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AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY OF MY STUDENT AND TEACHER EXPERIENCES  
IN FIRST-YEAR COMPOSITION (FYC) IN GHANA: (RE)DEVELOPING MORE  
INCLUSIVE PEDAGOGIES IN FYC IN THE U.S.

ERIC KORANKYE

98 Pages

In this thesis, I discuss the importance of culturally-responsive pedagogies in writing programs in multicultural classrooms, especially in the United States (U.S.) where student demographics are gradually shifting from the former U.S. dominance to a more heterogeneous learning community. The study examines the ways teachers of first-year composition (FYC) in the U.S. can reimagine composition studies outside the U.S. and practice inclusivity through the design of internationalized inclusive pedagogies for first-year composition classrooms. I share stories of my experiences of first-year composition (also called *Communication Skills*) from my roles as a student and teaching assistant in KNUST-Ghana. Through this narration and reflection, I emphasize the importance of storytelling as a source of epistemology and an important qualitative research technique. Further, I talk about experiences teaching in ISU's Writing Program and make connections between those experiences and the stories I shared from KNUST-Ghana. The purpose is to provide diversifying perspectives to curriculum design in writing programs through cross-cultural and institutional dialogue. I propose translingualism, multiliteracies, multiculturalism and internationalization as methods to attain culturally-responsive pedagogies.

KEYWORDS: Autoethnography, Internationalization, Translingualism, Multiliteracies, Culturally-responsive pedagogy, First-year composition, UScentrism, Communication skills, Cultural rhetorics, Multiculturalism

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ERIC KORANKYE

A Thesis Submitted in Partial  
Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

Department of English

ILLINOIS STATE UNIVERSITY

2021

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ERIC KORANKYE

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## CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

The increasing global call for culturally-responsive pedagogies in composition studies is a testament to the ongoing shift in student demographics in the U.S.—an increasing presence of international students alongside a growing domestic diversity. A culturally-responsive pedagogy is a student-centered approach to teaching in which the students’ unique cultural strengths and backgrounds are identified and nurtured to promote student achievement and a sense of well-being about the students’ cultural place in the world. U.S. education continues to shed its skins as it strives to respond strategically to the current rhetorical climate that calls for anti-racist, globalized, and internationalized pedagogies that altogether constitute the broader spectrum of culturally-responsive education.

In reorienting the discourse of responsible inclusion in pedagogy and scholarship in the field of composition studies, it is important to emphasize the relevance of internationalization in higher education. Internationalization is the process of integrating an international, intercultural, or global dimension into the purposes, functions, or delivery of postsecondary education (Knight, 2003, p. 2). Despite the continued relevance and popularity of the term, or label, *internationalization* in U.S. education, especially in composition studies scholarship, Donahue (2009) asserts that “at the same time, claims about the absence of writing instruction—and in particular, first-year or introductory writing courses—in countries outside of the United States are common currency” (p. 214). She opines that the notion of internationalization seems unidirectional as “[w]e tend to focus on how our U.S. experience is being internationalized: how English and its teaching are spreading; how other countries, different in their approaches or rhetorics, appear to lack what we have; and how we might avoid colonialist intervention or offer consultation” (p. 212). She argues further that “the U.S. picture of writing around the globe—its teaching, its learning, and our theories about these—has been highly partial, portraying the issue in particular ways, largely export-based, that might create

obstacles for U.S. scholars' thinking and thus impede effective collaboration or 'hearing' of work across borders" (p. 214). Horner and Lu (2010) corroborate this assertion that composition studies has been "a purely U.S. phenomenon ... and until recently ignored writing instruction outside the United States" (p. 308). This raises questions about our homogeneous composition historical tradition and the need for alternative perspectives.

Compared to the multiple layers of an onion, U.S. education is multi-layered with deep systemic exclusionary practices that manifest in manifold ways, and each layer points to the urgent need for a culturally-mediated education in composition studies that can revise this "shadowy" historical past. It is no coincidence that the lack of global writing instruction is flattened and occluded in U.S. composition, since as a field it began as predominantly white scholars teaching at Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs). Historical research shows that despite the evolving nature of higher education globally, for a long period of time, most pedagogies and academic modules of writing in the U.S. have not changed significantly as they continue to show traces of homogeneity and some kind of gatekeeping—a mechanism that essentializes UScentrism but "others" other well-established writing traditions from other countries. UScentrism is a tendency to assume the culture of the United States is more important than those of other countries or to judge foreign cultures based on American cultural standards. To address this wide range of demands and alternative needs—to acknowledge the pluralistic nature and relevance of writing traditions worldwide—Matelene (1985) suggests that we "try to understand and appreciate, to admit the relativity of our own rhetoric, and to realize that logics different from our own are not necessarily illogical (806)" (as cited in Bernstein, 2001, p. 296). Acknowledging and working with non-U.S. writing traditions are not only positive steps towards expanding the framework of our composition work, but they are also bold mechanisms of disrupting the perceived composition hierarchy.

Given the relevance of culture in every kind of education, how can writing instructors design their classroom pedagogy to incorporate the multiple cultures of diverse students? The UScentric approach to teaching writing has “a cultural logic that [has] gone largely unacknowledged in our field and that, by remaining unexamined, continues to exert a powerful influence on our teaching, our writing programs, and our impact on U.S. culture” (Horner & Trimbur, 2002, p. 595). To expand the radius of the conversation of culture and its influence, we need to examine what roles our national, institutional, and departmental cultures play in the design of writing pedagogies. When this is done, we can be sure to appreciate the identities and material embodiments of students.

In the practice of parents transporting babies from one location to the other, there are diverse useful ways employed that show cultural relationship with embodiment. In Africa, most mothers, especially Ghanaians, typically like to swaddle their babies tightly with cloths and carry them on the mothers’ backs when they are walking and sometimes even when they are travelling in cars. It is also common to see most White women strap their babies in car seats when they are travelling in cars and baby carriers or strollers when they are walking. These diverse ways have usability and accessibility concerns, and they come with their own affordances and constraints. Thus, none of these cultural artifacts can be prescribed as the best way of carriage because each has its own rhetorical and cultural context. In this illustration, each artifact symbolizes a writing tradition from a country that deserves recognition and acceptance in spaces where members of these countries converge.

But, has the U.S. culture’s way of conceptualizing writing been imposed on the globe as the only useful way? Do writing programs in the U.S. continue to cleave unto UScentric perspectives in spite of its visible multicultural demography? To promote inclusion and citizenship, and decolonize the classroom space, it is essential to create safe spaces for each cultural artifact—the baby carrier, car seat, and swaddling cloth—without privileging one over others.

It is important to recognize that at the center of UScentrism is white supremacy, and this has an overarching impact on writing programs in the U.S. Ranging from scholarship, authorship, pedagogy to writing program administration, racialization has been a drawback of liberatory education, and it is the reason black scholarship and non-U.S. writing instruction are occluded from most pedagogies. The hegemonic practice of seeing Black scholars and Black scholarship as genetically inferior or insignificant rather than valuing Black contributions to the knowledge production in the field contributes to the perpetuation of systemic inequalities. This racist approach reflects the notion of a single norm of thought and experience in the teaching and learning writing.

Like the movement of the sun around the orbit, student demographics shift with time. An American student studying in Ghana is described as an international student and so is a Ghanaian student who is studying in the U.S. The descriptor “international” is therefore geographically and rhetorically situated. Irrespective of who students are demographically, writing instructors should design “writing pedagogies and curricula that engage diverse students in intercultural, translingual, and multimodal literacy practices” (Khadka, 2020, pp. 181–182). Pedagogy has impact beyond the daily teaching to-do-list. Pedagogies are tied to identities (of instructors and students), which is why they should be purposefully designed and implemented to promote interaction and inclusion, drawing upon what students know individually and collectively. All aspects of writing—its teaching and actual practice—are situated in a culture, and they are always reified through the experiences and practices of its members and practitioners. It is therefore important to design a writing pedagogy that duly represents its members—pedagogy shaped by globalization and culture, where students’ diverse linguistic, cultural, and rhetorical traditions are valued as resources instead of problems. There should be a conscious decision to work against racist ideologies and actions in every aspect of teaching, from reading selection on a syllabus to assignment evaluation to embodied presence with

students. This is part of the restorative conversations we need to have towards decolonizing the classroom space and encouraging cross-border learning.

Recent studies show that, toward tackling the problem of integrating diverse identities and epistemologies of students from all identity groups (especially Black Americans), some work is being done in Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs), and Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs) for a while now in the U.S. These institutions, with the support of a culturally awakened faculty, continue to educate students of all races, ethnicities, and cultures from around the world, encouraging research in multilingual and multicultural approaches in teaching and writing within the U.S. According to Kynard (2013), “Despite such a deliberate divestment from [B]lack education, a good deal of literature was showing that the [B]lack students at those HBCUs were often more engaged in campus life, experienced more satisfactory and close relationships with faculty, more positive psychosocial adjustments, stronger cultural awareness and commitment, and greater academic gains as they went through college” (p. 176). Similar work is happening around border pedagogies, with people such as Laura Gonzales, as a Latina and Bolivian scholar in composition studies, championing transnational and multilingual composition pedagogy. In her groundbreaking study of the inventive intellectual work performed by multilingual communicators, Gonzales “provides methodological examples of how linguistic diversity can be studied in practice, both in and outside the classroom, and provides insights into the rhetorical labor that is often unacknowledged and made invisible in multilingual communication” (Sites of Translation, n.d.). Despite these important multiple projects happening, more needs to be done, especially looking beyond the U.S. to the international landscape.

Through translingual global writing instruction, practitioners of composition studies in the U.S. can and should be learning from second language writing scholarship or writing instruction that does not begin with, privilege, or even use Englishes. Horner and Trimbur (2002) intimate in their

“English Only and U.S. College Composition” project that they are not suggesting an abandonment of English as a language of instruction in the teaching of writing, but “instead [they] want to examine the sense of inevitability that makes it so difficult to imagine writing instruction in any language other English” (p. 595). Tackling such epistemological questions is where we can begin to make visible and destabilize our own assumptions of how the teaching and learning of writing works in the world, and not just privileging how the teaching and writing of/in English(es) works in schools in the U.S., which has historically been the focus of composition for obvious reasons, and also reasons we are ready to move beyond.

To sum up, the push for culturally-responsive pedagogies in composition studies in the U.S. questions our understandings of internationalization, and how deep we want to be immersed in its tenets. The attention of teachers and scholars in the field has focused on putting U.S. composition on the global map—not necessarily seeking to compare notes, exchange ideas about teaching writing, and theorize through researching the teaching of academic writing in other countries and the complicated linguistic relationships that are evolving. Instead, according to Donahue (2009), “U.S. composition scholars [continue to hold] various claims to unique knowledge, expertise, and ownership of writing instruction and writing research in higher education” (p. 213). At what point would this narrative change—where we would have cross-border stories that “consider, critique, and reorient the discourse of internationalization from different perspectives while highlighting global work in writing studies” (p. 214)? Not only will this cause a rapid change in the composition paradigm, but it will also help students become increasingly aware of the worlds beyond their localized perspectives.

This study offers a glimpse into the educational systems and institutional cultural values from my multiple roles as a student, teacher, and also a lifelong participant member of multiple Ghanaian cultures surrounding the activity of education. How can we explicitly state—and, more

importantly, live—our commitments to just, contextualized, and equitable pedagogical practices? It can be evidenced that there is a little work being done in this area, towards this objective, and this study is contributing to diversifying the ways we teach composition. Donahue (2009) recommends that “we need to begin thinking about where our work fits in the world rather than where the world’s work fits into ours, and move beyond an ‘us-them’ paradigm” (p. 214). This is a critical step for enacting deep systemic revisions in the field of writing. The differences in writing and writing instruction across languages and cultures should challenge writing instructors to expand their teaching repertoire and to diversify teaching strategies when dealing with diverse students.

In the next sections of this chapter, I discuss the purpose and direction of this study, and situate the study in the ongoing rhetorical conversations in composition studies. Next, in order to put into proper perspective my review of related literature and discuss my methodological framework, I will indicate the research questions that will help guide this study. In the literature review section, I focus on synthesizing major contested perspectives and previous research data about globalization and its relevance in culturally-responsive education. The purpose is to provide readers with the lens to understand why we need to decenter our contexts in the field of composition and embrace writing traditions that have been occluded and labeled as lacking in the past. In the concluding section of the chapter, I elaborate on the scope of the project and address a number of limitations, especially emerging from the methodology applied and literature reviewed, that could affect the validity and reliability of the results of this autoethnographic study.

### **Purpose of the Study**

This is an autoethnographic study of my undergraduate experiences as a student and a teaching assistant in First-Year Composition (FYC) classrooms in 2009 and 2014, respectively, in the

Department of English at the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST)<sup>1</sup> in Ghana. In the terminology of the Ghana education system, FYC is the equivalent of Communication Skills (CS), which is a compulsory course for all first-year students in most Ghanaian tertiary institutions. The purpose of this study is to explore some of the teaching and assessment practices I experienced in the CS program in KNUST-Ghana through a cultural rhetorics lens. The study also seeks to examine the ways the experiential research can help teachers of FYC in the U.S. reimagine composition studies outside the U.S. and practice inclusivity through the design of internationalized inclusive pedagogies for first-year composition classrooms.

