient for the group. Each group, coincidentally, decided to meet in my home at specified times. These decisions might have been influenced by the warmth and rapport we had built during the observation period. The first 15 to 20 minutes prior to group discussions were spent on refreshments and conversations on mundane topics to enable students to relax and tune into the discussion mode.

My living room is spacious and well ventilated as the windows were all opened to allow in light and air. When I sensed how at ease students were, we moved on to the dining area where we could sit around a table and have the discussion. I gave participants copies of the questions and a few minutes to review them to set the stage for

discussion and also to enable them to see that the questions were not designed to trick them or ask them anything too personal. I could have given them copies of the questions ahead of the scheduled discussion but I wanted their responses to be spontaneous, to express their own experiences and perspectives, not those presented as a result of consultations with their friends. By giving students sheets with the questions on them prior to the interview, I allowed them time to think and ask for clarification. I reassured them of anonymity and started off with the questions.

I kept a copy of the questions in front of me to help me make sure that I asked all the questions of each group of participants regardless of the order. I checked off the questions as I completed them. I tried to listen carefully to their explanations and descriptions so that I could clarify comments. Often in the sessions, I would tell stories to share my experiences as a teacher or as a student to help show the participants that I did not have all the answers or that I was not a perfect student either. Even though in the course of the discussions student-participants made references to and comparison with other courses, I was not able to use that information in this study because some of those lecturers had not given me permission to use their courses. However, where students expressed frustration as a result of a lecturer not conducting his/her class in the most professional manner, I listened and tried to make suggestions to help the student work through the classroom situation. Being an insider required that I be available for any discussion, not just for my own agenda (Maxwell, 2005, p. 85).

I was aware of the potential of group interviews to degenerate into informal chat, yet I opted for it rather than conducting individual interviews because it was hoped that in a group discussion participantsqcontributions and understandings would be enriched by the group dynamics. By sharing and comparing, clarifying, extending and reviewing their understanding, student-participants would co-construct knowledge resulting in convergent or common views (Cousin, 2009). Kamberellis & Dimitriadis (2005) argue that focus groups privilege horizontal interaction over vertical interaction, and the way I positioned myself, backgrounding my involvement, decreased my influence. Consequently, I am confident that a re-articulation of the power dynamics within the group interaction generated high quality data about studentsq experiences. A large amount of data was generated over a limited period of time, even including names and references to the experiences of friends and colleagues in other public universities. This unexpected generalization in the course of data collection confirmed the need for extrapolation and my decision to seek out emerging resonance in other public universities. The group discussions on average lasted approximately 80 minutes.

Focus groups with student-participants at KNUST took place in February, 2008 and at UG in March, 2008. The discussions took place in the sitting area of the guest house where I lodged and in the sitting area of the Botanical Garden, respectively. The discussions lasted approximately 100 minutes.

4.2.3.4 Individual interviews with lecturers

Individual interviews with lecturers were conducted after the focus groups, which enabled the exploration of issues that had come up during the focus group discussions. and the clarification of areas where there seemed to be a number of different viewpoints among students. Interviews with lecturers took place at the end of the semester during the examination period when they were comparatively free and could be contacted easily. I had not anticipated any problem with locating and contacting lecturers during this period. As a result, I could only arrange the last interview at the beginning of the second semester. While my first interview took place two weeks after lectures ended, my final interview took place two months later, because the lecturer involved travelled soon after lectures ended.

I took cognizance of intervieweesqfeelings and private schedules, and the interviews took place in their offices in all cases and at their convenience. I had briefed them about my research prior to observing their classes and discussed my desire to interview them after the final observation. I wanted them to understand that I would neither make judgements during the interview about their performance nor represent them in ways that would identify them in the finished research. The interviews lasted 50 minutes on average, the longest taking 70 minutes. I wrote down notes about what I thought was going on after the interviews which could be reviewed in conjunction with tape recorded transcripts as a further level of analysis.

Interviews with lecturer-participants at KNUST took place in February, 2008 and at UG in March, 2008. All the interviews took place in lecturersqoffices at pre-arranged times. The interviews lasted approximately 50 minutes.

4.2.3.5 Documents

I obtained ancillary written materials such as academic programmes, policies and regulations, basic statistics, course outlines and examination questions in order to examine the implicit messages within them. Documents give an insight into the

aspirations of various parties to education and institutional policies; they are part of the public face of institutional activity (Jones, Siraj-Blatchford, & Ashcroft, 1997). A qualitative content analysis of the documents was carried out (Bryman, 2004) to yield data on the formal and administrative expectations of the university and lecturersq wishes and intentions for students. A comparison of similarities and differences between the data yielded from the interviews, observations and documents helped to build up a picture of whether or not there was a %fit+ between the institutional aspirations and the teaching and learning process. This involved searching out the theme of critical thinking in those documents and illustrating them with brief quotations.

4.3 Data analysis and interpretation

The qualitative research design outlined above entailed sepcific theoretical and methodological approach to the analysis and interpretation of the data (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Data analysis and interpretation began soon after the initial observation and interviews. Unlike quantitative research that requires data to fit into preconceived standardized codes (Bryman, 2004), my interpretation of the data collected shaped my coding. Internal debate about what I saw and heard was not just about collating data, it was data analysis (Silverman, 2005). Data collection and analysis were recursive, they proceeded in tandem. My analytical procedure involved transcribing, coding and contextualization and offering interpretation.

4.3.1 Transcription

I transcribed my observations on the day of my visits, since these notes were less time consuming. However, I transcribed the interviews at the weekends when I had more time to devote to listening to the taped discussions. To ensure respondent validation of findings verification procedures were undertaken. Lecturers were given copies of transcripts to check that the findings and impressions were congruent with the views of interviewees (Bryman, 2004). Three out of five respondents (lecturers) reacted. One wanted me to keep the transcript as it was. The other two responded by adding clarifying details or filled in where I had put a question mark to indicate that I was not clear about something mentioned during our conversation. No one suggested I omit anything said.

I read through the transcripts several times for familiarization with the information. I highlighted key words and phrases used by participants and any interesting or significant points. The categories came initially from the research questions but going through the data helped me to derive further categories. I could then tag appropriate sections, locating them in my data to get a sense of scope and coverage. This process generated terms that were used to interpret and theorize in relation to the data.

4.3.2 Coding and contextualizing

The voluminous amount of data collected called for an analytical approach to data reduction and interpretation (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Data analysis in this case included repeated review of all interview transcripts, observational notes and relevant documents such as course outlines, examination papers and class handouts. I employed the constant comparative method in my data analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). In analyzing the raw data, patterns and regularities were identified, and in turn, preliminary categories (a representative word or phrase) were selected. Data were then coded by categories and subjected to further review. This process sometimes led to concepts being modified, or in some instances eliminated because they were inadequately supported by the data. Following the refining process, similar or related categories were %clustered+ into themes from which conclusions were drawn. Among the helpful analytical tools used were diagrams accompanied by corresponding snippets of supporting narrative such as key phrases and quotations. Overall, analyses of the data were guided by the concept of %explanation building,+ as I sought to explain by exploring causal links and investigating plausible and rival explanations (Yin, 2003).

Triangulating data from various sources of information and methods of data collection allowed for the refinement of interpretations and solidification of findings. It was through these various 'intermediary texts' of analysis that I started to make sense of my data and my interpretations 'emerged' (Dunne, Pryor & Yates, 2005). I developed understandings and tried to explore them through the data. While I used a two-step approach to data collection (observation and interviews), the data were treated as one corpus during analysis. This is because the research aimed to explore the same themes within the observation, focus groups and individual interviews. Moreover, although the focus of the discussion in the focus group and interviews was slightly different, the subsequent talk was quite similar. This was because in discussing broad topics, participants in the focus groups drew on their personal experiences. Similarly, participants in the individual interviews while discussing specific issues, made

reference to broader issues. This chapter turns next to two of the overarching considerations informing the data collection process, credibility and ethical considerations, before turning to a review of the limitation of the current study.

4.4 Credibility of findings

The use of multiple methods added breadth and depth to the enquiry. By triangulating sources of data I compared the perspectives of lecturers and students on the one hand, and then linked up observation and interviews in a methodological triangulation. By comparing what lecturers and students said and did in the classroom with what lecturers and students said in the interviews, and then allowing this data to be shared with participants, I allowed the triangulation to ‰converge+ (Erlandson et. al., 1993, p. 139), allowing for clarification of findings. Corroboration of data through triangulation and respondent validation thus enhanced the credibility of findings. My perceptions, descriptions and interpretations were shaped in the process.

The second step towards establishing the credibility of the research was offering a ‰thick description+ of the research site. This is useful for two important reasons: first, to provide a clear and accurate picture of the setting of the study; and, second, to provide a solid basis for comparison for others who might do similar research, as argued by Merriam (2001).

The third step to enhance the credibility of the present study involved the assistance sought from varied people at different stages of the research. This became necessary, especially as the research instruments were mainly self-designed. In this process of consultation, other lecturers were instrumental in shaping the research tools that were produced. My colleagues and prospective respondents in the research site provided invaluable input to the designing of the various research instruments even before they were pre-tested. Thus, this three-way interaction among the ‰facilitators+ (researcher, colleagues and persons for whom the instruments were meant) contributed immensely to enhancing the workability of the instruments.

4.5 Ethical considerations

The second overarching consideration in the data collection process was ethics. Jackson, W. (2003) and Zeni (1998) have discussed and summarized the ethical dilemmas that can occur in educational ethnography. As an insider studying my colleagues and students, I was guided by certain ethical considerations, such as how

to gain access and informed consent, as well as issues of confidentiality, dissemination of data, and the use of sensitive data, all of which were carefully considered. The issue of informed consent is at the centre of ethical research activity and it was important in this regard. Even though participants rejected written agreements because they thought it was not necessary they were briefed as to the nature of the study prior to commencement, and especially during the focus group interviews, when their permission to record the interviews were sought.

The research conforms to the guidelines issued by the Sussex Institute as summarized in the checklist shown in Appendix 1. Participants were clear about what data would be collected and how it would be used. Obtaining voluntary participation from prospective participants, either directly or indirectly involved, was considered crucial to the success of this research. Consequently, participants were given information to assist them in making an informed decision about whether or not they wished to participate in the study, and the opportunity to opt out of the research, if they decided later not to participate. Once informed consent had been obtained, I remained committed to the principles of anonymity and confidentiality, among others, in the particular uses of the data.

4.6 Limitations of study

While this study achieved the aim of finding out what academic literacy practices are being engendered and how criticality is being fostered through those practices, it is not without limitations. The study is limited by the small sample size and the purposive sampling of lecturers who volunteered for the study (thereby excluding those whose balance of commitment may be different). These findings will need further validation and exploration in future..

As discussed, the study employed a two tier methodology: classes were observed, and lecturers and students were interviewed individually and in focus groups. Interview participants inevitably spoke more about specific resource issues and the underlying processes that they employed in their teaching, whereas focus group participants spoke more about institutional and wider contextual issues. Although this may be seen as a limitation in some respects, it is argued that the use of these differing qualitative methods provided a holistic picture of the role of context in teaching and learning in the sample.

Finally, while the possibility that some lecturers might have prepared for class in anticipation of the observations cannot be completely discounted, by all indications this did not seem to be the case. Moreover, in walking out of class with students I took the opportunity to ask randomly selected students whether the class had been typical and assurances were positive.

