

THESIS TITLE: WRITING COMPETENCE IN ENGLISH: A GENRE-BASED ANALYSIS OF UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' WRITTEN TEXTS, 2000-2015

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ABSTRACT

Students' writing competence has been a concern in institutions of higher learning in the recent past. Educators, scholars and employers have complained about the declining writing skills of students at universities and those seeking employment. They claim that a considerable number of students "today" hardly communicate competently in writing. Moreover, scholarship on university students' writing competence has majorly focused on identifying the challenges students encounter in writing, providing little attention to how the students' writing competence has evolved overtime, especially in the Ugandan context. This study analyses the writing competence of science students enrolled at Makerere University between 2000 and 2015. Grounded in the Systemic Functional Linguistic (SFL) genre theory, the analysis focuses on the structural and linguistic features of the students' explanation genres and explores their main strengths and weaknesses in writing. The findings were compared across the times studied to establish how the students' writing competence had improved or deteriorated. The study established that students' writing across the years exhibited challenges that interfered with their writing competence. The use of linguistic and generic features among students in this study was different. Concerning the text structure, the findings demonstrate that all students' explanation genres throughout the years exemplified the explanation sequence, without a general statement. Comparatively, students of 2006-2010 exhibited a better performance of the structural features than those of 2000-2005 and 2011-2015, which implies a decline in structural competence in writing an explanation genre. With regard to the selected linguistic features, students' written texts revealed the use of scientific terms, nominalization, present tense, and appropriate use of conjunctions. On the basis of these findings, the study concludes that in fulfilling the communicative purpose, the students' writing competence over 15 years was fluctuating indicating a generally weak performance. Nonetheless, most students demonstrated better performance in the use of linguistic features in writing their explanation genres throughout the years compared to their use of structural features. The study, therefore, recommends that more attention should focus on the teaching of structural features, notably, the general statement which was identified as the most problematic area for students to acquire.

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DATE: 6TH OF January 2023

VENUE: CHUSS SMART ROOM

TIME: 2PM