This project is one of such emerging cross-border studies that shift paradigms and respond to the rhetorical exigency within composition studies. The autoethnography uses my Ghanaian story of FYC as a local cultural site to contribute to the ongoing scholarly conversation about expanding writing instruction and research. The primary research goal is to discuss how my personal narrative, or autoethnography in the FYC program, can act as a source of privileged knowledge to expand knowledge in the field. As I explain in more detail, this program is a good site to study for many reasons: first, as a member of the community, I can more easily strive to gain an insider perspective, and second, by critically reflecting on my local setting (and my role within it as a former teaching assistant and student), I hope that this study can affect future change and assist the program in moving toward the kinds of transformations it envisions. In sharing this research, I hope to provide strategies for others who may wish to examine their own local contexts with an eye toward self-reflection and potential change. The thematic focus is how we might contextualize the specific concerns, interests, goals, and possibilities that are driving our push against the restricted purview of

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<sup>1</sup> Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST) is a renowned public university in Ghana which offers tertiary education to thousands of Ghanaians and international students.

current practice of composition studies, and how these emerging studies might respond to and shape the existing homogenous foci of FYC.

This current study is significant because it might be the first of many research projects to emerge from Ghana, Africa that would help us understand better what we mean by responsible inclusivity in the field. As an English major student from Ghana who has benefitted immensely from the writing program in Ghana, I reflect in this project how the U.S. can benefit from what it lacks—but which is abundant beyond its borders—and develop from the rich writing and research opportunities from Ghana. The project challenges the U.S. to move beyond the position of “safety and comfort” to trouble the still waters to embrace culturally-responsive pedagogies. The purpose is to examine how the intersections of culture, access, and power can shape multicultural pedagogies and learning in FYC.

Although it is beyond the scope of this study to discuss the complete range of possibilities of representing cultural inclusion and counter-writing approaches in all FYC classrooms, this study offers some preliminary suggestions, based significantly upon my cross-cultural experiences in different writing programs, some realistic approaches that can move us a step further in incorporating internationally-responsive pedagogies. This autoethnographic study is an emerging project, not a project meant to be completed. The implications of the study hopefully will be to begin a cross-institutional dialogue between my experiences as a writing instructor in the Writing Program in Illinois State University in the U.S. and as a teaching assistant in Communication Skills at the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST) in Ghana. This thesis is a space to begin this work, building off of existing scholarship in the fields of composition studies and cultural rhetorics. The future work will be a comparative rhetorical analysis of how different writing programs in non-U.S. settings conceptualize first-year composition.

## Research Questions

This study calls for a new paradigm shift for inclusionary rhetoric and citizenship in the classroom. To help achieve this objective, my main research questions for this project are as follows:

- How does the writing program in KNUST-Ghana conceptualize first-year composition (referred to as *Communication Skills (CS)*)?
- How can the knowledge of the CS program in Ghana help in designing more culturally-responsive writing pedagogies for the teaching and learning of FYC in the U.S.?
- How can the CS program in KNUST-Ghana continue to revise its pedagogical practices to incorporate multicultural teaching and learning?
- How can a cultural rhetorics methodology help bring out a better understanding of an autoethnographic study?
- How does cultural rhetorics work as a focal lens to examine writing pedagogies?

## Literature Review

In the twenty-first century, the need for globalized writing pedagogies has necessitated continuous pressures by scholars, writing teachers, and students for deep systemic revisions in composition studies in the U.S. This global wave is monumental because the fast-spreading effects of globalization can be seen across writing programs in the U.S. through the increase of cultural and linguistic diversity, resulting in both educational challenges and opportunities. Canagarajah (2013) observes that due to the processes of globalization, migration, digital communication, and transnational relations, there has been considerable interest in recent years in understanding writing as a negotiation of cross-language relations (p. 40). In Payne and Desser's (2011) examination of the impact of globalization on disciplinary work in higher education, they use writing instruction as a touchstone and rhetoric/composition as a disciplinary case study. They argue that the lingering

questions about globalization in the educational landscape continue to be ignored because of the colossal effects of colonization that has been formalized in most writing classrooms.

### **Globalization as a Gateway to Culturally-Responsive Pedagogy**

Globalization is the flow of technology, economy, knowledge, people, research, values, and ideas across borders. Knight (2003) states, “Globalization presents new opportunities, challenges, and risks; it affects each country in a different way due to a nation’s individual history, traditions, culture and priorities” (p. 2). The Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) also notes, “The implications of globalization for writing pedagogy and research are varied and complex.” On one hand, globalization can perpetuate a fixed “best practice” stance by writing programs that embody the top hierarchies. One typical example is the UScentric approach in the teaching and learning of writing that has engendered numerous calls for revisions in the field. On the other hand, globalization can provide the opportunity to develop alternative perspectives on the teaching and study of writing. However, this possibility is predicated on the willingness of writing programs to keep their boundaries fluid and revise practices and policies about the ways in which writing is conceptualized. There ought to be a rhetorical listening to how others do the work elsewhere around the globe, recognizing that U.S. composition instructors have a lot to learn, not just to export their pedagogy or assimilate others into theirs. The research focus then is to discuss these possibilities in relation to the ways in which systems, structures, and practices militate against evolving globally-responsive pedagogies.

There is a growing body of literature that explores diverse ways we can incorporate globalization in the design of pedagogy in the field of composition studies. Tardy (2011) notes that “[a] number of scholars have asked compositionists to examine the ways in which English Only ideologies underlie and are perpetuated by the field’s research, pedagogical approaches, and institutional structures (Bawarshi; Donahue; Lu; Okawa; Trimbur)” (p. 636). The study of Matsuda

et al. (2006) on bridging the disciplinary divide through integrating a second-language perspective into writing programs responds to this dominant discourse in composition studies that enables what they call “a myth of linguistic homogeneity.” This discourse excludes language difference in the classroom and filters out language minority students in admissions. Through such exclusionary practices, language diversity is suppressed rather than recognized and valued.

In response to this UScentric traditional approach, the field of composition studies has generated rhetorical conversations and leaders of its organizations have composed formal documents taking stances on these issues including the “CCCC Statement on Globalization in Writing Studies Pedagogy and Research.” CCCC recommends “the kind of knowledge exchange that will benefit members of CCCC as well as members of relevant organizations outside of North America” so that “CCCC members will benefit from being aware of the rich traditions and contexts in which writing is taught and studied outside of North America.” The aim is to “promote the study of writing practices and pedagogies in other national and regional contexts,” “design pedagogies in ways sensitive to the complex effects of globalization,” and “emphasize respect for different kinds of knowledge in cross-institutional and transnational curricula.”

In writing research, CCCC recommends research on “subjects such as the applicability and adaptability (or not) of composition theory across international contexts; writing and writing instruction in languages other than English; how writing studies may transcend “traditional” borders along national, cultural, or linguistic lines...” This call for global composition by the CCCC is timely because international research shows that privileging only UScentric approach in FYC is counterproductive, especially in the current globalized educational context, and does not foster growth in the field. Even though some research is being done in composition studies now to move beyond these latent borders (Horner & Lu, 2010; Donahue, 2009; Tardy, 2011), there is still more work to be done, especially focusing on scholarship and research from Africa, in order to achieve

the kind of globalization that expands composition studies in culturally-responsive ways. This thesis helps meet this disciplinary need.

### **Translingualism and Multiliteracies as Methods of Culturally-Responsive Pedagogy**

CCCC's Statement on Second Language Writing and Multilingual Writers recognizes campuses around the world as fundamentally multilingual spaces in which students and faculty bring to the acts of writing and communication a rich array of linguistic and cultural resources that enrich academic life and should be valued and supported. An understanding of this positionality by writing instructors is a great step to legitimizing all identities, especially minorities, that crowd into our classrooms. Gonzales (2015), in her project on "Multimodality, Translingualism, and Rhetorical Genre Studies," corroborates this as she situates one possible future for rhetorical genre studies (RGS) in the translingual, multimodal composing practices of linguistically diverse composition students (p. 1). This is a focal method for this thesis because of the importance of the complex, multiple sets of identities that the presence of many different languages in our classrooms present.

Ideologies and cultures are embedded in people, and they are externalized through language. The power of language is comparable to the efficacy and mysteriousness of magic, which is able to manipulate its victims in many incredible ways. In the classroom space, language is not only an abstract means for expressing thoughts and ideas, but a concretized means of emphasizing the foundational argument of embodiment, positionality, and power that moves/pushes students into centers and margins. Language is a life-shaping force. Language is people; therefore, a language policy is a people policy. The increased awareness in moving beyond the "single language/single modality" approach to writing is a positive approach to legitimizing all language variations in the classroom.

A translingual pedagogy requires a different type of teacher, a co-learner. Writing instructors should rethink the writing classroom as a site of negotiation as opposed to prescription. Instructors

should be open to gaining literacies in students' languages and dialects, as a way to demonstrate readiness to move beyond the single-language model of instruction. Horner, Lu, Royster, and Trimbur (2011) intimate that such a "traditional approach to writing in the United States that takes as the norm a linguistically homogeneous situation: one where writers, speakers, and readers are expected to use Standard English or Edited American English—imagined ideally as uniform—to the exclusion of other languages and language variation" degenerates the efforts for global composition (p. 303). Giampapa (2010) suggests that "one way to take advantage of the 'current context' is to harness diversity (i.e., students' linguistic and cultural resources)" (p. 408) and to reconceptualize pedagogies that build on these resources, recognizing also the multi-diverse ways in which writing is now being conceptualized across cultures and knowledges.

According to the latest United States Census Bureau American Community Survey in 2017, over 20 percent of U.S. residents speak a language other than English, with Spanish being the largest non-English language spoken at home by 40.5 million people and nearly 3.4 million people speaking Chinese. "Despite the longstanding multilingual history of the U.S. population, most composition scholars have until recently ignored writing instruction outside the United States" (Horner & Trimbur, 2002, p. 308). It is unbelievable that a "tacit policy of monolingualism and a U.S.-centric focus remain the norm for composition programs; the teaching of writing in other languages and outside the United States, the writing of translations or of multilingual texts, and the writing of students other than U.S. students has been ignored" (Horner & Trimbur, 2002, p. 597). This observation has given rise to studies that seek to disrupt the homogenous foci of FYC. In the project of Tardy (2011), her essay turns specifically to the local to consider the obstacles and, more importantly, the opportunities that already exist for enacting a new multilingual norm in the teaching of writing in U.S. postsecondary contexts" (p. 635). This project is important because we need to

capitalize on reaping more of the opportunities that multilingualism presents, while working against obstacles that support a monolingual model.

An increasing number of U.S. teachers and scholars of writing recognize that the traditional ways of understanding and responding to language differences are inadequate to tackling the calls for multicultural perspectives in the teaching and learning of writing. One of these traditional ways that have prevailed historically is the privileging of the Standard Written (American) English or, as April Baker-Bell and others refer to as Standard White English, over all other student languages that may be present in the classroom. “The ‘globalization’ of English has removed control over what constitutes English from the United States and the United Kingdom: There are now a variety of “Englishes,” each with their own (contested and fluctuating) standards and conventions, with which the varieties of English used in the United States and the United Kingdom must contend (Kachru, 1990) (as cited in Horner & Lu, 2010, p. 309). As a product of “global Englishes,” countries such as Ghana in West Africa prides itself with a variety called “Educated Ghanaian English,” which is usually spoken by most elites, students, and educated folks.

Culturally-responsive pedagogy has emerged as a promising avenue for deconstructing this counterproductive approach, and one of such ways of dismantling feelings of disempowerment engendered by students having to leave their identities and languages at the school door is the translingual approach. This is a new paradigm that “sees difference in language not as a barrier to overcome or as a problem to manage, but as a resource for producing meaning in writing, speaking, reading, and listening” (Horner, Lu, Royster, & Trimbur, 2011, p. 303). Canagarajah (2013) notes that “while the term multilingual perceives the relationship between languages in an additive manner (i.e., combination of separate languages), *translingual* addresses the synergy, treating languages as always in contact and mutually influencing each other, with emergent meanings and grammars” (p. 41). A translingual approach seeks to develop alternatives to conventional treatments of language

difference among teacher-scholars of composition and the language arts generally. Translingualism moves beyond the single language/single modality approach to writing and legitimizes all variations of language in the classroom. “A translingual approach directly addresses the gap between actual language practices and myths about language spread through that industry's political work in order to combat the political realities those myths perpetrate” (Horner, Lu, Royster, & Trimbur, 2011, p. 305). This purpose extends the CCCC resolution to differences within and across all languages.

According to Horner, Lu, Royster, and Trimbur (2011), a translingual approach argues for (1) honoring the power of all language users to shape language to specific ends; (2) recognizing the linguistic heterogeneity of all users of language both within the United States and globally; and (3) directly confronting English monolingualist expectations by researching and teaching how writers can work with and against, not simply within, those expectations (p. 305). To this effect, a translingual approach requires writing teachers to keep all students in mind when selecting classroom activities, teaching materials, and pedagogical strategies. “These pedagogical choices should promote intercultural communication and understanding in class and beyond” (CCCC). A translingual approach also requires teachers to take into account students’ prior literacy experiences across languages and dialects, valuing students’ ways of life, ways of knowing, and ways of meaning making.