4.7 Conclusion

This chapter discussed the research as a qualitative case study involving observation, individual interviews with lecturers and focus groups with students. Sampling was purposive to elucidate the experiences of a particular group of students. It problematized my role as an insider researcher and my attempts to address those issues in my research. It addressed credibility as well as ethical issues related to data collection and analysis. In general, the entire research design, with its combination of observation and interviews, ensured two major benefits which are triangulatory, and complementarity. The next chapter presents the results and interpretation of data as a preparatory step towards the discussion of the findings of the research.

Chapter 5: Results and interpretation of findings

5.0 Introduction

This chapter reports the results and interpretation of the observations and interviews undertaken during the current study. Section 5.1 presents and summarizes findings from class observations. Section 5.2 discusses findings from interviews with lecturers and students about literacy practices and institutional support for teaching and learning.

5.1 Observations

With the exception of the African Studies class, an elective course that students can choose to meet this area's three-credit mandate, the other introductory courses . Biology, Sociology, Business Management and Sociological and Psychological Foundations of Education . are compulsory for students. A minimum of two quizzes are required in a semester for formative assessment purposes. Students take a two-hour examination at the end of the semester for summative assessment.

A common feature in the classes observed was the introduction of the course at the first meeting. Lecturers explained that they expected their students to read the assigned references on the course outline and any other readings or supplementary materials that were given. They were supposed to consult websites given and read widely. In each class I made friends with students I sat beside on my first visit. They saved a seat for me on subsequent visits and became my informants. I chose to sit at the back of the class so I could have an overview of the class and of interactions within the class.

5.1.1 The Biology class

The Biology class comprised 72 students and met in one of the lecture theatres. The rectangular room was just big enough to accommodate the students. They sat on benches behind long tables facing the chalkboard and the teacher, with between five and six students on a bench. There were windows on either side of the room, allowing for cross-ventilation. However, because of the humidity it felt quite stuffy, as only one out of six ceiling fans available was functional. There was a microphone plugged in at the side of the lecturer's desk for use in addressing students, but it was not functioning. The lecturer continuously walked down the aisle at the centre of the room and back up while lecturing to students, so those sitting at the back of the class could hear him.

In my second week of observation, while students waited for the lecturer to arrive, I looked over the notes of the student sitting to my left. Linda kept a highlighter in her left hand, her pen in her right. At one point I asked about her recording strategy: "I just put points or asterisks by the important points", she said. Curious about her definition of "important", I asked her how she determined the significance of information. "It is if the lecturer says it is important, pay attention or note, then I put asterisk there". Earlier she told me she tried to pre-read the chapters for her classes, and I asked if the strategy helped her in any way: "It is easier to understand because it helps me to follow the lecturer because I know what the lecturer is talking about" (observation, 5ᵗʰ September, 2007). Her perception of knowing the information seemed to suggest memorization rather than any higher levels of comprehension. The student on my right, George, also saw the strategy of reviewing in order to comprehend lectures as one of his strengths as a student and learner. Both of them said that taking notes had been taught to them in the CS course.

When the lecturer walked in all was quiet. He would introduce the topic for the lecture which was on some aspect of the classification of organisms. Students were supposed to know the various kingdoms . fungi, animalia, plantae, prokaryotae, and protoctista. The lecturer used direct and probing questions to test students' previous knowledge and establish what they knew. The lecturer discouraged chorus answers. Classroom discourse was mainly about expounding. The teacher spoke with reference to his notes. About a quarter of the time would be devoted to question and answer activities. The lecturer appealed to student experience but that was very limited. A typical example was that which occurred in my seventh week of observation, the lesson was on fungi. The teacher asked students where fungi are from. A student answered that spores in the atmosphere settle on suitable substrate and under moist and warm conditions the spores germinate into fungi. Though this sounded like a textbook definition, the teacher neither asked the student to explain nor did he elaborate on it. Rather, he asked students how many of them have seen fungi. There was a show of hands but he did not ask them to relate in any detail.

During my period of observation, the teacher's questions were mostly directed to the whole class and students were chosen to respond. If the answer was satisfactory, he moved on. If the answer was not satisfactory then he asked another student to comment on the first student's answer or to supply another one. He might reframe the question if he thought students did not understand it. When the right answer was reached the teacher would praise the student and continue. Classroom discourse was

mainly of an IRF structure where the teacher initiates, students respond and teacher gives feedback, a method which has been noted in primary and secondary classrooms throughout the world, including sub-Saharan Africa (Mehan, 1979; Pontefract & Hardman, 2005). The assumption in this discourse is that there is a right answer that the teacher knows and that the task of the teacher is to lead students to the correct answer.

Students felt free to ask questions but overall the style of the teacher did not explicitly encourage thinking or reasoning. For example, he would say %let\$ look at the two diagrams+ rather than %let\$ compare the two diagrams+. He might ask them to explain their point rather than ask what evidence they had to support the point.

The teacher asked students to read but did not really talk about the readings. He asked comprehension questions to check whether students had read. He would ask whether they had understood and would accept the reply %Yes, sir+ as sufficient. Very occasionally he would ask them to go and consult books if they did not understand the content of the lecture. For example, in my sixth week of observation when a student disagreed with the differences the lecturer made between a smooth muscle cell and a skeletal muscle cell, the lecturer explained and elaborated on his point. He directed students to reference books and asked them to look at the pictures and they would understand. He did not comment on the texts. These were seen as authoritative and the following week he asked whether they now understood, but there was no more discussion and the way students might present evidence in support of their views was not demonstrated.

After classes, I suggested that a chalkboard illustration might have been very useful in the first instance, and the teacher agreed with me. He explained he did not use the chalkboard because students at the back of the class could not read what was on the board but agreed that he could have engaged students better if he had invited them forward. This was a possible example of where my dual role as a researcher and educator might have been in tension. However, he did not seem to feel criticised and responded to me as I intended, as a helpful colleague rather than as an inspector.

I expected to see the use of visual aids and realia during the course of my observation but what I saw was chalkboard illustrations.

During the course of my observations, there were three announcements about laboratory practicals. I followed students to the laboratory to observe what was going on. Students worked in groups. Some groups took turns to use the microscope as they drew their specimen and therefore seemed to be all getting a chance to do different things. Also it was clear that these groups were discussing a great deal and debating the differences that they noted. With other groups, I observed a student continuously using the microscope and drawing while the others copied his drawing.

These students were obviously missing out on the critical reflection and significance of observation (Overton, 2006). They were more concerned with getting the task done right than with the learning that was involved. The teaching assistant (a new graduate of this course) on National Service (a year's service to the nation by new graduates) was around to adjust the microscope and help students out with any difficulty they encountered. However, he did not engage with the pedagogical issues and provided no guidance. For most students laboratory practical activities seem to consist entirely of routine procedures of following instructions and writing up reports.

Towards the latter part of class, on my week 8 visit, the teacher explained how a test question could be designed: he gave an example of a matching-type question about the respiratory system. The following week, the teacher gave a quiz. I took a look at the question paper. The questions were multiple choices. The questions were, however, framed in a way that required students to make an informed choice. All the answers were right, and one had to understand the subtle demand of the questions to make the right choice. I took a quick look around the class and there was no way to prevent cheating. Students were not adequately spaced. Once the first few students handed in their answer sheets and left the room, I went outside as well. The following week, the lecturer went over the quiz questions and discussed the answers with students.

Throughout the time of my observation, there was no mention of tutorials and there was no indication in my conversations with students that they had tutorials. I asked the lecturer about tutorials and the answer was that the student could contact the teaching assistant for help with any problems they encountered. However, teaching assistants are new graduates who are products of the same system and I wondered what help they could offer if they themselves have had similar experiences. I was not surprised when student-participants complained that teaching assistants asked them to cope because they themselves had managed to cope previously.

5.1.2 The Sociology class

The Sociology class took place in a large room which formed part of the roof top of the cafeteria. Because of its location, the room was airy. There were windows on one side of the room, an entrance door and a rear door. Like the Biology class, the students sat on long benches behind long tables. When seated, the 72 students occupied only half of the room space.

In contrast to Biology, the Sociology class always started with a discussion of assigned readings. The teacher tried to engage students in discussion of the texts, but they were reluctant to participate. Most students had not read the assigned texts before coming to class and their excuses for not reading normally took up the first ten minutes of the class. There were only 72 students and the readings were available in the departmental library so the reason for their failure to read was not lack of access, but that they had difficulty in understanding the readings. The teacher tried to suppress her anger and smiled through her frustration, reminding students they read for their own good. She advised students to read a second and third time and they would understand. She required her students to see her teaching assistant for clarification if they did not understand anything in the class. I wondered how the teaching assistant was going to do this when he was not present at lectures.

In the third week of observation the lecturer told me she had well-prepared questions to use as a springboard for discussion for this first part of the session but could never use them because the students had not read the texts. I suggested that she could give those questions to students the week before, to guide their reading. However, she rejected this idea, commenting that they were university not secondary students. She seemed to think that giving students questions in advance meant dumbing down standards. Yet, like other lecturer-participants, she acknowledged the depressing challenge of facilitating learning when the majority of students would not read assigned texts. Students seemed to rely on attending classes and taking notes but read the chapters only when it was time to study for a quiz or examination, a habit which, they confirmed, had developed over their secondary school years.

The teacher spent about a third of the time engaging students in question and answer activities or asking them to make presentations. She elicited answers from different students on a question but did not comment on their answers. For example, in my sixth week of observation when the lesson was on ±behavioursq she talked about how actions can lead to intended and unintended outcomes. A student did not understand

and asked for clarification. She invited explanations from members of the class. After four responses from members of the class, she seemed satisfied. She reinforced studentsq answers and moved on. She did not take the opportunity to compare or contrast the different answers and so missed opportunities for deepening the critical level of the discussion.

I heard students complain that they found the subject difficult because it was not studied at secondary school and the teacher handled it in an %abstract+way, as though they were graduate students. The teacher, however, did not see it that way. She was of the view students could supplement her lectures with reading the vast collection of Sociology books in the library. She asked quite a number of questions in her class. These mainly checked for comprehension, probed studentsqanswers, and asked for their views, but again she rarely asked them to give the reasons for those views. Though I encountered a number of questions in her class, they hardly required evaluation of ideas that would invoke critical thinking. They did not ask students to evaluate their reasoning (Browne & Freeman, 2000). Sometimes the teacher answered her own questions out of frustration because responses were not forthcoming. There was no time scheduled for tutorials. Students were to make personal arrangements with the teaching assistant for discussion.

The lecturer invited groups of students to prepare and give presentations on topics. However, the way she assigned topics seemed to suggest that only students in the group should prepare for that topic. The studentsqpresentations mainly consisted of reading extracts from the text book. After the presentation the teacher would paraphrase the content of what had been presented by the group and ask the group questions, ensuring that every group member spoke about the work done. When they were asked questions they had difficulty answering, and the rest of the class assumed spectator roles. Though the teacher would then invite the rest of the class to ask the group questions on the presentations, very few students asked questions of the group members after presentations. Class participation was however minimal.