It is essential that as we seek to expand the homogenous foci of FYC, we rethink literacies in multilingual contexts. How can we draw upon students’ diverse literacies as a resource for learning within the mainstream classroom, thus expanding the notion of school literacy as monolingual English literacy only? According to Rowsell, Kosnik, and Beck (2008), “Literacy as conceptualized within current educational curricula and pedagogical practices needs to be reconceptualized to encompass the multilingual, multiliterate practices that linguistic minority students bring into the classroom” (p. 410). An emerging approach that fosters this reconceptualization is the design of

multiliteracies pedagogy. The multiliteracies framework (Gee, 1990; Kern, 2000; New London Group, 1996; Swaffar & Arens, 2005) extends the more traditional definition of literacy—the ability to read and write—to encompass “dynamic, culturally and historically situated practices of using and interpreting diverse written and spoken texts to fulfill particular social purposes” (Kern, 2000, p. 6). Literacy is always situated, and it is important in fulfilling social and cultural purposes.

Giampapa (2010) stipulates that multiliteracies highlight the importance of creating learning environments to engage students in a wide range of literacy practices that are creative and cognitively challenging and that bring together text-based and multimedia forms of meaning making. Multiliteracies pedagogy builds on instructors’ personal and professional identities and draws from the linguistic and cultural forms of capital and identities of students. It opens up opportunities for students to access the academic literacies that are valued within schools.

Giampapa (2010) further argues that “[t]he purpose of multiliteracies pedagogy is to develop classroom-based projects that incorporate language and culture and to work towards spreading an ethos to validate students’ L1 culture and language across the school” (p. 414). According to Allen and Paesani (2010), “the adoption of a multiliteracies framework in response to calls for curricular change is not entirely novel, yet most scholarship to date has focused on the need for more explicit attention to students’ linguistic development in advanced-level content courses rather than on pedagogical models for integrating textual content into introductory language courses” (p. 122). In light of the changing landscape in U.S. higher education today, multiliteracies pedagogy represents a means of keeping the boundaries of the teaching and learning of writing fluid and it needs to find more space in writing programs.

What we know is that we need to move beyond the traditional ways in which first-year college composition instruction has been prescribed in the past particularly because of how the traditional ways do harm to students’ identities by devaluing their languages and cultures. A

shortcoming in scholarship, often due to political, capitalistic, and methodological tendencies and self-sufficiencies, is a lack of studies about non-U.S. writing traditions. Which writing projects/programs from outside the U.S. can help clear the “key blind [sic] spots in our awareness of deep and rich writing research and programming traditions internationally, of how we fit—or do not fit—into this broader world, and of missed opportunities for self-reflection and growth” (Donahue, 2009, p. 212)? It is important to consider cross-border pedagogies that would assess our self-portrait around the world, and reflect on that assessment.

This current study aims to fill this knowledge gap. It also aims to respond to calls by CCCC that recommend that “[s]cholars should conduct research with students to understand their backgrounds, and with faculty to understand what they bring to the project, including dispositions toward language, methods, contexts, and expectations.” The study is an autoethnographic report of the researcher’s firsthand experiences in the writing program in KNUST, Ghana that can contribute to shaping the perspectives of FYC as taught in the U.S.

### **Composition Studies (Communication Skills) in Ghana, KNUST**

There have been ongoing discussions about the nature and relevance of the Communication Skills course across universities in Ghana, especially at the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST). KNUST was originally called Kumasi College of Technology and later after the 24 February 1966 Revolution in Ghana changed to the University of Science and Technology. By another act of Parliament, Act 559 of 1998, it was renamed as Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (which is its current name). This institution was established primarily to offer science and technology education to Ghanaians, especially indigenes of Kumasi, the city in which the school is located. However, about a half century later, the university has expanded its operations and added on disciplines that were not originally spelt out in its mandate, in response to the international precedence set to ensure holistic training. Today, the university does

not only offer science education, but it also has programmes in the humanities and social sciences such as English, Politics, Law, Economics, etc. Research shows that most world class science and technology universities today offer the humanities, including religion and divinity. In fact, most of them began as either Colleges of Theology as in the case of Oxford and Cambridge in the UK, and Divinity Schools as in the case of Emory and Harvard in the U.S. It is pertinent to note that for a university to be truly international, it must offer programs in both the sciences and humanities.

The presence of the Department of English in a science-oriented university is justified. The teaching of English or writing in a university of science and technology has, from the very beginning, been central to the vision of this University's founders who identified the value of a humanities and social sciences program to science and technology. It broadens the minds of science students by covering areas outside their special areas of study, thus bridging the seemingly wide gap between the worlds of imagination and science, and it provides students of social sciences with interesting combinations that prepare them not only for a wide variety of job opportunities in public service, but also for further studies in diverse areas of communication, human resource management, and teaching at the highest levels of education.

Communication Skills (CS) is one of the general courses taught in most tertiary institutions in Ghana, including KNUST. In this discussion, the course structure from three public universities in Ghana—KNUST, University of Ghana (UG), and University of Cape Coast (UCC)—will be put into conversation. Tortor (2006) asserts that “the nature of the Communication Skills course appears quite unique from other subjects. Communication Skills is the foundation of language learning from which effective speaking, writing and reading emerge and it is the bedrock of human language learning” (as cited in Asemanyi, 2015, p. 2). Asemanyi (2015) argues that “the Communication Skills course is a course that enables students to have knowledge or the ability to use the requisite skills to communicate properly” (p. 1). As cited in Asemanyi (2015), “Gogovi, Gborsong, Yankah and Essel

(2006) agree that the study of communication skills would not only be useful to students by enhancing their academic performance, but would also be of immense help in the job market” (p. 3). This is true because communication remains a vital component of the effective functioning of every organization.

According to the course description by the Department of English in KNUST on its website: “[The CS program] is a remedial course aimed at correcting common grammatical errors in the students’ use of English. The course takes all first-year students through a review of English grammar, and is a required course. The objective is to revise grammatical usage in preparation towards effective speaking and writing” (“Course Description,” n.d.). KNUST regards the course as remedial, introductory, or developmental primarily because it is designed to polish the English proficiency skills of first-year students who graduated from senior high school and prepare them for rigorous academic writing in the years ahead of them.

The Communication Skills course was first started in the country by the University of Ghana (UG) and then the University of Cape Coast (UCC) before KNUST also introduced it. At UG, the Communication Skills course is called *Academic Writing (UGRC 110)*, and it is compulsory for all first-year students. According to the course description in the university’s handbook, “The main objective of Academic Writing I is to equip students with the language skills that will enable them to read and write effectively. Students will be taken initially through fundamental issues in grammar and composition in order to consolidate their language skills in these areas” (p. 6). The course is taken for two semesters, and each semester constitutes 3-credit hours. The second part of the course is *Academic Writing II (UGRC 210)* and it focuses on “the structure of the essay, unity, completeness and coherence in essay writing; summarizing as a skill basic to exposition, writing from sources, referencing skills and avoiding plagiarism” (p. 7). These learning outcomes are important to improving students’ writing competencies and preparing them as they enter the workforce.

At UCC, the introductory course is called *Communicative Skills I (CMS 107)*, and it is a compulsory 3-credit hour course for all first-year students as well. According to the course description, “This course is aimed at equipping fresh students to make the transition from pre-university level to the university level. It assists them in engaging and succeeding in complex academic tasks in speaking, listening, reading and writing. It also provides an introduction to university studies by equipping students with skills that will help them to engage in academic discourse with confidence and fluency” (“Course Description,” n.d.). The second-semester part of the course is *Communicative Skills II (CMS 108)*, which is “a follow-up course on the first semester one. It takes students through writing correct sentences, devoid of ambiguity, through the paragraph and its appropriate development to the fully-developed essay. The course also emphasizes the importance and the processes of editing written work.”

In the case of KNUST, the course is called *Communication Skills (ENGL 157)*. Here, the emphasis of this 3-credit hour course is “on usage of grammatical and lexical items. Topics such as spelling, parts of speech, punctuation, subject-verb agreement, misrelated and ambiguous constructions, sentence fragments and skills such as reading, comprehension, summary and paragraph writing [are] taught.” The second part of the course is *Communication Skills II (ENGL 158)* which is designed for the following purpose:

[T]o continue the process of helping students to become better communicators. Here, the emphasis is on business and technical communication so as to equip students with the relevant tools of communication necessary for functionality in business in a competitive world in which effective communication is crucial for success. Topics such as Communication in Organizations, Memos, Briefs, Letters and CVs, Reports, Minutes, Proposals, Oral Communication and Presentation skills will be taught. (“Course Description,” n.d.).

Although the course might be conceptualized slightly differently in these three public universities, they share some commonalities that are worth noting. In all cases, the courses are housed by the Department of English in the various universities; lecturers are chosen from the Department, and examination questions are set by the lecturers. The courses constitute 3-credit hours; they are taught for two semesters, and they are compulsory for all first-year students. As the researchers Gborsong et al. (2015) note, “It has been established that [most] undergraduate students as well as [most] lecturers want the course to be compulsory and maintained because of [its] importance” (p. 418). In terms of modeling, the courses are designed for students to meet the “Standard British English,” against the background that Ghana is a former British colony, and Ghanaian students learn the British English as a Second Language. Studies show that this fixation on Standard British English is too restrictive and has contributed to many students’ failing in Written and Spoken English. A 1996 report of the Education Commission, *On Addressing Problems in Language and Communication Skills in Education*, states: “This Report has established that the standard of language and communication skills within the education system has been deteriorating over a period of time and has now reached alarming proportions as attested to by various examination results” (as cited in Asemanyi, 2015, p. 2). More than two decades later after this report was published, little has been done to enact deep systemic revisions.

What we know is that there may be more than a few reasons that could account for students’ inability to conform to the prescribed “standard” and practice the knowledge acquired from the Communication Skills program. In the view of Asemanyi (2015), “Due to the lapses in student’s performance and competence in the use and knowledge of English language, some writers in communication skills like Acquah and Nyantuameh (2006) have even advocated that the Communication Skills should be made a two-year course as a means of promoting thoughtful and positive attitude for effective communication” (p. 3). This knowledge and suggestions have

prompted many research projects in the academic landscape in Ghana, but what we may not know is how to improve on the course itself through established research. Also, we need research that theorizes how the CS program can be diversified to take into consideration the shifting student demographics in KNUST, especially the increasing number of its international students. Little is also known about why, in spite of the over 12 years of English tuition and an additional year of Communication Skills studies in the university, Ghanaian students applying to most foreign universities for postgraduate studies still have to take English proficiency tests in order to gain admission. Is this international requirement a characterization of Ghanaian students' abilities? Do the writing instructors of the CS program lack knowledge of multiliteracies, translanguaging, and cultural rhetorics that have led to this gap? Or, is it the case that mainstream Communication Skills in Ghana is at present too narrow in its scope and limited in its perspective to meet the perceived international "standards"? Or do universities in the U.S. lack cultural awareness and thus, do not know that Ghanians are English-proficient precisely because of their education? Locating the "problem" only within individual students' "inabilities" as opposed to attending to structural issues that fail to recognize and honor what students can do is a deficit paradigm that fail to make the necessary systemic revisions.

It is against this background of opportunity gap that I seek to do a comprehensive study into the teaching of Communication Skills in KNUST to assess what can be done to improve on the teaching and learning of the course. According to Gborsong et al. (2015), "For over three decades now, research on undergraduate student pedagogy has shifted focus from an error analysis tradition to an emphasis on learner needs" (p. 413). The existing literature is replete with studies that examine such patterns of errors as spelling, tense and concord in Ghanaian university students' writing (Yankson, 1994; Dako & Forson, 1997) (as cited in Gborsong et al. (2015). Although earlier proposed by (Dzameshie, 1997; Afful, 2007), among others, modern research from Gborsong et al.

(2015) brings novel insights into the urgent need to modify the program content in order to meet current exigencies so far as learner needs are concerned. How can we design courses that meet students' needs? How do we create a learning environment in which a culturally diverse student body can thrive? My study seeks to answer these questions.

### **Definitions of Methodological Terms**

Moving forward, the remainder of the project will adopt the following operational definitions, given that these methodological terms can be operationalized so differently. Also, these definitions inform my methodological framework. At issue is not developing a universal definition, rather ensuring that the meaning is appropriate for a broad range of contexts and countries of the world, which is why these contextualized definitions appear at this point of the chapter.

*Autoethnography*—It is a form of qualitative research in which an author uses self-reflection and writing to explore anecdotal and personal experience and connects this autobiographical story to wider cultural, political, and social meanings and understandings.

*Border pedagogies*— An educational approach and metaphor designed to help teachers incorporate the complex intersections of identity, space, place, language, culture, and belonging, often relevant for students whose culture does not always align with traditional U.S. schooling.

*Codeswitching*—It is a process of shifting from one linguistic code (a language or dialect) to another, depending on the social context or conversational setting (Morrison, 2017).

*Culturally-responsive pedagogy*—It is a student-centered approach to teaching in which the students' unique cultural strengths and backgrounds are identified and nurtured to promote student achievement and a sense of well-being about the student's cultural place in the world.

*Cultural rhetorics*—According to Haas, as cited in Cobos, et al. (2018), it is the “study of everyday rhetoric and writing practices of specific cultural groups . . . and the historical, social, cultural, and political contexts that shape those practices” (p. 144).

*Globalization*—It is a growing interdependence in the world, fueled not only by the economy but also by the environment, communication technologies, health, energy, politics, immigration, and other forces (CCCC).

*Inclusivity*—Technical communication scholars Rebecca Walton, Kristen R. Moore, and Natasha N. Jones (2016) define inclusivity as “efforts to forward a more expansive vision [of an established space, such as an academic discipline], one that intentionally seeks marginalized perspectives, privileges these perspectives, and promotes them through action” (p. 3). The action part of this definition is important because Chavez (2015) believes that “projects of inclusion don’t rupture oppressive structures; instead they uphold and reinforce those structures by showing how they can be kinder and gentler and better without actually changing much at all” (p. 166).

*Internationalization*—It is the process of integrating an international, intercultural, or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of postsecondary education (Knight, 2003, p. 2).

*Multiliteracies*—Multiliteracies highlight the importance of creating learning environments to engage students in a wide range of literacy practices that are creative and cognitively challenging and that bring together text-based and multimedia forms of meaning making (Giampapa, 2010).

*Translingualism*—It is an approach to language difference that challenges English-only monolingualism and assumes students’ languages are not liabilities but resources.

*UScentrism*—It is a tendency to assume the culture of the United States is more important than those of other countries or to judge foreign cultures based on American cultural standards.

*Multiculturalism*—It is the presence of, or support for the presence of, several distinct cultural or ethnic groups within a society.

### **Theoretical and Methodological Framework**

According to Cohen et al. (2000), “The aim of research methodology is to help us understand, in the broadest terms, not the products of scientific inquiry but the process itself” (p.

45). In this section, I will explain the cultural rhetorics theoretical framework that will inform my thesis. The focus would be on situating my personal experience within the larger cultural contexts through an autoethnographic study. Various commentators stress the importance of using primary sources of data where possible (Hill & Kerber, 1967) (as cited in Cohen et al., 2000, p. 161). Primary sources of biographical research methods include: stories, autobiography, annals and chronicles, interviews, letters, conversations, etc. In this study, I use composition studies as a site; cultural rhetorics as a lens, and autoethnography as a method.

### **Cultural Rhetorics Theoretical Framework**

Cultural rhetorics is an emerging method of inquiry in composition and rhetorics that focuses on how cultures and rhetorics interface to explore people's lived experiences and practices, and how these find representation in rhetorical discourses. As cited in Brookes-Gillies (2018), Riley Mukavetz asserts that, "all research practices, methods, and theories are culturally located and specific (p. 122)" (p. 1); thus, grounding this study in a cultural rhetorics methodology is not only significant, but it also validates the importance of culture in research practices. Cobos et al. (2018) note that "cultural rhetorics as it exists today, intentionally or not, builds upon a longer history of scholarship by minoritized scholars across rhetoric and composition and beyond" (p. 140). Ríos in Cobos et al. (2018) argues that a cultural rhetorics approach can "allow for a more thorough interrogation of the material effects of academic cultural practices, including textual practices" (p. 146). As Brookes-Gillies (2018) stipulates, a cultural rhetorics approach is productive since it focuses "on how specific cultures are built around particular beliefs and practices, which lead that culture to value some things and not others (Cultural Rhetorics Theory Lab)". Even though the term *cultural rhetorics* has not been explicitly used as an explicitly named area of inquiry within rhetoric and composition studies in many studies, the underlying meaning of cultural rhetorics that integrates

culture, rhetoric, and composition has been present in most theoretical frameworks of research in the field.

In Haas' 2008 dissertation, "A Rhetoric of Alliance: What American Indians Can Tell U.S. about Digital and Visual Rhetoric," she defines cultural rhetorics as the "study of everyday rhetoric and writing practices of specific cultural groups . . . and the historical, social, cultural, and political contexts that shape those practices" (as cited in Cobos, et al., 2018, p. 144). Mailloux has also defined cultural rhetorics in 1998 as "[t]he study of the political effectivity of trope, argument, and narrative in culture," and described cultural rhetorics as a transdisciplinary investigation into "the conditions, purposes, activities, and results of the disciplinary production of knowledge, especially within academic institutions such as the U.S. university" (Reception 154; 186) (as cited in Cobos et al., 2018, p. 142). I approach this study, re-working Cobos' reflexive critique (p. 148), as I weave together my interests in cultural rhetorics with my research (and personal) interests at the intersections of writing, language, and identity—and how they are constructed on top of and against each other—by using my experiences as a student and teaching assistant in FYC in KNUST-Ghana.

Cultural rhetorics as an embodied practice provide a site for situating personal experiences within the larger cultural contexts of people. According to Cobos, et al. (2018), "[t]he study of cultural rhetorics is often formulated as an interrogation of both culture and rhetoric; thus, this inquiry understands constructions of culture and rhetoric as interdependent rather than stable categories" (p. 141). Particularly, in this project, I am grounding my personal narratives in the study of the program and institutional cultures in order to examine the importance of "indigenous storytelling practices" because Jerome Bruner says "culture is both invented and managed by stories. Stories take place. Stories practice place into space. Stories produce habitable spaces (391)" (as cited in Cobos, et al., 2018, p. 144). As Phill Bratta and Malea Powell indicate in Brookes-Gillies (2018), cultural rhetorics' work is "rooted in a desire to change the traditional narratives, canons, and ways

of operating in the discipline in order to explicitly open academia to ideas and intellectual affordances from a much broader range of continental and global cultures” (p. 2). These ongoing efforts—as well as other work in indigenous rhetorics—“are significant as they actively shift the location from which we might theorize how culture and rhetoric interface, center indigenous perspectives, and practice situated studies of cultures” (Cobos, et al., 2018, p. 144). As a member of the writing program community as a former teaching assistant and student in KNUST, I strive to show an insider perspective and critically reflect on experiences and roles in this local setting, especially towards efforts to move for the design of culturally-responsive pedagogies.

I believe that by putting my experiences as a teacher and student in Ghana and in the U.S. in conversation with one another, I am bringing my memories and hard-earned empirical knowledge of diverse classrooms and students into this epistemological realm of meaning-making. I have come to genuinely love scholarship that is based on subjective experience—a scholarship with a pulse; a scholarship that is alive with the voice and character of the author. Our experiences matter and this project places my experiences at the center, around which my discussion will revolve. It echoes what Brooks-Gillies (2018) believes: that a cultural rhetorics methodology helps us consider the ways we tell our stories and how we arrange, accumulate, and constellate these stories alongside one another (p. 1). I am sure this work will be a great addition to the ongoing discussion about considering and implementing other rhetorics and pedagogies as a necessary need, given the ever changing demographics in U.S. colleges and schools.

The use of this methodology for this study seeks “to extend cultural rhetorics conversations by building upon the aforementioned recent exigencies, honoring histories of cultural rhetorics work, and generating productive openings for future cultural rhetorics inquiry and practice” (Cobos, et al., 2018, p. 141). The study makes explicit the ways in which my subjectivities, positionalities, and commitments to the knowledge systems in the writing program are reified, as a means of “troubling

the myths of objectivity and neutrality” in our composition work. Like Haas in Cobos, et al. (2018), I seek to find “how cultural rhetorics can help us to interrogate how our disciplinary identity, history, and future has been written and on whose backs” (p. 146). How can this knowledge help in designing more culturally-responsive writing pedagogies for the teaching and learning of FYC in the U.S.? How can it open up discussions for incorporating different kinds of knowledge in cross-institutional and transnational curricula?

### **Autoethnography as Method**

The method of inquiry influencing my study is *autoethnography* through a cultural rhetorics lens. Autoethnography is a form of qualitative research in which an author uses self-reflection and writing to explore anecdotal and personal experience and connects this autobiographical story to wider cultural, political, and social meanings and understandings. Qualitative research employs a variety of methods which imply a humanistic stance in which phenomena under investigation are examined through the eyes and experiences of individual participants (Creswell, 2009; Merriam, 2009). It is because of this particular approach to inquiry that personal narratives, experiences and opinions are valuable data which provide researchers with tools to find those tentative answers they are looking for (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). At the point of autoethnography, the genre can accommodate introspective research on one’s memory, archival research on one’s writing development, discourse analysis of one’s literate artifacts, and library research to interpret the ramifications of one’s literacy development (Chang, 2008). As a method, autoethnography combines characteristics of *autobiography* and *ethnography*. When writing an *autobiography*, an author retroactively and selectively writes about past experiences. Usually, the author does not live through these experiences solely to make them part of a published document; rather, these experiences are assembled using hindsight (Bruner, 1993; Denzin, 1989; Freeman, 2004). My experiences in Ghana

as a student and teacher continue to shape my uptake of new knowledges in different cultural settings.

Drawing upon the tenets of cultural rhetorics framework that allows researchers to contextualize the lived experiences of the academic workplace in a country, I will share stories and experiences of how writing is conceptualized in KNUST-Ghana. I will focus on lecture approaches, language of instruction, assessment practices, classroom embodiment, etc. Findings from this critical autoethnography note that our experiences are essential in providing diversifying perspectives to curriculum design in writing programs and supports effective cross-cultural and institutional dialogue. The goal is not to present the *only* perspective about how writing is conceptualized in KNUST, but to offer a reflection that is grounded in my *own* personal experience, which may differ from the experiences of my colleagues and course mates. This is meant to show the power of stories, of narratives, and of counter narratives.

Canagarajah (2015) argues that “[t]his form of research is conducted and represented from the point of view of the self, whether studying one’s own experiences or those of one’s community” (p. 260). Autoethnography is an approach to research that puts the self at the center of the cultural analysis. It engages with the situatedness of one’s experiences, rather than suppressing them. Chang (2008) asserts that autoethnography “transcends mere narration of self to engage in cultural analysis and interpretation” (p. 43). The data resulting from using this type of introspection on our personal lives and experiences can be in the form of a poem, a narrative or a story (Denzin, 1989; Connelly & Clandinin, 1999; Nekvapil, 2003). In this thesis, the introspection takes the form of a literacy autobiography, consisting of stories and observational accounts.

“Autoethnography is an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze (*graphy*) personal experience (*auto*) in order to understand cultural experience (*ethno*)” (Ellis, 2004; Jones, 2005). Thus, it is not just writing about oneself; it is about being critical

about personal experiences in the development of the research being undertaken, or about experiences of the topic being investigated. As a method, autoethnography is both process and product. The intention for this autoethnographic action research is to spend time doing self-reflection on my teaching methods throughout my teaching assistant experience at KNUST. By using autoethnography, a method of writing that uses the perspective of the writer to create a detailed version of their experience (Anderson, 2014), I will be able to reflect on how first-year composition is taught in Ghana. Autoethnography will provide the audience with a more personal look into what I experienced during my placement in order to create a better understanding of the different responsibilities of student teachers. This reflective process will also guide future decisions in my own classroom and teach me how to teach first-year composition.

One of the main advantages of personal narratives is that they give us access into learners' private worlds and provide rich data (Pavlenko, 2002, 2007). Another advantage of writing autoethnographically is that it allows the researcher to write first person accounts which enable his or her voice to be heard, and thus provide him or her with a transition from being an outsider to an insider in the research (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1995). It is this advantage that also entails a limitation as, by subscribing analysis to a personal narrative, the research is also limited in its conclusions. However, Bochner and Ellis (1996) consider that this limitation on the self is not valid, since, "[i]f culture circulates through all of us, how can autoethnography be free of connection to a world beyond the self" (p. 24)? How can a cultural rhetorics methodology help bring out a better understanding of an autoethnography?

With regard to the limitations of this methodology, Chang (2008) asserts that there are a number of pitfalls to be avoided in doing autoethnography. These include an excessive focus on self in isolation from others; overemphasis on narration rather than analysis and cultural interpretation; exclusive reliance on personal memory and recalling as a data source; negligence of ethical standards

regarding others in self-narratives; and inappropriate application of the label autoethnography (p. 54). The feelings evoked in readers may be unpleasant since the connections readers make to narratives cannot be predicted (Bochner & Ellis, 1996). In this study, mechanisms would be put in place to measure and manage some of these feelings and address the limitations identified.

### **Scope and Limitations of the Study**

Studies on cultures are usually faced with the problem of adequate representation of the growing cultural diversity. This study focuses on how the writing program culture in KNUST in Ghana conceptualizes composition studies. It is important to note that a combination of institutional cultures do not sufficiently represent an entire national culture; thus, foregrounding this study in cultural rhetorics—which seeks to illuminate the Ghanaian culture of writing—is more likely to have some deficiencies because no one writing program is representative of writing in Ghana, U.S., or worldwide.

Also, the scope targets only KNUST, and excludes all other tertiary institutions in Ghana where the researcher could have generated multiple relevant layers of data for this study.

Further, my autobiographical experience is not representative of all Ghanaian experience, but this experience is particular too, and relevant for qualitative research. There is also a possibility of implicit bias as a result of the nature of personal narratives, but according to Cohen et al. (2000), “[e]ssentially, the validity of any life history lies in its ability to represent the informant’s subjective reality, that is to say, [their] definition of the situation” (p. 133).

There is also a lack of previous adequate studies on Communication Skills in Ghana. As a result, not much foundation has been laid for the researcher to build upon to achieve his research objectives. Thus, this thesis is a space to begin the groundwork that will hopefully give rise to important future studies.

## **Chapter Summaries**

### **Chapter Two**

In this chapter, I will present and interpret the data from selected stories and experiences as connected to the larger cultural and national contexts. I discuss my experiences of first-year composition from my multiple roles as a student, teacher, and also a lifelong participant member of multiple Ghanaian cultures surrounding the activity of education. This section offers a glimpse into the educational systems and institutional cultural values of KNUST and also provides the context within which I will situate my personal experiences. The purpose is to let light in on how U.S. composition can gain multiple perspectives from a Ghanaian institution through a culturally-responsive engagement.