One student in this group, Bernice, participated fully and understood the texts. She initiated discussion with the lecturer saying, for example, that her understanding of the reading had been different. Bernice felt confident in comparing and reconciling her knowledge with that of her teacher, practising what Russell (2002) describes as discipline-specific literacy. These discussions between Bernice and the lecturer were to some extent a modelling of critical discourse, however none of the other students

became actively involved in the dialogue and some appeared not to be listening at all. The lecturer seemed relieved when Bernice responded in this way but made no attempt to bring in other students.

Bernice's approach was in sharp contrast to that of Rita, who sat in front of me in the room and who was more representative of the rest of the students. Rita often seemed unsure about what to do or how to read the material. She expected to be told exactly what to know and how to know it. Rita's notes consisted entirely of the points the teacher wrote on the board to illustrate that a point was important. She had no marginal notes of her own. The only indication of personal reflection seemed to be four question marks in the margin. When I talked to her about this she said she was writing down the important things so that she had a record of them. She thought she was comprehending and making meaning of the material except where she put the question marks. However, there was little evidence of her doing anything except writing points down so she could recall them later. She was not synthesizing a variety of material, as her lecturer expected, she merely depended on the lecturer's notes. While an effective memory may be impressive and it may even help get by on tests, it does not indicate that the learner understands the material (Piscitelli, 2004). Unlike Bernice, she did not seem to focus on the process of learning (adopting a deep approach). Rather, she was accumulating information from lectures and adopting a surface approach.

During the course of my observation, the lecturer gave students two quizzes. These required students to fill in the gaps in sentences or provide short answers to questions. Two weeks later, the lecturer returned their papers and took them through, discussing what the questions demanded.

5.1. 3 The African Studies class
The lectures in the African Studies class, which were on the subject of sexual and domestic violence, took place in a room which once housed the university library. The room was a large square building partitioned by pillars that made it difficult to have an overview of the class. The teacher sat on a podium with a microphone plugged in at the side of his table, ready to facilitate delivery. Although the room was big enough to accommodate the 436 students, it felt a bit cramped. The lighting system was not the best taking into consideration that the lecture took place between 6.30 and 8.30pm, hours of darkness throughout the year in Ghana. Students I spoke to did not like the time slot.

Winifred and many in her class enjoyed the course because of the entertaining way the teacher presented the lecture. Mercy told me how quickly each two-hour lecture went by due to the lecturer's humour. His presentation method was to read aloud his notes, sitting down at the podium. He hardly used the board so students stayed focused on him. From time to time if he felt they were not taking notes, he would stop and tell them to do so, dictating what they should write. Part of his teaching style also involved the repetition of ideas through multiple examples, including comedic stories about himself, in order to counter the embarrassment and awkwardness that students might feel about the subject.

Mercy, who sat on my left, took several pages of notes each time and stopped from time to time to underline sections. She had put her notes into statement or question format, with symbols and abbreviations. She, like other students, admitted to not liking reading and so the fact that the teacher never referred to any of the readings on the course outline was a good point for her. Her motivation was more achievement-oriented, to obtain good grades. Consequently, putting time into becoming a proficient reader in the academic setting was not a priority. For another student, Kojo, attending class and taking notes were more important than reading for earning the grades he needed. His strategy seemed to work as he earned an above-average course grade. He was an example of what Hobson (2004) describes as a student who had turned into a consummate pragmatist, determining the minimum reading investment that will produce desired course accomplishment.

Mary's notes had the date on top of each page. She used words, phrases, arrows pointing to other information, underlining and bullet marks to organize her notes. However, when I discussed these with her they seemed only to be a means to recall what the lecturer had said. She needed to work on developing her ideas beyond points to memorize. She was not yet ready to work like a reader. Academic literacies demanded more from her than she was accustomed to doing.

When later in the interview I asked the lecturer why he made no reference to texts, he said he had asked students to read newspaper articles on the subject and some psychology texts but students would not read. That made it difficult for him to engage them in discussions. He said students preferred to copy notes from their seniors and thought that would take them through the course and examination. Having attended the whole lecture series I do not actually recall him asking them to read anything.

Although the course covered topical issues that drew media attention and could easily be turned into a discussion forum, only about a fifth of class time was devoted to question and answer activity. This involved the lecturer asking questions of students and eliciting examples of domestic violence and abuse. However compared to the other classes observed, the students were very reluctant to answer and participation in this class was minimal. Classroom discourse involved the lecturer talking; telling students about his own experiences, reading notes interspersed with a few questions but there was no interaction among students, in spite of the topic. The stories that made up his lectures were entertaining but there was no critical comment involved.

In my fourth week of observation, the lecturer explained that he was not interested in multiple choice questions. He preferred essay type questions or short answers. He discussed with students how he expected them to present their essays for the semester and gave them a deadline for submission. When students presented their term papers, I followed up to find out how they performed. He was still in the process of marking and students did not get their scripts back before the semester ended. Students did not get any feedback on their essays. Consequently, the essays measured their performance rather than guiding them (Pryor & Crossouard, 2008). There were no tutorials. When I enquired about tutorials, the lecturer quickly reminded me of the size of the class.

5.1.4. The Business class

Conducting the Business Management classes in an auditorium-style lecture theatre required a heavy lecture style format. Because the room was too small to accommodate the almost 800 students, some students sat on the floor of the aisles on either side of the room, while a crowd gathered at the back of the class, standing and taking notes. The room had windows on one side of it and an entrance at the side and the rear. There were eight ceiling fans in the room but only two worked. However, the fans made so much noise they had to be switched off so the lecturer's voice would be audible. The lecturer had his personal cordless microphone stuck around his right ear that extended to the side of his cheek from which he relayed his lectures.

On my first day of observation, the first meeting of the class, the lecturer distributed the course outline and went through it with students. He asked them to read the references

and consult the websites given. At the bottom of the course outline was the term essay students were to work on and submit mid-semester.

The lecturer told students he had simplified the content of the course such that even if they did not read, they would understand. When I interviewed him later I asked why he had done this. He explained that he felt he could not ask students to go and read when he knew there were only ten books between the 800 students. He agreed that this might discourage them from doing any reading but thought this was preferable to the unfairness of asking them to do an impossible task. Over the period of my observation, the lecturer came to class with only his microphone, duster and chalkboard marker in hand. His lectures were delivered from memory and in each two hour lecture he broke off from time to time to question the students. However these questions were mostly of the ‰do you understand?+ kind. The answer to this was always a chorus of ‰es+. Sometimes he would ask questions that required more than just an affirmative answer, for example asking, when teaching managerial roles, what were the different categories of managers. In this case what was being demanded was factual information, whether from their previous studies or from course readings.

On three occasions he asked students to discuss their views with those sitting around them for five minutes. He then called on members of three groups at random for their ideas. He summarized the groupsqpoints and moved on with the lesson, missing out on opportunities for deepening the critical level of the discussion.

His presentations were dynamic and captivating and I must admit I enjoyed his lecture and took down a few points for my personal benefit. Nevertheless, I wondered what sort of message was being conveyed to students. If the lecturer can memorize his notes, what are students supposed to do? His presentation style was lively and kept students alert and focused, as the room was very quiet; students had their books out and open and were taking notes from the lecture. Not a single student walked out of this class during my period of observation, in contrast to the education lectures. The Business lecturer, however, missed out on some opportunities to engage students critically. For example, while speaking about managerial roles he talked about power and authority. Power minus authority, he said, equals ability. Authority minus power equals right. He drew a diagram on the board and there was an overlap where power and authority merged, as illustrated below:

Figure 5.1 Lecturer's Diagram: Power and Authority

Power

P - A = Ability		
	P+ A = A + R	A - P = Right
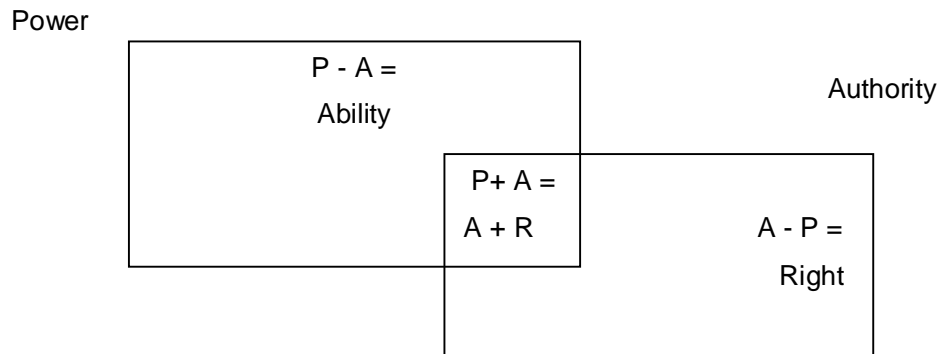
Authority

I expected the lecturer to elicit studentsqviews or discuss what authority plus power might mean, but was disappointed when he answered his own question. When I asked him after the class why he did not elicit the answer from students, his response was that students often got such questions wrong and for him it was really important that they were able to reproduce the right answer.

There were announcements of tutorials on two occasions. Almost all the class came to these one-hour sessions to meet the teaching assistant. The students then asked questions and the teaching assistant gave answers which clarified areas of the lectures that had not been understood. The answers were once again factual. Anything more complex was left unanswered, as the assistant said they would have to check with the lecturer.

In the eighth week of observation, the teacher reminded students about the deadline for submission of the term essay. There was a quiz in the tenth week of the semester; the questions were multiple choice and most students handed in their answer sheets half way through the allocated time and left. All the answer sheets had been collected 15 minutes before the end of the test period. I followed up to find out what feedback students got on their essays. Students had not got their scripts back by the end of the semester. They could not therefore monitor, critically assess or correct their work to facilitate thinking and learning (Nicol, 2009; DqAndrea & Gosling, 2005).

5.1.5 The Education class

This course took place in a large lecture theatre that could conveniently accommodate the 480 students. The building was comparatively new. The room had windows on either side and all the ceiling fans were functioning, keeping the room cool. The microphone on the lecturer's desk was not functioning. The course was new to students as education is not a secondary school subject. As we waited for the lecturer to arrive, I noted Mary's neat notes, including the date on each page. It seemed to suggest a sense of order. She mixed complete sentence length and phrase length to convey ideas. Numbers and asterisks drew attention to particular areas within her notes. She told me she pre-read on a regular basis, even if she could not finish all the chapters and found this practice helpful for following the lecturer better.

The teacher presented his lectures and had his points on flip charts. He sometimes asked students to turn round and discuss a question he had posed with three people sitting around them. For example, when he was teaching about the school as an agent of socialization, the lecturer gave students five minutes to discuss what that might mean with three people around them. After three minutes, hands started going up. After five minutes he called on students at random to present their responses. He allowed students to comment on answers given by their colleagues. When he asked the question "why do we say a good school makes a good village?" it was time for another discussion. When a student answered that students learn discipline in school and in the long run come to live in society, a disciplined society, he asked her to explain. He probed students' answers and asked for clarification. He encouraged them to ask questions, noting that "the crazier the question the better". He asked "why" questions, seeking reasons for student answers, but did not interrogate thinking. He talked about the readings and asked comprehension questions to check student understanding. In my fifth week of observation, he passed a book round the class so students could see an illustration in the text.

As the teacher stood in front of the class lecturing, two students played with their mobile phones, texting messages or checking to see how many messages they had got. The young women in the row directly in front of me were passing notes. For most of the time students at the back of the class talked, fidgeted, and passed on notes to their friends. The lecturer's voice was not audible at the back of the class, neither was the flip chart visible. Students at the back of the class probably felt isolated and the constant trickle of students who got up and left the lecture room was distracting.

There were no tutorials for this course. The lecturer thought tutorials were counterproductive because of student numbers. In my final week of observation, the lecturer announced that there was going to be a quiz at an announced date. The quiz took place during the revision week. I followed up and collected a copy of the question paper. It was a multiple choice question test. Students did not get their scripts back before the semester ended.

5.1.6 Summary of observations

Data collected from observations indicate that students were engaged in listening, speaking, reading and writing activities to various degrees, with oral discourse dominating classroom interaction. Literacy practices observed in classrooms are summarized below:

Listening • Students listened to lectures, thinking of questions and making sure they know what is going on. **Speaking** • Lecturers mostly model authoritative expounding. • Question and answer activities mostly followed IRF discourse. There were no opportunities for evaluative reasoning that might foster criticality. • There were some opportunities for peer discussions in the Business and Education classes but these were short and not usually well structured. • Students had no model for critical interaction. **Reading** • Students had little physical access to texts with nowhere near enough copies for the number of students, except for Sociology. • Intellectual access only for the exceptional student (for example in the Sociology class) as the texts seem too difficult for most students. • Provision of handouts/booklets were seen by students as authoritative as they were able to predict what is required in examinations. • Many students read no books or articles and rely on handouts. **Writing** • Note-taking was the major writing activity of students. This was mostly based on lecturersqcues or dictation or copying from the chalkboard. • Some students were able to take their own notes which may have enabled them to recall content of the lecture and if they read them again they may have been able to reflect on what had gone on.	Classroom feedback may be described as minimal. They hardly required evaluation of ideas that would invoke critical thinking. Feedback on writing came too late, partly as an effect of massification

• Multiple choice testing removed the need to write for assessment. • Most students extracted from texts for presentations (Sociology class). • Some students wrote term essays but they were given no guidance on how to construct an argument within the specific discipline.	

5.2 Findings from interviews

5.2.1 Lecturers

In interviews, the various lecturers at the three institutions were all in agreement that they wanted to develop criticality in their students and that this was an important outcome of university education. They stated that student engagement was central to promoting criticality and, as one said, %the beauty of higher education is to be able to read and query ideas+(Business lecturer, UCC 6th December, 2007).

However in keeping with the notion of academic literacies these lecturersqviews of the meaning of criticality varied depending on the discipline. In Biology students were expected to:

> ... be able to relate features or structures to function and then have confidence in expressing themselves. Besides that they should be able to relate to each other in the class and criticize each otherç reasoning and be able to come out with solutions and solving problems. We also expect them to be able to handle simple or basic laboratory equipment like measurement instruments and microscopes (Biology Lecturer, UCC 12th December, 2007).

Here there is an element of analytical thinking and problem solving but they are placed in the context of specific skills . on the one hand they are laboratory skills but on the other they are about being able to use peer interaction for critical engagement.

In the African Studies class the lecturer was concerned that students should be able to recognize when sexual and domestic violence was taking place and identify underlying causes and motives. Criticality for him was when students were able to %state issues and critique+ which to him seemed to be mostly about understanding causes of behaviour. However he was also concerned that criticality was about being able to question what others say:

> I tell students not to accept anything I tell them but to assess it, evaluate it, question it and if you are convinced then take it ... they donq believe me. We have to change their mindset (African Studies lecturer, UCC on 5th December, 2007).

In Business Management getting students "to appreciate issues, analyze and solve problems" demonstrated that they were being critical. This has some similarity to what the Biology lecturer talked about.

In Education criticality entailed getting students "to ask questions, probe and think analytically. They must be able to apply, synthesize and evaluate". While the Education lecturer shares the view with the Biology and Business Management lecturers that analytical thinking is essential to criticality, his definition seems to refer to the higher level skills of Bloom's taxonomy (Bloom et al., 1965).

For the Sociology lecturer, criticality is:

> the ability to reason or demonstrate some form of analytical skill. All I look for is evidence of some logical procedure (Sociology lecturer, UCC on 7th February, 2008).

While she shares the same sentiments with the Biology, Business Management and Education lecturers in stressing the importance of analytical skills in criticality, her interest was in seeing her students engage in reasoned arguments.

The lecturer of Engineering emphasized: "looking at things from multiple perspectives and combining ideas in the process". Criticality to him involves encountering varied views and allowing further information to continually shape one's opinions. In Pharmacy, criticality involved getting students to "describe substances, analyze, synthesize and apply ideas". Here, analytical thinking and synthesizing are placed in the context of specific skills, chemical processes. In Philosophy and indeed the Arts, criticality was described as:

> confronting new problems and thinking broadly to offer solutions and not just being ready to take ideas from people in class, refusing to go beyond the idea and come out with your own position (Philosophy lecturer, UG on 13th March, 2008).

Here, criticality involves problem solving, reflection, evaluative behaviour and making value judgments.

The concept of criticality was expressed in the course descriptions, albeit in different ways:

> stimulating students' interest to appreciate the diversity of organisms and the need for environmental management and conservation of life forms (BIO 101);

õ to enable students to appreciate the integrated nature of business activities and in particular help them to develop perspectives on key business issues (BUS 101);

this course will enable students to acquire a new vision of the social experience and sharpen their observation and analytical skills õ (SOC 101);

this course will examine the dynamics of sexual assault õ .attention will be given to resources for theological and sociological reflection (ASP 106A);

this course õ studies the sociological and philosophical foundations of education õ (EDF 102).

Being able to recognize and make sense of the different aspects of the subject matter seems to run through almost all of these lecturersqideas of what criticality meant in their subject. Being analytical, therefore, was one aspect of academic literacy practice involved in their discipline. However, beyond that they each stressed something slightly different and contextual in terms of the subject matter or toolsqof the subject, for example, the notion of domestic violence in African Studies or the use of laboratory equipment in Biology. Despite these differences in what academic literacy might mean, the evidence of the lectures observed suggests that the way that lecturers worked was remarkably similar. Indeed, even the idea of being analytical did not feature much. The majority of class time was taken up by the lecturerqs efforts to impart information to students, optimizing course material coverage.

In the interviews some time was spent in exploring what the lecturers did in order to develop criticality in their students. However the lecturers were not very forthcoming. A common response among lecturer-participants was that they facilitate critical thinking development by encouraging students to articulate their views and try out ideas through question and answer activities. These, they claimed, allow students to participate in dialogue which is more likely to stimulate thinking about the subject matter and facilitate comprehension and retention of ideas. However, what they were referring to was the questioning that has already been commented on which, as we have seen, largely followed the IRF pattern and seemed to be focused on directing students to the correct answer. The education lecturer went into a bit more detail saying that asking whyqquestions was important. This, he explained enabled students to think because it required them to give reasons for their answers.

In Education, Sociology and Business the lecturers referred also to group discussion. They shared the view that this gives students opportunities to discuss and disagree with their peers, challenge one anotherqs views, and become more engaged with the thoughts of their peers. The exchange of ideas was seen as being a way by which

criticality would develop and, as the lecturer in Sociology and Education from UCC suggested, this exchange with peers enabled students to see how other students think about issues which can complement and enrich their own. She explained further that to give responses in this kind of exchange forces students to analyze what others say and be more critical in whatever they are saying.

However, my classroom observations and interviews confirmed that group discussion entailed asking students to talk about issues for short periods with those around them. Such emphases on class discussion were in contrast to what was found in practice. The most common mode of instruction witnessed was lecturing: class time was devoted primarily to conveying information. There appeared to be limited opportunities for class participation, and when I asked why there was not more classroom discussion or more questions in class, one lecturer explained that:

> ... where you have a lot of topics to cover then you'd like to go through the lecture without soliciting too many questions (Education lecturer, UCC on 4th December, 2007).

Lecturers seem to feel pressed for time to address all that they want to in a course. The compulsion to get through one's lecture is noted by Horgan (2006) as one of the greatest barriers to effective teaching.

The philosophy lecturer emphasized also that criticality came through oral practices and saw the need to engage his students in class because:

> Philosophy is purely an intellectual exercise which encourages debate and individual thought ... what I do is to introduce the philosophical issue or problem. If it is something students are not aware of because they haven't been taught before, I take the time to explain to them and the necessary readings are alluded to and then make sure that the problem is stated in a way that students at that level will see the reasoning involved (Philosophy lecturer, UG on 13th March, 2008).

For this lecturer, demonstration and reading are ways of engaging his students in philosophical reasoning.

The Sociology lecturer at UCC, like her colleague at KNUST, argued that assigning students to give class presentations and having their papers critiqued by the lecturer and their peers invoked a high level of student participation and critical thinking. However, observation of the Sociology class at UCC suggest that the impact of classroom experiences on students' abilities to think critically is weaker than might be expected. While she motivated her students into participation —by giving bonus marks

for contributions in class+ (Sociology lecturer, UCC on 7th February, 2008), another lecturer believes in resorting to drastic measures:

> if students donq want to think, I force them to think during my examinations by the questions I ask (African Studies lecturer, UCC on 5th December, 2007).

This was also the lecturer who made students write essays but without giving them guidance on this. He seemed to believe in a pedagogy of force as a way of getting students to demonstrate criticality in his course.

Another way in which lecturers suggested that they could develop criticality was by encouraging students to search for meaning through requiring them to read widely:

> I give them course outlines with detailed reading list and sites to visit. With Sociology, there are shelves of numerous books with all the classical readings required of students plus reference books from which they can make photocopies. I think the minimum requirement should be the willingness to read (Sociology lecturer, UCC, 7th February, 2008).

This was evident during class observations as all lecturers started their courses by distributing course outlines with references for students to consult. They were also asked to read supplementary materials or handouts provided by the lecturer.

Lecturers emphasized the importance of writing to the development of critical thinking and suggested that writing exerts a great impact on studentsq cognitive outcomes as they write their drafts in the process of constructing their final work. As one lecturer explained:

> Writing is most likely to promote critical thinking õ the amount of writing and the nature of the writing assignment is important õ it must demand more analysis and less description (Education lecturer, UCC, 4th December, 2007).

However, the writing witnessed in classroom observations involved mostly students taking notes from lectures. In the Business Management and African Studies courses, students were required to present term essays which required them to discuss the topic assigned. However, lecturer feedback on student writing came too late to facilitate critical thinking in that course

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It has been seen that there were differences between what lecturers mean by criticality, but what was striking about the way that they talked of developing criticality was that apart from the lecturer of Philosophy at UG, nobody seemed to refer to demonstrating it or modelling it in their own discourse.

In the interviews, lecturers recognized their difficulties in teaching criticality and suggested several things that created impediments to effective teaching. First, most students do not seem to have the requisite background knowledge for the course:

> Pharmacy is a new course so we don't expect much from students in the area of pharmacy but then the basics. Chemistry is the main subject of pharmacy therefore we expect that they must have certain basic knowledge in Chemistry and Biology, particularly Botany, plant physiology, human physiology ... They come in with their A's but because they did not do much in organic chemistry, they are found wanting in this particular subject (Pharmacy lecturer, KNUST on 20th February, 2008).