### **Chapter Three**

As already indicated, this autoethnographic study is not a project meant to be completed. In the final chapter, I discuss the implications for the work began in this thesis as well as future work. The implications of the study hopefully will be to begin a cross-institutional dialogue between my experiences as a writing instructor in the Writing Program in Illinois State University in the U.S. and a teaching assistant in Communication Skills at the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST) in Ghana.

## CHAPTER II: STUDENT AND TEACHER EXPERIENCES IN GHANA: AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

In this chapter, I will present and interpret the data from my personal stories and experiences as they are rhetorically connected to the larger Ghanaian educational and cultural contexts. I discuss these experiences of first-year composition (also called *Communication Skills*) from my multiple roles as a student, teacher, and also a lifelong participant member of multiple Ghanaian cultures surrounding the activity of education. According to Royster (1996): “Stories are a model example of how apparent simplicity has the capacity to unmask truths in ways that are remarkably accessible—through metaphor, analogy, parable, and symbol” (p. 35). These stories I share will be reflected upon, analyzed, and interpreted within their broader sociocultural Ghanaian context in order to detect and map the cultural undertones of what is recalled, observed, and told. The purpose is to emphasize the value and power of stories, self-reflection, cultural context in education, and agency of voice.

As already indicated in Chapter I, a shortcoming in scholarship in composition studies, often due to political, capitalistic, and methodological tendencies and self-sufficiencies, is a lack of studies about non-U.S. writing traditions. Writing traditions from Africa have been occluded from many international discourses and not given much attention because, sadly, Africa is often seen in a bad light and African rhetorics, literacies, prolific literature, writing conventions, etc. are not only called into question in grossly negative ways, but perhaps also just ignored, forgotten, or not worthy of study, etc. Many non-Africans think that they know the story of Africa—its politics, education systems, governance, etc.—which are usually politically-skewed versions that continue to put Africa in the spotlight for the wrong reasons. We are constantly put on trial in a way that should not exist but does. ? Part of it is the persistence of white supremacy, in that of course white culture will amplify itself, but one question Royster (1996) asks is: “How can we teach, engage in research, write

about, and talk across boundaries with others, instead of for, about, and around them” (p. 33)? This thought-provoking question foregrounded this current study.

As a pedagogical resource, and in response to the problem of misrepresentation, misappropriation, and occlusion of writing traditions from Africa, this section of the study centers the Communication Skills (CS) program in KNUST-Ghana and provides useful insights regarding how the program is conceptualized within the institutional context of KNUST-Ghana. This narrowed scope is important because according to Bernstein (2001): “the appropriateness of each [writing program] model lies strongly on a combination of site-specific conditions such as the institution’s mission, its demographics, and its resources. The individual institutional need — and, possibly, the theoretical and epistemological assumptions driving the writing program — [seem to be a stronger determinant of how the course is conceptualized]” (p. 15). The goal of this institutional reflective analysis is to let light in on how U.S. composition studies can gain multiple perspectives about writing program traditions from a Ghanaian institution through a culturally-responsive engagement.

The first part of this chapter is an introduction and institutional context about Communication Skills (CS) in general before I describe my specific experiences in them. The second part is a collation of stories narrated from the first-person point of view, beginning with my student narratives and then teaching narratives of how I experienced the teaching and learning of Communication Skills in Ghana. I reflect on the significance of the narratives throughout and at the end of the chapter. I corroborate Royster’s (1996) assertion that “[m]y sense of things is that individual stories placed one against another build credibility and offer, as in this case, a litany of evidence from which a call for transformation in theory and practice might rightfully begin. My intent is to suggest that my stories in the company of others demand thoughtful response” (p. 30). Through this reflection, I emphasize the importance of storytelling as a source of epistemology and

an important qualitative research technique. The purpose is to bridge the perceived gap between anecdotal evidence and statistical data, and advocate the relevance of each in research in rhetoric and composition. The conclusion of the chapter is a rhetorical analysis of the stories and a reflection of the issues that were raised in the stories and their pedagogical relevance in composition studies.

### **Student Narratives: Going Back to Move Forward**

We have all enjoyed and participated in some kind of autoethnography, even in non-academic versions. Sometimes, we reflect on and share our daily routines or favorite journeys with people, and other times, we reflect on our historical past to trace our own personal growth. As students, we are sometimes asked to take stock of our literacy educations, experiences, and habits in literacy autobiographies. Through such reflections, we are encouraged to think historically and to identify sources of our current attitudes and approaches to literacy. Whether an autoethnography exists in a formal or informal form, it uses an author's self-reflection and/or writing to explore anecdotal and personal experience, and connects this autobiographical story to a wider cultural, political, or academic understanding. By this approach of narratives, we get to peek through the window of the narrator's life, and this open access into people's private worlds is a source of rich data for research.

When I was an undergraduate, I kept a student diary which I called, *The Evolving Life of a Visionary Student*. In this diary, I recorded personal experiences, literacy formation processes, intriguing occurrences, thoughts, and feelings throughout my four years study of English studies. When I decided to do this autoethnographic study, I searched for it from my archives, and I am amazed at some of the wonderful memoirs, stories, and notes I found, as they take me on a walk down memory lane. I am both excited and nostalgic to share some of these stories in this reflection.

In these stories that follow, I center my voice in narrating my own academic experiences about Communication Skills (CS)—a voice coming from within, from my soul. According to

Royster (1996), “Voice is a central manifestation of subjectivity” (p. 30), and when it is reified through personal narratives in research, it becomes a powerful rhetorical tool that can be made available to others who are interested in viewing the world from a different lens. “There is agency in the fact that one can articulate one’s own experiences, rather than letting others represent them. This is especially important for members of marginalized communities who lack the resources and publishing outlets to articulate their knowledge and interests” (Canagarajah, 2012, p. 262). One rhetorical tool that has influenced my academic journey is storytelling. Whenever I have had to share my literacy stories, I do so with much poise and exuberance because I know that we are the stories we tell, and it is better to tell our own stories the way we want, rather than allowing others tell our stories which may misrepresent or misappropriate our identities.

The importance of stories and places of stories is corroborated in Malea Powell’s Chair’s address at the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) Convention in 2012, where she emphasized the importance of stories and storying. According to her, “Stories take place. Stories practice place into space. Stories produce habitable spaces.” Because storying cannot happen without emplacement, especially because our locations shape our perspectives and understandings, these stories that I share from my local Ghanaian location must be perceived not just as “simple stories” to delight and entertain, but as vital layers of a transformative process in composition studies.

While the stories shared in this chapter are generally personal, they are also plural, constituting experiential data that I share with many others. They are co-constructed in multiple ways because of the multiple roles—active and passive—others play in our stories. Arguably, the professional life of the teacher is inseparable from the academic life of the student within the period of their contact because of the classroom space they share, and neither of these lives is complete without the influence of the institutional parameters that connect both. These stories will reveal

some of the members who are together enmeshed with me in the invisible web of the sociological and academic cultures that I am part of. Ballenger (2006) argues that, “Like captive flies on a spider web, we are all enmeshed in the invisible webs of cultures. Shared traditions, rituals, languages, and attitudes help determine how we behave, what we think, and who we want to be. [Auto]ethnography makes these invisible webs visible, much like dew on a spider web” (p. 370). The knowledges, literacies, and experiences I share with these members would contribute to the knowledge production in this narration and reflection.

### **Mapping the Trajectory of My Formative Literacies**

If you could travel back to any time in the past, what date would you choose and why? Would you attempt to influence past events while you were there? Why or why not? When I tried to answer these questions, I failed all the many times because there are so many past school memories that I cherish so much that I am unwilling to change anything about them, especially the transitioning period from high school to the university in 2009. This time marked the chapter of my life where I discovered myself—my talents, multiple literacies, and aspirations—and eventually defined my future steps in academia and work life. Whenever I have had to do a reflection of this moment, the nostalgia fills me with tears and many indescribable feelings.

I am a first-generation academic who has lived in Ghana all my life except two years ago when I moved to the U.S. to pursue graduate studies. The formative years of my education in Ghana were phenomenal as they accustomed me to the Ghanaian learning culture, together with its multi-diverse systems and literacy practices. Sadly, until I moved to the U.S. for my graduate studies, I had rarely thought about my culture and academic training in a more culturally-structured way. I had not taken a reflective look at my Ghanaian learning culture because, apparently, it is difficult to see culture from within it, in the midst, unless perhaps one is exposed to a new culture.

My years as a student in Ghana have provided me with incredible opportunities to develop a critical sense of self and my multiliteracies, including the expression of how my personal experiences from high school, undergraduate studies, and public work in Ghana have shaped my research inquiry in writing, literature, and composition. This autoethnographic study, which was borne out of intellectual curiosity and my contact with the diversified American culture, has offered me the opportunity to pause and to re-see my experiences and knowledges in FYC in Ghana, not necessarily to do a contrastive study between the writing programs I have been involved in from different national contexts, but to look from within to appreciate what is outside and vice versa. My scholarship and research as a teacher and student have put my cultural knowledge and experiences at the forefront of my intellectual and social discourses, acknowledging the depth and breadth my culture has and continues to expand and shape my worldview.

Growing up, I had always been passionate about language studies, cross-culture history, literature, and writing. Because of this passion, especially in literature and writing, I earned the alias *Hamlet* as I could recite most of Shakespeare's poems and analyze his drama works. I also developed critical literacies for teaching, editing, interpretation, and translation. At age 12, I always found myself interpreting child preachers at our church who spoke in English to Twi and vice versa. It was instinctive. I also loved to correct the mistakes in the notes of my elder brother and some friends. At the time, I did not know it was called editing, but I just loved correcting errors. When I was 17 years old, I was made a Sunday school teacher in the teen's church in my local assembly. My teachers had seen the teaching desire in me, and they encouraged me to keep on teaching. Even though these literacies were conceived out-of-class, until this day, they have become my most treasured resources in academia and work life.

As a young student who had spent most of his preadolescent years in multilingual communities, I was curious to know what language is, its significance, and what accounted for

language differences. Whenever I came across people who could speak multiple languages, I wondered whether the languages were compartmentalized in their heads and there was no cross-language influence when they were speaking a particular language. Questions like this, as well as the answers to these questions, skyrocketed my interest in languages.

Coming from a family background of more business- and science-oriented people, it was quite surprising to have developed such interest in arts, languages, and writing. I wonder sometimes if I chose writing because of a desire to be different from them, or maybe, writing chose me because I am different, or perhaps both. Writing came to me as a rare gift, at least, I think—a means of escape from the exhaustion and complexities of my young life. It was an imaginary place I could be free to express my wild thoughts and dreams without feeling intimidated or undervalued. Writing was my voice. My writing teachers were always amazed by the depth of my composition essays. They always remarked on my terminal reports that I could be a prolific writer if I gave it more attention. It became my goal. My love for writing increased rapidly with their constant positive feedback.

My parents believe my passion was borne out of my love for reading and writing, but I also think my personal encounters with some incredible writers, journalists, and academics contributed to the eruption of this love for languages and writing. This passion transformed into a burning desire to formally train in English Studies for my Bachelor's degree at the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST), Kumasi, Ghana. When my family and friends heard that I was going to study English at the university, they wondered what an English course entailed that I was willing to commit four years to study. In my heart of hearts, I did not know the full scope of the English course even though the scanty information I had read from the university's brochure and department website had convinced me to take up the course. I had wanted to read English to become fluent like an American or British native speaker. I admired people who could speak

impeccable English and my drive was to become nothing short of that. I had also been trapped in the national rhetoric in Ghana that fluency in the English language was a kind of identity marker—a descriptor that separated the educated elites from ordinary folks. I wanted to be identified with these elites.

### **National Context of Language of Instruction in Ghana**

My country Ghana is a multilingual country in which about 84 local languages are spoken. Some of these languages are Ewe, Akan (comprising Asante Twi, Fante, and Akuapem), Nzema, Dangme, Frafra, Dagbani, Dagaare, Ga, etc. I belong to the Akan ethnolinguistic group, and I am proficient in all the three indigenous sub-dialects. As a country, none of Ghana's many local languages has been accepted as official language, rather the English language (precisely the British English), which was inherited from the colonial era. The formal language of instruction in both private and public schools at all levels is the English Language, so all writing programs are conceptualized with the background knowledge that Ghana falls within the English as a Second Language context. In the study of the English language in schools, there is the argument for the emphasis on grammar and usage because Ghana falls within the English as a Second Language (ESL) context as a former British colony, and learning grammar is a driveway to the core of the language. Inasmuch as this colonial design has been disadvantageous to the preservation, study, and promotion of most of our Ghanaian local languages, the adoption of the English language as our lingua franca also piqued my interest to study English. The argument that the English language is the most widely spoken international language which would connect me to the world was tenable, and that is why I desired to study it to the highest level.

### **Local Context of Communications Skills (CS) at KNUST-Ghana**

My local context, KNUST, is one that shares traits with many midsized to large universities, particularly those in developing countries, while also having unique characteristics—modeled on the

Ghanaian culture—that impact our CS program in specific ways. Situated in Kumasi, a major metropolitan area with a long history of migration from all parts of the country, the institution is a public university that is open to all Ghanaians and international students. Within the institution, the required first-year composition course (also called Communication Skills) has been situated within the Department of English since its introduction about two decades ago. The Department sought to establish entering students' poor preparation in written English as the grounds for a required first-year Communication Skills course. This is a postsecondary course that points students toward fluency in written and spoken English. In all the departments of the university where the course is taught, it is directed by a tenured faculty member (also called a lecturer), with support from Teaching Assistants (TAs) and Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs). TAs and GTAs, as part of their assistantship, organize required tutorial sessions for students and offer additional support to the lecturers they are assigned to.