This view was shared by another lecturer who observed that:

> there are some who might not have covered much of the syllabus but have been able to pass based on the fact that those areas they covered they had questions to answer. So when they come to first year where Biology 101 cuts across a wide spectrum, those who might not have touched on certain areas have fundamental problems (Biology lecturer, UCC on 12th December, 2007).

Successful high-scoring university entrants have to a large extent been taught to pass examinations which do not correspond to what new students are prepared for. Both the uncritical approach of secondary school and also the way the examination syllabus worked were therefore seen to prepare them badly for university. The knowledge gap was seen as a barrier to understanding subject matter and facilitating student engagement. This is exacerbated in Sociology, which is not taught in the secondary school. However:

> ... in Sociology there are no problems with books ... the library has stocks of books for students to read to give them the background knowledge (Sociology lecturer, UCC, 7th February, 2007).

The mismatch between students' background knowledge and the requirements of the course is amenable to remedy. One solution might be to instruct students to read to catch up on the subject but as has been seen they refused to read, finding the books inaccessible in terms of understanding, particularly where the lecturers did not seem to cover the ground of how to read them.

The situation is, however, different in subjects such as Pharmacy and Business Management where physical access to texts is difficult:

> the textbooks are not there so we give them notes, most of my colleagues have written handouts for students and the questions come from there and some want their notes back (Pharmacy lecturer, KNUST, 20th February, 2008).

While it is university policy that lecturers might make use of supplementary materials to encourage independent reading, giving students notes and maintaining that the right

answers are in those notes encourages memorization and reproduction. In Business Management, handouts ‰are my lecture notes compiled in the process of being developed into a book+ (Business lecturer, UCC on 6th December, 2007). A full transcript of the lecturersqnotes might be seen by students as authoritative text. They might become substitutes for lectures instead of being adjuncts to lectures.

However the main impediment to effective teaching that lecturers noted was the conditions brought about by massification. While lecturers agreed that massification had widened participation in university education and narrowed the gender gap, it involved a much wider intake of ability. At UCC the Communicative Skills (CS) course has been introduced to help address this problem. However as a lecturer noted:

> We donq see the CS that students are taking in their work. It isnq making much difference (Sociology lecturer, UG on 11th March, 2008)

There may be many reasons for this but it is worth noting that this course is a generic one where students in all disciplines are taught together. Given the lecturersqdifferent conceptions of what constitutes criticality and if academic literacies are specific to the different subjects the CS course is not an appropriate method for acculturating students into academic literacies. In terms of specificity, CS does not go beyond the immediate context and discourses of the disciplines. From my experience of teaching CS, the purpose is to describe academic discourse objectively, not to develop a critical perspective toward it.

The most obvious face of massification is the increase in student numbers and large classes:

> õ we have very little time to pay attention to individual needs õ once you have not developed personal relationship with your students, first youqve lost that touch. It is when a lecturer is able to call a student by name and ask him or her to answer a question that the student pays attention. We should be for instance, getting students to make presentations, group assignments for them to go and work but the resources are not available. This is the medium for students to interact among themselves, sort themselves out and build self confidence (Biology lecturer, UCC, 12th December, 2007).

In large classes, lecturers have no personal contact and knowledge of students as individuals. As a result, the social relationship between lecturers and student is different and more remote; teacher/student interaction and interaction among students are made difficult and students are discouraged from engaging in class. Generally, resource issues created poor teaching and learning environments. This was also noted by Morley et al. (2010).

In describing massification in terms of quantity and quality, and the relationship between them, an associate professor with 21 yearsqof teaching experience noted with nostalgia how:

> in our student days we read widely, had weekly tutorials, and opportunities to practice academic writing. Students were encouraged to research and show off their ideas at tutorials õ in our time the system went through us, we just did not go through the system. The lecturer did 30% of the work and the student did 70% (Education lecturer, UCC, 4th December, 2007).

Lecturers, however, shared the view that with massification:

> The environment under which we work is different now õ it affects the achievement of these objectives ... the idealism does not hold in the circumstance (Business Management lecturer, UCC, 6th December, 2007).

The idealism might not hold in the circumstance, yet lecturers expect and demand criticality from their students. In the context of a culture where there is great respect for authority the fact that lecturers and students do not really know each other very well makes it even more difficult for them to respond critically to each other.

An extra point of practical importance is the challenge of engaging students in cooperative learning. Resource issues are another challenge in a system where the availablity of facilities has not kept up with the rapid increase in student:

> There are no slides. If we have slides students can mount these slides and all features that you discuss with them, they can observe them. That in a way helps students to think and be able to relate structures to functions. Even though we may draw, it does not appeal as when students mount these things under the microscope and then viewing more or less the actual specimen. The same students who pass through with these difficulties are the same students who end up teaching in the secondary school. The deficiencies experienced by undergraduates are manifested by teachers in the secondary schools. If they cannot handle or mount specimens by themselves whiles in university, of course you donq expect them when they go to teach in secondary schools to deal with topics on microscopic organisms or organize practicals that deal with microscopic organisms. They are not comfortable with such topics. These shortcomings, therefore, negatively impact on their studentsqperformance. The lecturer himself is limited in a way in terms of what he can do because of lack of facilities (Biology lecturer, UCC, 12th December, 2007).

The ripple effect of inadequate training of science teachers at university as a result of inadequate laboratory equipment was explained in terms of simplification of what teachers do. Furthermore, communication is also thwarted by inadequate facilities:

> microphones in lecture theatres do not work. Students cannot hear lecturers, lecturers cannot hear studentsqresponses, and students do not

benefit from the contributions of their peers because only those who sit around the student can hear what he/she says. Having to shout out responses does not motivate students to talk. The issue of students having to talk on top of their voices makes them shy away from expressing themselves at lectures. It is not comfortable having to stand and shout answers out anytime you talk in class (Engineering lecturer, KNUST, 21st February, 2008).

Lecturers also talked about massification in terms of workload:

when you engage students you see evidence of analysis, problem-solving, evaluation. We don't pursue it. We don't want to give ourselves too much work (Pharmacy lecturer, KNUST, 20th February, 2008).

Effective instruction for developing critical thinking skills requires enthusiasm for teaching, and calls for additional efforts from lecturers. Successful cultivation of critical thinking skills in students is a challenging and often daunting task that demands experimentation and creativity. Faced with large numbers and the intensity of teaching, doing this involves a risk of being dragged into very lengthy work which lecturers just cannot manage.

When addressing the influence of tutorials upon the academic well-being of students, lecturers argued that their workload limits the length of time that they are able to engage students:

... I can't do that with all the teaching, research, and meetings. I ask students who need me to come and see me (Sociology lecturer, UG on 11th March, 2008)

In the face of various pressures, lecturers described tutorials as an aspect of their role they felt unable to prioritize. This suggests that they were not unconcerned about students; instead they felt they were being realistic about what they could achieve in the face of competing daily pressures.

Similarly, lecturers acknowledged the importance of socializing students into academic writing, but one described how:

I limit them by the number of pages they can write because of marking constraints ... I can't meet deadline – I don't give them a free range. A hint of their understanding of the philosophical issue (Philosophy lecturer, UG on 13th March. 2008).

With pressure to meet deadlines, lecturers' workloads dictate the length of assignments and the type of assignments they can give students. In the Sciences:

The number of practical sessions has reduced drastically and students have to work in groups ... does not facilitate the training of students in handling data and writing reports, as well as in simple aspects of

experimental design ... it is not fostering the critical awareness that it should. This needs attention and has to be effectively managed (Engineering lecturer, KNUST, 21st February, 2008).

When students work in teams, effective management becomes very important. As Overton (2006) suggests, team work offers much scope for critical reflection and deliberate focus on the significance of observations but only when properly managed.

Lecturers talked about university policies which are not really making any difference to teaching and learning because they are not followed through:

We are being asked to split classes into smaller groups but we don't have the venues to meet students. We have public address systems but most are not functional. Even the quality assurance unit is not functional except for the administration of questionnaires to students at the end of the year to evaluate lecturers. Many of the policies do not work (African Studies lecturer, UCC, 5th December, 2007).

Policies have to be followed through to make a difference. When mechanisms are not put in place to implement them and their impact is neither monitored nor evaluated they are unlikely to impact on practice. As one lecturer-participant noted:

If you are quality assuring the teacher but not quality assuring the system that should make logistics available to the teacher to teach effectively, I don't think it is useful (Sociology lecturer, KNUST, 20th February, 2008).

5.2.2 Students

In the focus group interviews, students discussed their expectations of appropriate literacy practices on entering university. These include listening at lectures and making sure they are following the lecture:

you have to pay attention the whole time and be thinking of what the lecturer is saying even when you are taking notes (UG, 8th March, 2008).

Students view listening as an activity they have to engage in and derive meaning from it. In the various focus groups they shared views about:

listening to what the lecturer is saying and asking yourself questions about whether what he is saying is meaningful to you or not. You ask yourself questions as you are thinking and see whether you understand what is going on (UCC, Education, 17th November, 2007).

Both male and female students observed the active nature of listening comprehension, trying to interpret what they hear and reflecting on it. A student noted how:

you just don't ask yourself questions – sometimes you have to ask the lecturer questions to make sure you understand what he or she is saying (UCC, Sociology, 24th November, 2007).

For this student, listening is both interactive and reciprocal. Students must think aloud and obtain feedback from the lecturer in the process of negotiating the content of the interaction, not just sit there and receive information from the lecturer. The need to focus and make sure one is following what is going on during lectures was stressed by students:

Sometimes during lectures the lecturer may be saying something important but the way he'll put it, you wouldn't realize it. Before you realize that what he said was important it has already passed. And when you ask him to say it again, it wouldn't be like the first one he said. So you have to be very attentive to be able to put down something (UCC, African Studies, 17th November, 2007).

Listening at lectures require students to be discerning listeners in order to capture salient points in the lecture. Students observed that:

– the lecturer explains some points. Your friends can give you all the details but you might miss out on something the lecturer said and that can cost you. Some of the things, if you don't hear it from the lecturer, there's no way you can hear it anywhere. The lecturer may cite an example which at that point of time, you can use (UCC, Business Management, 20th November, 2007).

Being at lectures and listening to what the lecturer says has an advantage in terms of getting first-hand information from the lecturer himself/herself. Apart from this, any clarifications and examples lecturers give may prove useful.

Students perceive questioning during lectures as very important in the pursuit of understanding. They said their lecturers ask questions and also encourage them to ask questions in class. Students' descriptions of classroom interaction can be put into three categories. In the first category, some lecturers:

– ask you questions, if you don't know the answer they will tell you. Then they move on to the next topic (UG, 8th March, 2008).

This practice is consistent with the IRF pattern of classroom interaction commented on earlier which is known to encourage transmission of information. In the second category:

– some also ask questions and they add more to your answer. Some of them, if you ask a question and they see you don't understand, they will make sure at best the whole class understands. There was a question and the lecturer showed us a method of working the solution but a student also said he knew another method. He explained that method and made us know that the person's procedure is also right (UCC, Biology, 22nd November, 2007).

Some lecturers explain and make sure students understand. However, they do the talking and students receive the information. This is not very different from the IRF pattern. In the third category:

> õ sometimes too, when the student asks a question, the lecturer throws it to the whole class to get their views õ Some lecturers too will give you space to share your views and this is good because you get ideas from other students (KNUST, 19ᵗʰ February, 2008).