The CS course is taught for two semesters, constituting six credit hours. The rationale for designing the CS as a 2-semester requirement is grounded in historical and cultural understandings. When the course was introduced about 20 years ago, the urgent need was to polish the spoken and written communication of high school students who had gained admission into tertiary institutions. This was operationalized in only one semester. Later on, there was a need to expand the focus and learning outcomes of the course. The emphasis on business and technical communication became crucial to equip students with the relevant tools of communication necessary for functionality in business in a competitive world in which effective communication is crucial for success. This emphasis was taught in semester two. Writing happens in continuum and its studies never ends. Mastering writing takes time, a lot of it, of which it cannot be sufficiently dealt with within the short timeframe of two semesters of Communication Skills or even throughout the college experience of

students. However, it is noteworthy that two semesters are a relatively longer and better time frame than just one semester devoted to teaching such a demanding and complex course.

KNUST-Ghana's program requires two semesters of coursework not only because it values English (which is both pragmatic and problematic), but also because it assumes students come from diverse language backgrounds with diverse language resources and difficulties—which perhaps Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs) in the U.S. are unwilling to assume. As I discuss extensively later in this chapter, many U.S. universities require only one semester in college writing because they operate on the common assumption that most students in U.S. writing courses are native speakers of English. If they are native speakers, then we do not need a “remedial” class in language instruction. As a result of this formalized acceptance of first-year composition as a one-semester requirement, funding is usually available for one semester.

In the first semester of CS at KNUST, there is a focus on general writing skills, with particular attention to fundamental grammar, comprehension, composition, summary writing, phonetics, semantics, and error analysis, etc. Students are taught that grammar plays an instrumental role in writing development and needs to be given substantial attention. Students are also taught to summarize texts, analyze comprehension passages, and identify errors in writing and correct them. These writing skills are foundational to them becoming professional writers.

In the second semester, attention is directed away from grammar and error analysis. The focus is on multiple genres of writing and types of reading. Students are taught that writing is conventional and context-specific rather than governed by universal rules; thus, students learn that within each new disciplinary course, we will need to pay close attention to what counts as appropriate for that discourse community. Students are taught that features of good writing vary from one situation to another. These variations depend, for example, on the subject of the writing, its purpose, and the reader's expectations. The form of writing used in a field of study often

structures those expectations. As a consequence, the features of good writing in a literature course will differ greatly from the features of good writing in business or astronomy, and what seems clear to one audience might not be clear to another.

The second semester also focuses on business and technical communication, writing genres, information literacy, oral communication, and writing projects required for all students. Because our field does not know what genres and tasks will help students in the myriad writing situations they will later find themselves, students are introduced to multiple writing genres that could expand their understanding of how writing works outside the academy. Students are taught to write memoranda, press releases, curriculum vitae, resumes, cover letters, statements of purpose, etc. The goal is to make students holistic writers—proficient in business and technical communication, literature, creative writing, linguistics, writing research, etc. It is also meant to prepare students for when they are applying to graduate studies.

In terms of classroom dynamics vis-à-vis writing pedagogies, the CS course is taught in all first-year classes in all departments (e.g., medicine, pharmacy, engineering, humanities, etc.), but they are not conceptualized the same way. In addition to part of the course that is general for all students, some aspects of the pedagogies are structured differently for each department because writing differs from profession to profession; thus, its teaching should be tailored to fit each discipline or major. When I compared my CS notes with my friends from other departments, I realized that even though there was a general aspect common to both, there was a specific aspect which was not exactly the same for both of us. Whereas our lecturer went into much detail with regard to grammar because we were English majors, it was superficial in classes such as Business Administration, Economics, and Agriculture, etc.

These general and specific framings of the course are important because 1) for its specific aspect, it is an avenue to prepare students for writing in their future profession; and 2) for its general

aspect, it is an opportunity to learn about writing and how it works in the real world in different spaces and across different times. These two-prong purposes of the course are part of the historical and cultural reasons for the introduction of the course in all tertiary institutions about 20 years ago. The framers of the course and its instructors hoped that students that would be produced would be able to write and communicate in specific contexts and do same in general contexts as well.

In terms of assessment, there are multiple formative and summative assessments to test students' understanding of what is taught at different times. There were the essay types of questions, lexis and structure, multiple-choice questions, comprehension tests, oral presentations, impromptu/in-class tests, take-home assignments, and group assignments, etc. The Communication Skills course is a 3-credit hour course, graded over 100 per cent. The mid-semester exam constitutes 30 percent while the final exam is 70 percent.

### **First Few Days of Classes: A Rare Encounter with Translingualism**

Just as my high school writing instructors had always pointed out that writing at the university level was sophisticated, and that I needed to elevate my writing style to a high standard, the signs were clear when I entered my Communication Skills (CS) class the first day in the first semester at KNUST in Kumasi. Before the lecturer entered class, as usual, casual conversations among groups of students filled the atmosphere, and I could hear some of them talk about their *off-the-roof* expectations of the writing course, which almost whisked away my self-belief that I was a good writer. Their high school teachers must have given them the same admonition about elevating their writing to a high standard, and it appeared they were already working towards that.

The student demography in the class was heterogeneous—we came from different parts of the country. Our peculiar names pointed to different locations of the country, and our distinctive accents and different local languages affirmed these regional differences. The cultural mix was refreshing. While a few city-dwellers bragged about their prestigious high schools and their pre-

tertiary knowledges in their urban English accent, almost everyone else spoke their local language. There is sufficient evidence that in multicultural classrooms, bilingual students are more likely to speak their local languages in casual conversations rather than English. Perhaps, it is instinctive. I came from a suburban part of the country, and my high school was neither lesser known nor popularly known, so I always had to exert too much labor trying to describe it to my course mates, unlike their top schools that needed no more descriptions. In my estimation, this was an imbalance, a sort of negative feeling from the outset, but that would only last for a short while. I was not going to be intimidated by anything. I was more determined to succeed in this class.

Sitting across me was a young female who later identified as Ijeoma after our casual chat. I could recognize her Nigerian accent almost immediately. I sort of liked the diversity in language usage in the classroom. Ijeoma was not the only Nigerian in the class; there were two other gentlemen—Arinze and Chinedu—who were such great orators. Whenever we were involved in group discussions, I could stare blankly at them for their incandescent mastery of the language. They changed my misperception that Nigerians were not good speakers of the English language. It was the first time I would share a formal classroom space with non-Ghanaians. I was excited. There were more things to learn, unlearn, and relearn about national identities and ideologies. I was curious to know how writing was done in Nigeria and how they would incorporate their knowledges from their country into our classroom. Ijeoma became my study mate.

As was his favorite teaching style, to get quicker responses and harness understanding, the lecturer would sometimes explain a course concept in Twi—the dominant local language of students in the class—and later on translate it into English for people like Ijeoma and other Ghanaians who did not understand Twi. He also frequently asked the Nigerian students to show how some writing concepts are expressed in their home languages. This translanguaging proved very useful because when concepts in a second language are related to concepts in your first language, you are able to

understand them better. This approach encouraged some level of codeswitching and codemeshing. Interestingly, the lecturer himself was a Fante—Twi was not his first language, but he had learned to speak Twi since he got his teaching appointment at KNUST in Kumasi, a city where Twi is the dominant language. Later on in the semester, we realized that these Nigerian students could speak some little Twi, especially the conversational aspect, and you could see the excitement in their readiness to communicate in Twi anytime we met. I became a translator to Ijeoma. She would often record Twi expressions she heard in the course of the day on her phone, and send them to me via text messages (and sometimes, play the recordings when we meet) for translations. I loved the exchanges. It made me pay more attention to my own language, its nuances, and how people could use it differently. In return, Ijeoma taught me her Yoruba and Igbo languages, and with time, I could describe myself in them, albeit not proficiently. When I engaged Chinedu and Arinze on their perceptions of language practices carried out in the class and their attitudes toward a range of language practices, they were much happy that language diversity is recognized and valued rather than suppressed in the class.

When language legitimacy becomes bi-directional in the classroom, it emboldens individual student identities and builds a healthy community of learners. This readiness to accept and learn our diverse languages showed that students are not resistant to learning new languages, but they may only lack the opportunities to learn. This is why translanguaging—an approach to language difference that challenges English-only monolingualism and assumes students' languages are not liabilities but resources—needs to be encouraged at all levels of education. Enacting a translanguaging pedagogy in the classroom does not mean the instructor should be able to speak and understand all students' languages, but it is for them to create an inclusive learning environment where no student should have to “leave themselves at the door” or feel that part of who they are (especially their native language) is not welcome at school.

## Face-to-Face with Writing Pedagogy

When the lecturer came to class the first day, he engaged us in some bureaucratic tasks such as general class introductions, and distribution of syllabus and semester timelines. He appeared very prepared and resourceful. Back in my high school, there were no such formal documents to be given to students as course syllabus and timelines, so everything that was currently happening in my new class showed that I had indeed moved to a higher level of education. I noted it down to do the same in my future classes. Dr. John Anning (as the lecturer was called) explained that the Communication Skills (CS) course was a kind of remedial course that would help *polish* our writing so that we can *transfer* the writing skills to other courses and apply them in our work life and public spheres after college. The second part of what he said sounded great to me. My predilection has always been trying to make connections between classroom knowledge and its application in the *real* world. Students are more likely to give attention to knowledge that has real-time value on the job market because the consequence of education is not only to transform people into better versions of themselves, but to make them employable, to say the least. He was committed to preparing us to be lifelong learners, liberal thinkers, empowered intellectuals, adept compositionists, and responsible community members.

One of the controversial subjects my study mates and I discussed was the consideration of the CS course as a remedial course, but not a disciplinary course. I argued that the traditional description of first-year composition as remedial, introductory, and preliminary intimates that writing is not a full-fledged course like Business, Geography, Economics, etc., but it is a preparatory course to help students pursue other courses. To me, this misperception is counterproductive to the work being done in the field of writing. Also, I argued that considering the course as remedial encourages student-writers to see themselves as deficient in writing skills, so they believe they need a

writing course to help them improve. This contributes to their obsession with errors, correctness, and the urgency to meet their teachers' criteria. When that happens, instead of students devoting their time to learning, they are often preoccupied with obligatorily meeting the standards of correct writing because, according to most writing teachers, correctness in writing is a highly measurable feature of acceptable writing and educability. But it is worthy of note that errors in composition are inevitable, even in the writings of seasoned academics. Thus, we need to understand that writing is a disciplinary course which gives attention to the intelligences and rationalization behind students' errors, and recognize the cross-cultural influence in their multilingual compositions.

Jackson, who was one of our vocal group members, counter-argued that the course should be considered remedial because it is the immediate high-standard English language course after high school that is meant to prepare all first-year students for writing in the university. Its preparatory nature does not mean it is a sub-standard course, but it is one that *ushers* first-year students into university writing. In his response to my argument about the term *remedial* limiting students to focus largely on errors in their writing, he explained that while it is impossible to totally eliminate all errors in students' writing within the two semesters in which Communication Skills is taught or even throughout our college experience, it is important to understand the source of these errors (and creativities) and work co-constructively with instructors to minimize them in writing. When this is effectively done, with the collaboration of both students and teachers, it will be possible to achieve most fundamental writing goals and learning outcomes of writing classes. We agreed to disagree. We planned to do a collaborative writing in our final writing project on this topic.

We had only spent 40 minutes in this first class, but it felt like so many years. There were so many new things to learn and transfer—implicitly and explicitly—and I loved the intellectual exchanges. As was Dr. Anning's habit of encouraging reading in class, he called me out of the blue to read a section of the course syllabus. For some minutes, I could not utter any word. It was the

first time I would stand before a large class in a university to read. As one who stammers, I had always shunned speaking in public, but on this day, I faced my greatest fear head on, and that would be the last day I said goodbye to running away from public speaking. His encouragement emboldened me. That day, I left the lecture hall transformed and ready to take on more public speaking tasks. Instructors' support always goes a long way to shape learners' attitude towards learning. When I finally found my voice, I read:

CS is designed to teach about the ways writing works in the world and how writing is used to mediate various activities. The CS course is taught over two semesters—ENG 157 and ENG 158 for first and second semesters, respectively. In this first semester, we shall look at many strands of writing, including but not limited to the following: Grammar, Comprehension, Composition, Summary Writing, Phonetics, Semantics, Error Analysis, Varieties of Writing, etc. (Course Syllabus, n.d.)

Almost immediately, I imagined myself having completed the course, and having acquired all the competency and knowledges to pursue my writing career. But that was too fast—I had to slow down to enjoy the process rather than think about the end product *ab initio*.

At KNUST, one of the focuses that seem to be fundamental in the first semester of the Communication Skills (CS) course is the attention given to language. A substantial part of the instruction is centered on linguistic competency and language accuracy, and this is proportionate with the metrics allocated to language in the rubrics. The rationale is that it is important to consider language as being fundamental to writing development. It is true that writing goes beyond keeping to a list of grammatical or syntactic rules, but it is also difficult to be a *good* writer if one does not have a command of grammar. This is why all aspects of the language are taught, especially grammar, mechanics, and usage so that students do not lack in these fundamental areas. As much as I found this debatable, I could not make a better argument for why good writing could be separated from

grammar, especially because learning the grammar of a language is one of the best ways to know the language.