Exchange of ideas among students allows them to feed off other people's observation and they can complement and enrich their own. The interaction and participation that might result are more likely to foster high level cognitive interaction. Some students, especially female students talked about not feeling encouraged to ask questions in class because when they do, some lecturers:

> õ tell you that is what will happen during tutorials õ if you have any questions, write them down. During tutorial time, you ask these questions õ if we ask too many questions then they can't finish the topics before end of semester õ we don't ask too many questions (UCC, Sociology, 24ᵗʰ November, 2007).

However, there were no tutorials during the period of my observation. This means that students' questions were not addressed. Lecturers cannot get through the material if students spend too much time asking questions. This communicates a desire to optimize course material coverage instead of engaging students. Students might refrain from speaking up in class for fear of disrupting the class.

In response to my inquiry regarding classroom participation, the science students noted how classroom interaction entailed more lecturing than discussion in comparison to non-science courses. They observed that unless a student has a question or the teacher asks students questions they just listen. Students talked about the behaviour of some of their peers, which discourages some of them from engaging in class:

> Sometimes when you ask a question, some students will shout at you and ask why you don't understand this simple thing ... because of that, some lecturers will not answer your question but say we should see our friends who understand to explain to us õ so we don't feel like asking questions and talking in class õ we see the lecturer after class (Business Management, UCC, 20ᵗʰ November, 2007).

Some students become irritated when their peers ask seemingly simple questions which make them feel they are wasting class time. Students may be afraid of making themselves look stupid in front of their peers. They refrain from asking questions in class or volunteering comments. Instead, they prefer to ask questions of their lecturers after class rather than during class. They seem more comfortable in doing so though the extent to which lecturers made themselves available for such interaction seemed

limited. Students however, described how some lecturers encourage them to think and express their views by asking why and sometimes asking them to discuss with people sitting around them and come out with their views:

> When we discuss we share our views and we get to know what others are thinking or how they see things. When we don't agree, we argue our points and try to convince others so they see where we are coming from and understand (UG, 8th March, 2008).

Students are likely to comprehend and retain ideas when they engage in cooperative exploration of knowledge and divergent thinking. Discussions give students opportunities to engage with the thoughts of their peers and think about why they agree or do not agree with what they say. To reciprocate this kind of exchange forces students to be more critical and analytical. Classroom observations, however, showed that there were few opportunities for students to engage in such discussions that were organized by the lecturers. Instead both male and female students in various focus groups talked about being encouraged by their lecturers to form their own study discussion groups:

> Our lecturers tell us to form study groups õ we share our ideas about what has been taught at lectures and what we read õ we compare notes, we discuss and share our views and understanding. Study groups are good. The discussions broaden your knowledge. They help you to understand the subject better. (KNUST, 19th February, 2008).

The encouragement to interact in study groups, outside the classroom setting, creates opportunities for learning. This most likely will enable students to practice disciplinary discourse through examining, agreeing with, sharing views, discussing, and interacting with the ideas of peers in disciplinary ways. Though students share the view that they find these discussion groups useful only 70% (20) of males as opposed to 98% (27) of females said they had joined study groups. Female students seem to invest more time into group discussions than their male counterparts.

Students talked about an instructional protocol which involves every lecturer starting a course with:

> a course outline ...with a list of books to read and websites to go to for information õ and some lecturers, when they come to class, they ask us questions about what we have read (UCC, African Studies, 17th November, 2007).

Lecturers require students to read widely and all students in focus groups (100%) observed the usefulness of reading prior to lectures. However, when asked about those who actually read prior to lectures only 55% (15) of females and 40% (11) of males said they always read before lectures. If less than half the number of students who

participated in the study make the habit of reading prior to lectures, it would seem to vindicate lecturersq complaints about a lack of reading culture among students. Lecturers interrogate studentsqreadings to check comprehension by questioning them on the assigned texts. Some lecturers:

> õ insist that we say something about the topics before we go on so we are forced to read ahead. And I think that is the reason why we are given the course outline. It is challenging (UCC, Education, 17th November, 2007).

Some lecturers force students to read by insisting that they comment on their readings or articulate their views in class, others:

> õ give you the notes alright but their questions are not straight forward. You have to think. You have to read wide to be able to apply. When you give them their notes, they will tell you they donq want it. They want your understanding of what has been taught (KNUST, 19th February, 2008).

Some lecturers require that students add value to their notes by integrating their readings into their notes and expanding their knowledge. They are more interested in the meanings students make of topics. Yet, others require students to read and prepare for presentations in class:

> The lecturer gives us topics to go and do some research and come and give group presentation in class õ this makes us read and discuss what we read. We pool ideas after discussions and arguments (UCC, Sociology, 24th November, 2007).

Group presentation encourages small group work and student-led inquiry. Students are forced to speak in their own voice and might see themselves as sources of knowledge. This may directly or subconsciously prepare students to assume the role of critical thinkers by conveying a sense of legitimacy to their efforts at independent thinking. Classroom observations, however, showed that this was not common practice.

Students in all the focus groups (100%) noted the mismatch between lecturersq demands that they read widely and their assessment requirements. The assessment procedure was a source of concern among students and was summed up in this contribution:

> õ the same people will tell you to go and read all those books and look for information from the internet. When you come back they donq want the information you got on your own. You answer multiple choice questions and their questions come from their notes. If you are going to answer multiple choice questions for examination, what are you going to do research for? Research helps you to write essays and presentations but we donq write essays and do presentations. We have to learn the

handouts lecturers have given us because all the questions come from there (UCC, Sociology, 24th November, 2007).

Students feel they are not being encouraged to do justice to their independent reading. They might find reading useful, however they do not see the relevance of reading when they neither write essays or make presentations and all their test questions are multiple choice questions based on notes that lecturers have given them. Students linked this more strongly with summative assessment and were in agreement that:

the questions they ask ... multiple choice questions ... fill-in-the-blanks õ You realize everything is coming from the handout lecturers sell to us. You learn the handouts in order to pass the quizzes and examinations. Even though you have references, if you depend on them you will fail the paper. You are not encouraged to use your own ideas you get out of reading the references õ at the end of it all, itos about passing your quizzes, passing your exams (UCC, Education, 17th November, 2007).

Meeting assessment requirements is a determining factor in how students learn. What is assessed governs what students see as being valued; these students see the handouts they buy from lecturers as a guarantee to passing their examinations. The nature of assessment tasks therefore greatly influences both the effort students put into learning and the quality of learning. Students might have a list of references to guide their reading which they may find useful, but they would not read if their assessment tasks do not demand commitment to reading. Students noted that:

The incentive or motivation to explore to learn is not there. After all, every first class student is the best. We have to conform. (UG, 8th March, 2008).

Students are not going to put their best efforts into work which is not going to count. Passing their examinations and getting a good grade is what matters to them and this means mastering the handouts they have bought from lecturers.

New university students expected to be engaged in continuous writing and noted the lack of writing in their courses. They, however, agreed that all students take notes during lectures which they find useful. Both male and female students talked about note-taking practices, perhaps because it was on-going in the EAP/CS course they were taking at the time of data collection. All but one of the females (96%) presented an organized note taking strategy while only 50% (14) of the males talked about note taking in an organized way. Some students are given the opportunity to engage in academic writing when their lecturers assign term papers and construct tests that utilize a short essay response format. They are however limited as:

most of the assignments we do, we donq even get our papers back; we donq even see the marks that we got (UCC, African Studies, 17th November, 2007).

Students do not get feedback on their writing that would regulate their learning (Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006). They go through the motions and the focus seems to be on the successful completion of the task in hand (Pryor & Crossouard, 2008). In Science and Engineering, class work and examinations tend to entail work problems rather than writing assignments:

> when we go in for practicals, they ask you to sit in there and write your report. You go and meet the bench set for you to start to perform the experiment. The instructions are short. It's not detailed. They expect us to write the theory behind the experiments and prove why we are performing that experiment (UCC, Biology, 22nd November, 2007).

While students are expected to do experiments and write reports, they feel they are not getting the support they require by way of guidance and direction. Although a curricular emphasis on writing comes about more readily in some disciplines (e.g., Humanities and Social Sciences) than in others (e.g. Science and Engineering), students share a common view that they are not being set enough writing assignments:

> If they say university education is to help you develop for life and they don't give us a lot of writing assignment and rather multiple choice questions, you find yourself lacking when you graduate. If you are not able to develop your writing abilities from here, and your employers expect you to write, you would be found wanting (UCC, Sociology, 24th November, 2007).

Students expressed concern about their ability to perform if they do not have the opportunity to practice the skill of writing. However, lecturers I interviewed generally reported doing little to incorporate writing in their courses because of student numbers and marking constraints, which make it impossible to give useful and timely feedback on students' work. They thought giving students assignments seem unfair and will serve very little purpose in the circumstances. With multiple choice testing removing the need to read and write for assessment and limited opportunities to engage in class discussions, students felt to a large extent that their expectations of academic literacy practices were not being met. Practices described by both lecturers and students show a gulf between policy intentions and the experiences of students and lecturers.

5.3 Conclusion

Lecturer-participants were in agreement that the development of criticality in students is an important outcome of university education and in consonance with the view of Canagarajah (2002) that oral practices play a greater role in developing critical thought, oral discourse dominates classroom interaction. However, this took the form of lecturers mostly modelling authoritative expounding. Lecturers shared the view that student engagement was central to promoting criticality, yet classroom feedback was

minimal. Multiple choice testing has removed the need to read and write for assessment. The main impediment lecturers noted as negatively impacting on teaching and learning is the effects of massification. Large student numbers, resource issues that create poor teaching and learning environments and policies that are not followed through make effective teaching a daunting task. Irrespective of seniority and experience, all lecturers recognized their difficulties in teaching criticality, citing contextual factors that followed them into classrooms and created impediments to effective teaching.

6.0 Discussion and Conclusion

6.1 Discussion

Findings from observations and interviews raise questions around the levels of congruence between lecturersqpersonal epistemology and practice as described. While lecturers expect a critical perspective from students, the majority of those interviewed described as typical teaching practice sessions designed to transmit information to students. Lecturers mainly engaged students in oral discourse which, Canagarajah (2002) suggests, plays a greater role in developing critical thought. However, lecturersq approaches to teaching do not focus on adapting lectures to involve students more directly in the teaching and learning process. Lecturers mostly modelled authoritative exposition interjected with questions that sought to check studentsqunderstanding of subject matter, rather than engaging them in evaluative questioning that will help them make disciplined observations.

In Ghana, where the challenges of teaching large classes at university level is noted by all lecturers in the study, serious attention needs to be given to creative ways of dealing with some of the specific challenges, especially those related to levels of interaction and feedback. The need for active learning by students in university and the placing of students at the centre of the learning process might be achieved by the effective use of questioning. The use of evaluative questions that give students opportunities to engage in reflection, analysis, synthesis and communication in the context of their learning need to be included in all teaching approaches, including lectures (Fink, 2003). The use of educational technology to enhance the teaching of large groups by providing discussion opportunities has been suggested by lecturers who felt they are not getting the support required from their institutions.