When I visited the lecturer in his office to discuss this conundrum I faced, he explained that the argument rests on the idea of “World Englishes” and the fact that language is mediated by sociocultural context. How Ghanaians use the English language is different from how Americans, British, or even Australians use it. This difference in the usage of the same language at the national level translates into how it is taught in every country, noting that while the language may be native to some people, it may be foreign to others. He explained further that written language and spoken language cannot be held to the same standards of usage. Written language is coded or taught in a manner that recognizes its specificity and regulated use, and regulated use requires navigating the rules of grammar and usage. Language use is context-specific; always rhetorical, and it functions differently in written usage. As soon as I left his office, I went to the library to read on Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL), Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL), Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL), and other iterations of how the English language is taught. The findings expanded my understanding of how the language works in different contexts.

Through my reading, I found sufficient evidence to prove that in writing programs such as those in the U.S., it is possible that there might not be attention given to grammar or to language because they operate on the assumption that most students are native-born, and thus, have natural proficiency in the use of the language. This assumption that every student in the classroom is at a certain comfort level in the language can be detrimental because of the rapidly shifting student demographics, especially in multicultural higher education where there are many students from across the world entering college and universities. This assumption does not take into consideration non-U.S. bodies and identities that are in the classroom, and this exclusionary practice inhibits the

full conceptualization of the teaching of writing. Bi/multi-lingual students are put at a disadvantage because they are neither native nor considered experts in the language. At best, Matsuda et al. (2006) argue that such students are referred to the writing center, or placed into remedial writing courses or special sections for second language writers. Students in this category are more likely to experience many difficulties in mainstream composition classrooms when there are no writing centers in their colleges/universities.

Also, the argument of nativeness is not always sufficient because the proficiency of native speakers is evident in spoken language; it does not necessarily translate into writing. We must be alert to the possibility that writing, by making the language of the student visible rather than audible, exposes what might otherwise be hidden, especially grammar competency. Nobody is a native writer of any language. Everybody begins to learn how to write in a particular language that they speak. One's nativity in a language is not immunity to writing imperfections. As I have already indicated, I belong to the Akan ethnolinguistic group in Ghana; my native language is Twi, and I had so many classmates in my Twi course with the same native language. However, not all of us were proficient in writing Twi even though our spoken proficiency was unquestionable. Thus, the nature of the Twi course was not conceptualized on the assumption that most of us were natives of the language, so the grammar of the language would not be taught. That would have been detrimental to us acquiring the fundamental skills in the language.

In the context of my argument about nativeness not always corresponding with written proficiency, according to recent studies of students' composition essays, some common errors found in native-born students' writing are comma splice and run-on sentences. This is true because, in speaking, you do not have full stops or have semi-colons/colons, but in writing, all these must be demonstrated. Thus, if writing instruction does not pay attention to grammar, mechanics, and linguistic accuracy, it puts both native speakers (who do not have these rules innate) and bilingual

students (who may not have extensive knowledge about writing in English) at a disadvantage in terms of writing. Even though error-free writing is not necessarily good writing, it is important for writing programs to return to grammar, not necessarily to sleuth students' writing to punish them, or be fixated on grammar correctness, but for students to become aware of the rules of the language in order to develop their writing not only for college work, but also for their work life outside the academy.

Negotiating the overlap of knowledges, identities, and languages is an intellectually adventurous and rhetorically challenging experience for the instructor who teaches in a multilingual setting. Dr. Anning's attitude, teaching styles, and philosophies to teaching writing showed that he was compassionate and willing to help students succeed in our writing journey. His desires were centered on the following strategies: focusing on students' intellectual and social development; offering the best possible course of study for the context in which the education is offered; purposely developing and using educational resources to enhance students' learning; establishing an environment that challenges each student to achieve at high levels academically while encouraging each member of the class to contribute to students' overall learning and knowledge development; paying attention to the cultural differences diverse learners bring to the educational experience and how those cultural differences enhance the teaching and learning environment, and creating a welcoming classroom environment that engages all of its diversity in the pursuit of individual and collaborative learning.

In incorporating diversity and responsible inclusion in the classroom, they must manifest in the class culture, student-teacher relationships, lesson plans, discussions, the syllabus, the reading list, assignments, assessment practices, and so on. In our first meeting, the lecturer provided the reading list. It contained a diverse selection of authors from Ghana and across the globe. The first reading material was Paul Prior's "The Sociocultural Theories of Writing," which focused on how

these theories could be practically applied to writing instruction. On grammar, he assigned “A University Grammar of English” by Randolph Quirk and Sidney Greenbaum. As at the time this grammar book was assigned, there were no copies available in Ghana, but we had to get copies before the next class. Most of my colleagues did not have literacies on how to purchase books online, on Amazon, except for a few who had credit cards and had engaged in international transactions in the past. Through this experience, I secured my first credit card and began to order books online for my personal library. All these engagements in the classroom constitute a focus on multiple literacies, and on people’s resources, not just for learning about writing, but for actively using that evolving knowledge to develop more adaptive literacy skills and practices.

My favorite reading on the list was Paul Prior’s “The Sociocultural Theories of Writing.” He posits that every time the rhetorical act of writing begins or a student engages a text, a lot of invisible factors play subconsciously. For example, where am I from? What cultural and academic context am I situated in? Is my external world different from my internal socialization? What is my antecedent knowledge about this current topic/issue? What uptakes have I done in the past about similar issues? How can I bring them to bear in my current writing? This metacognitive analysis is corroborated by the proposition that language, culture, and thoughts are inseparable. Every student belongs to a culture, and by culture we mean not only a way of life or a particular way of dressing, but we emphasize a group’s ideological perspective of the world, their social value system, an identified language framework, and a pattern of thought processes. When a student begins a writing task, all these elements of the culture come to bear. According to Prior, “Even a lone writer is using an array of socio-historically provided resources (languages, genres, knowledge, motives, technologies of inscription and distribution) that extend beyond the moment of transcription and that cross modes and media (reading, writing, talk, visual representation, material objectification)” (p. 55). This reading provided me with the opportunity to reflect on my thoughts in writing, recall

relevant antecedent knowledge, develop and organize my thoughts and motivation before I begin any writing task.

One of the vital aspects of the course I enjoyed most was also the focus on the distinction between the British English and American English. I had watched many American and British movies and engaged with literature and pop culture from these two countries, but I never realized that the distinction in their Englishes was structured and could be learned in the classroom. I found the goal of this topic—to make students aware of these important subsystems to help them distinguish between the two when writing or speaking—to be very instructive. I learnt that the differences between these two forms of Englishes exist in the areas of vocabulary, spelling, grammar, and pronunciation. In one of my essays, I remember clearly mixing “analyse and analyze,” “lift and elevator,” and “forgot and forgotten,” etc. My instructor penalized me for inconsistency, and from that time, I learnt to be consistent in my choice of English—to either use American English or British English throughout my writing. This knowledge has been of immense help to me in my editing career. When I communicate with the authors I work with, I ask them their preference and target readers, and I make sure to navigate the choices between these “Englishes.” The theme of translingualism is about language and identity: how beliefs about language work; how language affects the stereotypes we have about how people, and how intertwined language is with our identities. One factor that pushes back the integration of language diversity into classroom learning is language hierarchy: the privileging of a particular kind of English over all other Englishes. Translingualism is a more pragmatic way to help students interrogate language hierarchy. When every student’s language is seen as a resource, and there is no privileging of one over all others, students with “minoritized” languages would not feel intimidated and irrelevant.

In one of our assignments which we had to distinguish between the American and British English, this is what I submitted:

“I shall look at some differences in these areas, with the exception of pronunciation. For our purposes, American English is represented as **U.S.** while British English is represented as **British.**”

*Spelling* —

1. British English words ending in ‘our’ usually end in ‘or’ in American English:

<b>U.S.</b>	<b>British</b>
Savior	Saviour
Color	Colour
Flavor	Flavour
Labor	Labour
Neighbor	Neighbour
Favorite	Favourite

2. Some verbs in British English that end in ‘se’ are always spelt ‘ze’ in American English

<b>U.S.</b>	<b>British</b>
Analyze	Analyse
Paralyze	Paralyse
Organize	Organise
Criticize	Criticise
Apologize	Apologise
Recognize	Recognise
Subsidize	Subsidise

3. British English words ending in ‘re’ usually end in ‘er’ in American English:

<b>U.S.</b>	<b>British</b>
Center	Centre
Meter	Metre
Kilometer	Kilometre
Centimeters	Centimetres
Fiber	Fibre

4. In British spelling, ‘l’ is doubled in verbs ending in a vowel plus ‘l’. In American English, the ‘l’ is not doubled:

<b>U.S.</b>	<b>British</b>
Travel	Travel
Traveled	Travelled

Traveling	Travelling
Traveler	Traveller

5. British English words ending in 'gue' usually end in 'g' in American English:

<b>U.S.</b>	<b>British</b>
Analog	Analogue
Catalog	Catalogue
Dialog	Dialogue

6. British English words ending in 'mme' usually end in 'm' in American English:

<b>U.S.</b>	<b>British</b>
Program	Programme
Kilogram	Kilogramme (outdated)

7. British English words that are spelt with the double vowels 'ae' or 'oe' tend to be just spelt with an 'e' in American English

<b>U.S.</b>	<b>British</b>
Leukemia	Leukaemia
Maneuver	Manoeuvre
Estrogen	Oestrogen
Pediatric	Paediatric
Encyclopedia	Encyclopaedia
Anemia	Anaemia
Fetus	Foetus
Esophagus	Oesophagus

8. Some nouns that end with 'ence' in British English are spelt 'ense' in American English:

<b>U.S.</b>	<b>British</b>
Defense	Defence
License	Licence
Offense	Offence
Pretense	Pretence

9. Some nouns that end with 'rrhoea' in British English are spelt 'rrhea' in American English:

<b>U.S.</b>	<b>British</b>
Diarrhea	Diarrhoea

*Dates* —

In writing dates, these two Englishes arrange the day, month, and year differently. In British English (as used in Ghana), the order is: Day/Month/Year (dd/mm/yyyy). So, 10<sup>th</sup> April 2021 will be written as 10/4/2021. However, in American English, the format is: Month/Day/Year (mm/dd/yyyy). So, 10<sup>th</sup> April 2021 will be written as 4/10/2021.

*Grammar* —

In American English, the past tense of the verb *learn* is *learned*, and the past participle is *learned*. However, in British English, the past tense for *learn* is *learned* and the past participle is *learnt*.

Other verbs that fall into this category are as follows:

	<b>Present</b>	<b>Past</b>	<b>Past Participle</b>
<b>U.S.:</b>	Spill	Spilled	Spilled
<b>British:</b>	Spill	Spilled	Spilt
<b>U.S.:</b>	Get	Got	Gotten
<b>British:</b>	Get	Got	Got
<b>U.S.:</b>	Forget	Forgot	Forgotten
<b>British:</b>	Forget	Forgot	Forgot

With the examples “get” and “forget”, there are controversies. There are different schools of thought with regard to the past participle forms in American and British English.

*Vocabulary* —

<b>U.S.</b>	<b>British</b>
Airplane	Aeroplane
Apartment	Flat
Appetizer	Starter
Area code	Dialling code
Audiotape	Cassette
Automobile	Motor
Bachelorette party	Hen night
Band-aid	Plaster

Bulletin board	Notice board
Busy (of a phone)	Engaged
Call collect	Reverse the charges
Candy	Toffee
Cellphone	Mobile phone
Check	Cheque
Checkers	Draughts (game)
Check mark	Tick
Closet	Cupboard
Cookies	Biscuits
Checking account	Current account
Closet	Wardrobe
Corn	Maize
Counterclockwise	Anticlockwise
Crosswalk	Zebra crossing
Deck of cards	Pack of cards
Dial tone	Dialling tone
Drugstore	Chemist
Elementary school	Junior school
Elevator	Lift
Emcee (MC)	Compere
First floor	Ground floor
Fiscal year	Financial year
Flashlight	Torch
French fries	Chips
Garbage (trash)	Rubbish
Gas, Gasoline	Petrol
Gonna	Going to
Gotta	Got to
Gray	Grey
Grocery store	Supermarket
Groundskeeper	Groundsman
Highway/Expressway	Motorway
Hood	Bonnet ( <i>of a car</i> )
Instant replay	Action Replay
Jump rope	Skipping rope
Labour Union	Trade Union
Lawn, yard	Garden
License plate	Number plate
Line	Queue
Louvers	Louvres
Main Street	High Street
Math	Maths
Mom/mommy	Mum/mummy
Nappy	Diaper
Newscaster	Newsreader
News release	Press release
Night gown	Night dress

Overpass	Flyover
Pajamas	Pyjamas
Pants	Trousers
Parking lot	Car park
Period	Full stop (punctuation)
Pharmacy	Chemist shop
Physical therapy	Physiotherapy
Post	Mail
Purse	Hand bag
Punching bag	Punch bag
Push-up	Press-up
Quotation marks	Inverted commas
Railroad	Railway
Refrigerator	Fridge
Restroom (Bathroom)	Loo
Resumé	Curriculum Vitae
Schedule	Timetable
Sidewalk	Pavement, Footway
Skeleton in the closet	Skeleton in the cupboard
Slaughterhouse	Abattoir
Slingshot	Catapult
Sneakers	Trainers
Soccer	Football
State school	Public school
Station wagon	Estate car
Suspenders	Braces
Sweater	Pullover
Taxi stand	Taxi rank
The movies	Cinema
Tire (of a car)	Tyre
Tow truck	Breakdown van
Shopping cart	Trolley
Truck	Lorry
Trunk (of a car)	Boot
TV	Telly
Underground	Subway
Vacation	Holiday
Windshield	Windscreen
Zee (Letter Z)	Zed
Zip code	Postcode
Zipper	Zip

This contrastive list is significant as it reifies the project of this chapter—for instructors to acknowledge the existence of multiple Englishes and understand that multilingual students’ choices of vocabulary, spelling, grammar, etc. come from someplace, and should not be treated as

substandard or errors. Students who do not write and speak American English should not be expected to “clean up” the English they have spoken and heard their entire lives.