The lecturers in this study shared a common view that discussions promote thinking and are related to the development of criticality, yet only a few of them engaged their students consistently in class or group discussions. Moreover, observation showed that these discussions were very short and not well structured interjections to lectures. Class discussions that are known to enhance critical thinking require the lecturer to rely less on lecturing. Class discussions might be effective when both lecturers and students ask more questions in class; students are encouraged to respond to questions posed by their peers; a greater proportion of students participate in the discussion;

students are motivated to question or challenge what is being said; and students are encouraged to volunteer comments rather than participate in discussion only when they are called upon or ask a question (Browne & Freeman, 2000). Tutorials offer opportunities for discussions. Thus the virtual cessation of tutorials described by both students and lecturers deprives students of opportunities to engage with their own and one another's ideas, an activity that might help them to understand the ways of thinking in the disciplines.

It could be argued that lecturers are adopting a teaching approach for survival in a mass higher education system. However if, as this study has shown, massification entails negative impacts on lecturers and students, it may be valid for lecturers to aim for a successful outcome within that context, rather than opting for methods which, while convenient and practicable, may also be viewed as dissonant or being in tension with the ultimate aims of higher education.

While students said they find class discussions helpful for their learning, most students felt uncomfortable expressing their opinions in large classes, especially when their peers criticize them for asking trivial questions. In order to engender class discussions that foster criticality, lecturers need to do more to bring about a class atmosphere where students are comfortable voicing a diversity of viewpoints and where they feel safe to question, critique, and disagree. Students will need to feel that they are not being disruptive of class, but rather contributing to the lesson. Lecturers might ensure positive outcomes by guiding discussion and facilitating student participation. This requires that lecturers know when to interject and when not to, how to pose thought-provoking questions, and what to do when students too readily reach consensus (Tsui, 2002).

The students interviewed in this study said they find cooperative learning useful. Indeed, cooperative learning is regarded as an important element of active teaching and small group cooperative work has been recommended in the context of large class teaching (Mulryan-Kyne, 2010). This is because apart from promoting cognitive elaboration, small group work provides feedback, enhances criticality, and motivates students to appreciate diversity, contributing to effective learning. The informal study groups that lecturers encourage students to form outside the formal classroom setting might give students opportunities to define knowledge for themselves and to use curriculum content as a stimulus for critical thinking. Indeed, Canagarajah (2002) notes that multilingual students must realize that the effective way to become insiders in a

discourse community is to enter the on-going discourse and conversation in a relevant but critical manner where their contribution is valued (p. 207). Students are more likely to express and share their views in such informal groups than in a large class.

When teaching is treated as a process of mutual learning by lecturers, it is likely to impact studentsq critical thinking development by influencing their willingness to practice critical thinking skills in class. Traditional classrooms, where students are merely expected to pay attention and take notes on a lecturerq lecture, present few opportunities for students to exercise critical thinking skills. Students are more apt to put their critical thinking into use in a setting where explicit avenues exist to provide and receive feedback on ideas, voice dissenting views and question othersq views. Such practices will enable students to develop the self-confidence for independent thinking that is essential to becoming critical thinkers.

It appears from the data that the close reading of academic texts is an assumedq university literacy skill based on very little evidence of studentsq reading abilities, and with no guidance offered on how to accomplish this. An area overlooked by most lecturers was teaching how to read and reading critically for the particular content area. Too often, lecturers have implicit expectations by telling students to read without making them aware of and then helping them adjust their literacy strategies. Indeed, Karp and Yoels (1976) found a positive link between the active participation of students in the context of teaching and learning and course reading. In Ghana, the use of supplementary reading materials (in the form of handouts) might be necessary to promote the independence required in higher education. However, when these supplementary materials also form the basis of the course and, as students in this study have observed, almost all test questions come from them, the challenge to students to read and read critically is absent and the active involvement of students in learning, which is integral to high quality education, is therefore reduced. In interviews and conversations with lecturers many denied that this happens, yet the data collected from my extensive observation and interviews with both students and lecturers suggest otherwise.

While content is taught, the skills needed to access the thinking that invites students into the academic community are not. How many academic staff in higher education have picked up a text, a technical text, and followed it clearly? Lecturers need to remember that students feel this frustration most of the time for several weeks or

months in every undergraduate course. Fostering critical reading of texts involves integrating reading into subjects, promoting meta-cognition, interrogating texts and using feedback to support learning (Wilson et al., 2004). These were not observed in classes. Since students would not read because they found academic texts challenging, modelling reading and the thinking involved could be an excellent method of demonstrating how to anticipate material. Students who read prior to class said they found this practice useful; teachers would therefore help student learning and thinking if they make explicit reference to the objective in assigning a particular reading and discuss ways in which students could best achieve those objectives (Luke, 2000). Students would benefit from specific instruction in selecting main ideas, asking themselves questions, looking for organizational clues, and attempting to summarize or explain what they have read (McKeachie, 1994). Although these strategies are taught in principle in the Communicative Skills course, the subject teacher can go over them for emphasis and to show their relevance and applicability to the particular discipline.

If lecturers can spend the first week at the beginning of an academic year showing students how to think about their reading, this could save much frustration later in the semester when students have given up trying to figure out what to look for or what it all means. Lecturers need to play a more directive role at the beginning of their courses, since guidance is most helpful in the early stages (Nicol, 2009). Giving students the opportunity to consult lecturers in groups or as individuals about the reading, structuring, argument and language of writing are additional strategies which can be helpful to students (Ridley, 2004).

The more explicit pedagogies such as suggesting reading strategies in a university classroom may be equated with lowering of standards, but it can be argued that simplification is a necessary feature of even the most complex kinds of work. Nothing inhibits clarification and good teaching more than the fear and loathing of any formulation that seems reductive. In addition to assessing course expectations lecturers need to assess students at the beginning of their university experience to understand where students are, rather than assuming or expecting them to catch up.

Generally, students in universities in Ghana are expected to undergo socialization into writing in an academic way (Hoadley-Maidment, 2000). Students in this study expected to be engaged in continuous writing on entering university. However, there was little evidence of academic writing among students. A feature of massification is large classes, and a drawback of large classes is the lack of student writing. Marking of

essays is time-consuming and the volume of marking and student feedback required in large classes seem to have forced lecturers to eliminate writing assignments in their courses with educationally bad consequences. The few who require students to write essays do not give usable feedback and grade superficially enough for these to lose most of their educational value. Indeed, clear anxieties emerged when lecturers were questioned on how equipped they felt to deal with large classes. It was, therefore, surprising when a lecturer-participant talked about giving his 1,000 students an essay, discussing their work with them and asking them to rewrite. I wondered whether he was telling me what I wanted to hear rather than the reality of the situation. This suspicion was confirmed by students in the focus group who said they mostly answered objective questions and when they do write essays, they never get their scripts back. Massification has led to a preference for multiple-choice testing which has removed the need to write for assessment.

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If students are going through a full course without having to write any essays, except perhaps very short ones during examinations, this must obviously be contributing to lowering the skill level for self-expression and critical thinking among graduates. Writing promotes psychological and physical engagement which implies =get in there and do somethingq It invites students into on-going intellectual dialogue that characterizes the various disciplines as they engage critically and thoughtfully with course readings (Svinicki, 2005; Carroll, 2002). Writing is necessarily production and encourages critical thinking by forcing students to acquire, synthesize, logically analyze information, organize their thoughts, contemplate their topic, evaluate information in a logical sequence, and present their conclusion in a persuasive manner. If students are not writing, they are yet to create a %dialect of constructing, reviewing and reconstructing+, a process which Tsui (2002, p. 755) argues allows students to utilize criticism in refining their work and is likely to invoke greater practice of critical thinking skills in students.

In the context of large classes such as those found in Ghana, writing does not necessarily need to consist of the weekly essay or the term paper. Students can gain some of the educational advantages of writing through short writing activities such as: summarizing major points in the lecture or writing down brief statements on the main points of the lecture, justifying their choice (McKeachie, 1994). Students can then review and discuss one anothers paper or report what they have written as a lead-in to large group or class discussions. The teacher may also collect and sample studentsq papers for class discussion or student-led discussions. Such classroom tasks do not

only stimulate students to think and write without the threat of grades, but oblige students to think during the lecture. They also give the teacher feedback about what and how students are learning from the lecture. In the sciences, where studentsq description of laboratory practicals is one of routine procedures of following instructions and writing up results, lecturers may set aside time to discuss process and product and ask students to justify their results.

Observation data from the current study demonstrated that the types of talk encouraged, the reading required, and the writing and assessment tasks that take place during courses hardly support on-going commitment to criticality. The nature of assessment, multiple choice tests, appears to detract from the aim of nurturing studentsqabilities to think critically. Criticality does not emerge from *ad hoc* practice. It develops over time through continuous practice as an integral part of the course (Wilson, et. al, 2004). That aside, the literature supports explicitness (Mingers, 2000; Fulop, 2002; Paltridge, 1999; Vardi, 1998; Chanock, 1998; Trishman et al., 1992). Explicit models of what is involved in thinking critically will raise studentsq meta-cognitive awareness.

Students will develop criticality if they are able to practice the strategies or patterns of presenting information unique to the particular field of study. The place to explain to students what is expected in a discipline is within that discipline (Skillen et al., 2001), rather than assume that students will automatically see the shift in expectations for each field of study. Insights from academic literacies research (Lea & Stierer, 2000), suggest that English as a language of learning is not just technical but also ideological and has disciplinary bases. Disciplines have recognizable identities and distinctive forms of professional language are used within the discipline. These symbolic forms of differentiation, DoAndrea and Gosling (2005, p. 61) argue, represent more fundamental differences in the epistemology of the subjects.

Beyond such initial and necessary steps, significant progress is likely to come about only if universities are willing to invest in resources that are needed to experiment with institution-wide changes. As observed earlier, while the use of technology to support small group discussions is being discussed extensively in Ghanaian higher education institutions, its use is yet to materialize. Policies aimed at enhancing teaching and learning in large classes have to be followed through, monitored and their impact evaluated. It is only then that the effectiveness of these policies can be determined. In the most important sense, that the university in its policy statements and course

outlines prizes critical thinking, the practices described by students and lecturers are completely in tension. Hence, visible support from the administrative level, faculties and departments is vital. From the accounts of lecturers, even if they want to engage students critically, as they all claim, the means to do so in the context of massification are not there. They will have to learn new skills in order to do this as what may happen with a group of 20 cannot be translated into a group of a hundred or more.

Large classes undoubtedly make the teaching of critical engagement with subject material more difficult, certainly if it is approached in ways that are appropriate to small groups. Massification can then become a reason or an excuse for the abandonment of critical thinking as a realistic outcome of university teaching. Nevertheless, identification of instructional techniques that are influential to critical thinking in the current context can assist lecturers to implement changes that will enable courses across the curriculum to become more effective in meeting the widely supported educational objective of educating students to think critically. If universities in Ghana are truly committed to fostering critical thinking skills in students, they will need to actively support lecturers in teaching reform efforts. Change is more likely when there is a supportive and encouraging environment than when individuals attempt changes on their own. Consequently, orientation sessions for newly recruited academic staff should not be one-off events. Seminars, workshops, and training sessions need to be regular components of on-going professional development programme for lecturers. It is also important for lecturers belonging to related disciplinary fields to work collaboratively since research into academic literacies shows that teaching goals and approaches tend to vary in disciplines.

6.2 Conclusion

The objective of this study was to explore literacy practices on undergraduate courses and what kinds of criticality students are learning in their courses. A central premise and indeed findings of this study is that classroom practices, and thus student learning, are intensely influenced by the actions of teachers. Successful development of critical thinking skills in students is a challenging and often daunting task that demands creativity and experimentation. This typically calls for additional efforts from lecturers, especially, in a mass higher education system such as that found in the Ghanaian context. The findings of this study indicate that lecturers in universities in Ghana have not really adapted to the changed circumstances of massification except in ways that mean that the critical acquisition of academic literacies is diminished, yet lecturers

expect and demand criticality from their students, being "often hesitant to question our own academic practices" (Robinson-Pant, 2005, p. 181).

It would appear that the majority of lecturers interviewed were clearly concerned about and frustrated by the constraints of massification. What is disturbing is that, in this small sample, the impact of massification on teaching and learning has resulted in lecturers feeling under pressure to teach in ways that conflict with their personal ideologies. What is even more disturbing is that while lecturers feel pressured to teach in ways that conflict with their personal ideologies, yet simultaneously they still aspire to criticality in their students. By maintaining an expectation of a critical perspective in students, lecturers are failing to address the real issues of students, which include external pressure to teach in ways that conflict with their expectations. As such, there is scope for lecturers to become ontologically insecure (Ball, 2003), which could result in forms of fabrication about what they do and why.

As a case study of 'developing criticality' in the context of massification of higher education in Ghana, the research literature suggests that large classes create problems for teachers, many of which can contribute to less effective teaching. However, a growing body of research has also shown that teacher expertise is a more significant determinant of student learning than class size (Wenglinsky, 2000; Wright, Horn, & Sanders, 1997; Greenwald, Hedges & Laine,1996). McKeachie (1994) also argues that although there are both practical and theoretical reasons why class size should make a difference, in the end, it is the skill and competence of the teacher that counts. Lammers & Murphy (2002) suggest that a teacher's profile of teaching techniques is not as indicative of student learning as the quality and context with which the techniques are used. The research question thus sought to find out what kinds of criticality students are learning in their courses. Whether or not lecturers implement alternative approaches to facilitate student learning becomes even more important in a mass higher education context.

Lecturers'status and experiences of teaching vary and, therefore, one would expect a variation in their ability to engender academic literacies that foster criticality in their courses. This would account for differences in the way they handle change in the current teaching and learning context.

It was necessary to find out what support was available for teaching and learning and whether it is making any difference to lecturers' efforts to foster criticality in their

students. To maintain quality of teaching and learning in the face of massification requires universities in Ghana to come to terms with the increase in student numbers, support lecturers to adapt to rapidly rising student numbers and address resource issues to support lecturersqnew roles. The extent to which universities in Ghana have changed to accommodate and to manage expectations of university teaching and learning will determine how this change impacts on lecturers and students.

As stated earlier in section 2.1 (Higher education and the quality of learning), the nature of learning that takes place in universities forms distinctive characteristics of degree level courses. Students entering universities in Ghana have expectations of what constitutes degree level work. It was important to find out what studentsq expectations of appropriate literacy practices are on entering university, the extent to which these expectations are met and what students find helpful for their learning in order to explore studentsqaccounts of academic literacy practices.

6.2.1 My research journey

My research journey started as an International EdD student. As I went through the modules for the programme, this research became a focus of and meaningful part of my everyday life. I have travelled as a novice researcher and a practitioner. My research enriched my practice, as my practice contributed to the research. As a practitioner, participantsqbeliefs and attitudes expressed during the research process, especially during observations and interviews, led me to check my own beliefs repeatedly. My research experience has led to an appraisal of my own perspectives and practice. I have become more tolerant and less likely to blame students. My classes are more engaging as I tend to go the extra mile in planning my lectures and ensuring that students sit in groups during lectures and engage in discussion more often. Student writing is no longer confined to the term paper. Students are now involved in a series of writing activities during lectures which lead to class or small group discussions.

As a novice researcher, my own view of research was that based on quantitative knowledge, facts, figures and questionnaires to analyze. I had to learn that there are other possible methods and that peopleś voices could be included in research. I tried not to force meanings on the data but talk with participants to incorporate their understandings into my own. When in describing what they are doing to foster criticality in students, lecturers dwelt on their frustrations caused by constraints of massification

and their feelings about their own position which clearly impacted on the support offered, there was a change in direction. Analysis showed that lecturers feel the in'uence of context acutely in delivering higher education, thus most of the talk of lecturers who took part in this study focused on their subjective perceptions of their teaching grounded in the higher education context which includes university level factors that place pressure on, and in some instances present barriers to teaching. However, being aware of and responsive in their teaching, although important, did not go far enough for the majority of the lecturers who took part in this study.

I have learned that process is very important and that patience is needed to listen to the data and draw meanings from it in an interactive manner, because data and interpretations are interdependent rather than successive stages of the research process. I have learnt that research seems a lot more complicated and more problematic than it is held out to be. Indeed, the whole issue of criticality is relevant to this study as well. What counts as good research in Ghanaian circles is somewhat different from that which is expected of a British doctoral study or publication in an ±internationalq journal. This means that it is difficult for a researcher in that context, including myself, to find a voice which is critical. Sometimes the attempt at criticality can be read as dogmatic.

6.2.2 Contribution to knowledge

Although transition to higher education is receiving research attention in developed countries (Aynsley and Jacklin, 2009; Laing, Robinson and Johnston, 2005; Jackson, C., 2003; Yorke, 2000), there is little data available on how students in Africa in general, and in Ghana in particular, experience it. Morley et al.qs (2010) study on widening participation in Ghana discusses the affective and social aspects of participation in higher education, especially the acquisition of self-confidence and social skills, more than subject knowledge. Research which examines the development of criticality during degree-level courses focuses on specific contexts such as Australian and British universities, or the classrooms of overseas students in the United States of America and elsewhere (Mitchell et al., 2003). Research into teaching and learning in higher education in Ghana is a relatively unexplored field. Thus this study attempts to fill this gap in knowledge. In highlighting the gulf between policy intentions and the lived experiences of students and lecturers, the issues raised in this study might stimulate critical debate and might therefore also lead to positive action.

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APPENDIX A: SUSSEX INSTITUTE RESEARCH ETHICS CHECKLIST

This checklist relates to the research ethics procedures at the time of fieldwork.

Standard 1: Safeguard the interests and rights of those involved or affected by the research

	Yes	No	N/A
1.1 Will you consider the well-being, wishes and feelings, and best interests of those involved or affected?	☒	☐	☐
1.2 Will written and signed consent be obtained without coercion? Will participants be informed of their right to refuse or to withdraw at any time?	☐	☒	☐
1.3 Will the purposes and processes of the research be fully explained, using alternative forms of communication where necessary and making reference to any implications for participants of time, cost and the possible influence of the outcomes?	☒	☐	☐
1.4 Where covert research is proposed, has a case been made and brought to the attention of the School Research Governance Committee and approval sought from the relevant external professional ethical committee?	☐	☐	☒
1.5 Does the proposal include procedures to verify material with respondents and offer feedback on findings?	☒	☐	☐
1.6 Will conditional anonymity and confidentiality be offered?	☒	☐	☐
1.7 Have you identified the appropriate person to whom disclosures that involve danger to the participant or others, must be reported?	☒	☐	☐

Please add further comments if helpful to clarify the above
All participants will be fully informed of the parameters of the research and will be asked to give written consent even though this is not considered normal practice in Ghanaian research contexts.
1.6 The universities are impossible to anonymize to Ghanaian readers but every effort will be made to anonymize individual participants.

Standard 2: Ensure the safety of researchers undertaking fieldwork

	Yes	No	N/A
2.1 Have you identified any physical or social risks to yourself in undertaking the fieldwork?	☒	☐	☐
2.2 Will you have access to an administrator who will keep a diary of any fieldwork visits and your whereabouts?	☐	☐	☒
2.3 Have you considered how you will collect your material and whether this could make you vulnerable?	☒	☐	☐
Please add further comments if helpful to clarify the above			

Standard 3: Uphold the highest possible standards of research practices including in research design, collection and storage of research material, analysis, interpretation and writing

	Yes	No	N/A
3.1 Will literature be used appropriately, acknowledged, referenced and where relevant, permission sought from the author(s)?	☒	☐	☐
3.2 Is the research approach well suited to the nature and focus of the study?	☒	☐	☐
3.3 Will the material be used to address existing or emerging research question(s) only?	☒	☐	☐
3.4 Does the research design include means of verifying findings and interpretations?	☒	☐	☐
3.5 Where research is externally funded, will agreement with sponsors be reached on reporting and intellectual property rights?	☐	☐	☒
3.6 Will plans be made to enable archiving of the research data?	☐	☒	☐
Please add further comments if helpful to clarify the above			

Standard 4: Consider the impact of the research and its use or misuse for those involved in the study and other interested parties.

	Yes	No	N/A
4.1 Have the short and long term consequences of the research been considered from the different perspectives of participants, researchers, policy-makers and, where relevant, funders?	☒	☐	☐
4.2 Have the costs of the research to participants or their institutions/services and any possible compensation been considered?	☒	☐	☐
4.3 Has information about support services that might be needed as a consequence of any possible unsettling effects of the research itself been identified.	☐	☐	☒
4.4 Are the plans flexible enough to take appropriate action should your project have an effect on the individuals or institutions/services involved?	☒	☐	☐
Please add further comments if helpful to clarify the above			

Standard 5: Ensure appropriate external professional ethical committee approval is granted where relevant

5.1 Have colleagues/supervisors been invited to comment on your research proposal?	**Yes** ☒	**No** ☐	**N/A** ☐
5.2 Have any sensitive ethical issues been raised with the School Research Governance Committee and comments sought?	**Yes** ☐	**No** ☐	**N/A** ☒
5.3 Has the relevant external professional ethical committee been identified?	**Yes** ☐	**No** ☐	**N/A** ☒
5.4 Have the guidelines from that professional committee been used to check the proposed research?	**Yes** ☐	**No** ☐	**N/A** ☒
Please add further comments if helpful to clarify the above			

Standard 6: Ensure relevant legislative and policy requirements are met

6.1 Do you need an enhanced Criminal Records Bureau check?	**Yes** ☐	**No** ☒	**N/A** ☐
6.2 Are you certain about implications arising from legislation? If not has contact been made with the designated officer (Chair of the SI Research Governance Committee)?	**Yes** ☒	**No** ☐	
Please add further comments if helpful to clarify the above			

Appendix B Interview questions

Lecturers

Questions used in the semi-structured interviews with lecturers:

1. What are your beliefs about university teaching and learning?
2. How do you communicate these beliefs to students?
3. How would you characterize typical: classroom interaction; reading tasks; writing tasks; assessment tasks?
4. What opportunities are there for students to think about their views and the views of others?
5. What resources are available for teaching and learning?

Students

Questions used in the semi-structured interviews with students:

1. What are your perceptions of teaching and learning at university?
2. How are your experiences of teaching and learning matched to these perceptions?
3. What activities would you describe as typical of: classroom interaction; reading tasks; writing tasks; assessment tasks?
4. How do these activities facilitate learning?
5. How would you describe the teaching/learning environment?