In professional writing in the real world, most authors use these two English varieties interchangeably, either because they are unable to detect the differences or because their usage has become too common that they are inseparable and indistinguishable. Whatever the reason is, authors are not punished for mixing languages (because some editors are even unable to detect), so why should multilingual students be penalized because of similar linguistic choices? The resolution of the Students’ Rights to Their Own language (SRTOL) as quoted in Kynard (2013) emphasizes that “[w]e affirm the students’ right to their own patterns and varieties of language—the dialects of their nurture or whatever dialects in which they find their own identity and style. Language scholars long ago denied that the myth of a standard American dialect has any validity. The claim that any one dialect is unacceptable amounts to an attempt of one social group to exert its dominance over another” (p. 73). For this and many other reasons such as the project of SRTOL, instructors should refrain from the prescriptive attitude toward Standard American English (SAE) and not continue to privilege standard edited American English over other varieties of English. We need to transform, enrich, and reshape deeply held assumptions about superiority and inferiority of languages.

Respecting rhetorical sovereignty, in terms of valuing “the inherent right and ability of peoples to determine their own communicative needs and desires in this pursuit, to decide for themselves the goals, modes, styles, and languages of public discourse” (Lyons, 2003, p. 449) is one way we can write and stand with others on their own language terms unencumbered by our own ideological baggage.

### **My Response to Course Pedagogy**

Just as it may be difficult for lecturers to shift their paradigms, it is equally difficult for students. In high school, I often liked to stay in my shell and individuate my studies. Due to several

factors, it is evident in many places that many first-year students have no desire to form a sense of community or make friends in the classroom, and I was part of this statistics. I would usually just go to class, listen, and leave. However, due to the nature of the Communication Skills course and how group work was assigned, building a learning community became organic. A substantial part of the course hinged on collaborative learning and writing. This challenged me, as well as other students, to shift my paradigm from individualism to community learning. Together, we decided to have a study group where we would have extra discussions of class lectures and build a collaborative learning community. Our small study group of ten members became a microcosm of the diversity in our general class—culturally represented and academically fairly distributed. Until this day, members of this group are still in contact, and we offer support to one another in diverse ways.

Most of our writing tasks were collaborative in nature. The rationale was that writing is more of a collaborative process rather than as a product of a solitary endeavor. We recognized that knowledge does not only exist in the heads of individuals or in the external world, but meaning is negotiated at the meeting of individuals, culture, and activity in a discourse. Paul Prior's chapter, "A Sociocultural Theory of Writing," asserts that, "Even a lone individual thinking is co-acting with other people through artifacts fabricated elsewhere, at other times, mostly by other people" (p. 55). Thus, we need to note that a person's thought process is not an isolated activity; it is inextricably attached to the ecological situations surrounding his or her speech and writing context. This prepared my mind for future collaborative research and publications. I left the course with increased awareness of writing studies as a discipline, as well as a new outlook on writing as a researchable activity rather than a mysterious talent.

### **Teaching Narratives**

Unlike other writing programs where lecturers have very little input in course designs because they tend to have a rigid hierarchical model of instruction, the lecturers of the CS course at

KNUST have some level of control in determining the nature of the writing instruction. The input of instructors constitutes a substantial part of the course development and this shapes curriculum. They are not seen as conduits of specific versions of writing knowledge; rather, they are perceived as makers of knowledge or as members of a community whose goal is to study, understand, and teach a range of writing skills and practices, often in conjunction with students participating in the classes.

In Ghana, all graduates from tertiary institutions such as universities, polytechnics, and colleges of education are mandated to take a one-year national service at a service post assigned by the National Service Scheme (NSS). The Scheme provides newly qualified graduates the opportunity to have practical exposure on the job, both in the public and private sectors, as part of their civic responsibility to the State. Graduates are posted to different sectors of the country, from education, agriculture, business, commerce, industry, security service, etc. At the time of completing my four-year study of English in 2013, I did not know where I wanted to undertake my one-year national service. Other Teaching Assistants in our department had recommended serving in the Department of English as a teaching assistant. I was both scared and intimidated, as I felt incapable of tutoring university students, but they kept motivating me until I finally accepted to apply as a teaching assistant. When the national service postings came, I was admitted to the Department of English as a teaching assistant, and assigned to a lecturer who taught Research Methods in English, Critical Ideas, and Communication Skills.

In my situation, my lecturer gave me a rare opportunity to do more than the usual duties required of a teaching assistant. In addition to organizing tutorials for students in Research Methods in English, Communication Skills, and other courses, I was also assessing students by administering tests, assignments, and course works. I also assisted the lecturer in teaching, researching and reviewing course materials. This unique opportunity gave me so much exposure to writing

pedagogies and classroom instruction. In this section, I share some of the experiences in tutoring Communication Skills in the mainstream classroom and tutorial sessions.

### **The Genesis of My Teaching Literacies**

Before the first semester started in September 2013, my lecturer—Mr. Francis Kofigah—and I had a conversation about the kind of teacher I wanted to be. He asked me, “Do you plan to teach based on how you were taught in school or how you wish you were taught in school?” I could not answer straight away. In response, I told him a story about why I decided to be a teacher—

“When I was growing up in a small town in Ghana, the community school I attended was so many kilometers away from home, and my siblings and I had to commute this long distance on foot every day. That was not the only disincentive to my going to school, but as a slow learner who was always bullied and mocked because I could not keep up with the learning pace of my classmates, I thought I had better quit school to help my parents in their trade. It took the intervention of my grade one teacher who inspired me to keep pushing hard despite the negative circumstances. He was patient and tolerant. He took the time to offer me extra help in my studies. I could not imagine life without the valuable contributions of my teachers, particularly, this grade one teacher. His encouragement and unconventional teaching techniques changed my life and formed values that have stuck with me forever. He is one of the reasons I pursued a teaching career. From that experience in my childhood, which has been reinforced in my many years of teaching, I have learnt that all students are unique and must have a stimulating learning environment where they can grow physically, mentally, emotionally, and socially. It has always been my desire to create this type of atmosphere in my classroom.

Before my undergraduate studies, I taught the English language at the primary and senior levels in my community schools. As a young teacher, I always saw myself as a leader and mentor, so I gave off my best knowing that my work truly does have positive ramifications for my students,

their families, and the future. I received daily commendations from my students and some parents about the tremendous impact my teaching has on their lives, and this feedback motivates me to do more. That is the kind of transformational teacher I dream to be.”

Mr. Kofigah looked satisfied and impressed with how my teaching literacies were birthed and how far I want to take them. He promised to give me the instructor’s support to help me realize my full potential in teaching. The first few weeks in class, I sat through the lectures as he taught students Communication Skills. About halfway into the semester, he gave me the opportunity to teach the mainstream class. He sat through my lectures and offered constructive support and input, both in class and outside class.

### **Teaching Dilemmas: To Conform or To Rebel?**

When I began to teach the Communication Skills class, I planned to make my classroom a site of negotiation rather a space for prescription and adherence to rules. I took into consideration the various identities and learning styles of students in creating opportunities for them to learn and grow. I continuously linked the texts to what is happening outside the classroom: in my students’ lives, and in our various communities of belonging. I aimed to bring an open mind, a positive attitude, and high expectations to the classroom each day. I saw teaching as a lifelong process where you learn new strategies, new ideas, and new philosophies. My goal in teaching was to help students become critical thinkers. I believe if students can learn how to deepen their ways of thinking with new ideas and understanding, it will naturally guide them to be not just good writers but also speakers and listeners. I also focused on teaching students to be critical of their own thoughts and ideas so that they could learn to have an open mind, with continuous curiosity for learning.

As a student, I was *forced* to focus on grammar. As an instructor, I provided less grammatical feedback, and instead focused on the process of students’ writing. This, presumably, was a sacrilege against the established norm, especially in the first semester, but I was willing to be a daredevil.

Studies in English education have been showing since the 1990s, at least, that isolated grammar exercises do not improve students' grammar. I had also learnt that when teachers do more than "cover" grammar, writers will improve their writing by using the grammar they have learned. I was eager to experiment with this.

One afternoon at the Business School where I taught Communication Skills in an afternoon session, one student who must have been confused or felt he was in a harm's way by the non-conventional teachings about writing I was employing asked a question. This question, in my estimation, constituted the systemic defects in how students perceived the writing course and how some teachers actually conceptualized it. He asked, "Is this what to expect in the exams? We don't want to labour on reading/studying 'non-fa.'" The term "non-fa" is a street term for "irrelevant stuff." There was a pregnant pause after this question. Then, I thought about it for a while and replied him with another question—"What will be the relevance of this course to you after you pass your exams?" There was another pregnant pause. He couldn't answer the question. Perhaps, I had given him something to think about. What I learnt from that short encounter was that the nature of writing assessment determines what students perceive to be writing. If the focus of assessment is on policing students for errors in their writing, they might as well perceive good writing as grammatical correctness.

I observed that students had become used to the "banking system of education (based on the assumption that memorizing information and regurgitating it represented gaining knowledge that could be deposited, stored and used at a later date)" (Freire, 2013). In my student experience from junior high school to college, most curriculums of our schools were designed in the manner which bell hooks describes as "the banking system of education." Students were made passive participants while teachers were given the power and agency to control whatever happened in the classroom. We were spoon-fed with cooked information to master and prepare for end of term examinations and

other standardized tests, but not for practical learning or critical thinking. This kind of pedagogy did not only hamper our ability to read to understand and synthesize information, but it blurred our perception of education as a place for memorization and reproduction, where people with photographic and retentive memories were idolized and scoring high marks in examinations was the measurement of one's intelligence. Overall, I believe that a teacher is a facilitator; my job is not to solely open my students' minds and shovel in information.

As a writer of multiple genres, I see my writing literacies influencing how I teach students about writing genres. I am a big believer that by writing in different genres, we are able to access knowledge in different ways—both about the subjects we are studying and about ourselves. In most of my CS classes, I recommended to students to consider writing as an additional skill—not just a gift—that they ought to work on as a way to help their professional growth.

In assessing students' writing, students and I collaboratively worked on identifying some recurrent errors in their final texts. A major part of this task was through peer review and class discussions. Some of these errors we identified were in the areas of spelling, vocabulary, pronunciation, grammar, mechanics, and semantics. This approach of co-constructing knowledge with them during this error analysis was important because I know the danger of students thinking I am the expert who has all the knowledge about how to fix errors. It was also to avoid repeating the banking model of teaching where instructors literally open the minds of students and shovel in information.

I knew that students coming from different linguistic backgrounds are expected to have different kinds of difficulties with overcoming errors in writing. It is more expected than to be wished against, in order to shape the learning curve of students' progress. During our tutorial sessions, we spent time on grammatical errors that students had challenges with. I shared my own challenges with grammar as well. Students were more relaxed and ready to share their problems.

They had come to trust me. They knew I was committed to helping them improve upon their writing skills, so I was always looking for diverse ways of teaching writing effectively. I believe that any writing class, whether it is basic, intermediate, or advanced, the complexity of teaching writing predicts that students would face the critical challenge of mastering writing skills while teachers face the plight of providing the appropriate instructional support to different range of abilities of students in the class. As a strategy, I focused on the kinds of “errors” first-year students make, the rationalization and intelligences behind these errors, and how they can be supported to, not necessarily to overcome errors, but to recognize some of these errors, correct them, and make the best out of their writing literacies.

As a teaching assistant, I was thought of to know some things, but I did not know many things. I used to tell students that I am on the same journey with them to discover our writer-researcher identities and work through the learning outcomes and objectives of the course to shape our ideas and learning skills, so I encouraged students to ask questions. I asked them to seek possibilities not just within themselves, but also with others where many ideas and difference in opinions come together to compromise and collaborate.

### **Reflections and Consideration for Writing Instruction**

In this chapter, I shared personal stories of my teaching and student experiences of Communication Skills at KNUST-Ghana. Stories coming from students’ own voices are telling. They offer a glimpse into the educational systems and cultural values from these students’ perspectives. The students’ insights into their local writing instruction, such as the use of sources for learning to write, the methods used in teaching students how to write, and the ways of motivating students to write, give composition instructors information about different ways of learning and viewing literacy in different cultures. These different ways of knowing should not be treated as deficient or less impactful. Through this autoethnographic study, I shared more details about how

the Communication Skills program is conceptualized in Ghana. As I explained, this program is a good site to study for many reasons: first, as a member of the community, I could more easily strive to gain an insider perspective, and second, by critically reflecting on my local setting (and my role within it as a former teaching assistant and student), I believe that this study can affect future change and assist the program in moving toward the kinds of transformations it envisions.

I have benefitted immensely from the Communication Skills course as a student, looking at my well-roundedness in the use of the English language. However, looking at the issues that emerged from the narratives, the CS program could reflect on them in order to help the program expand its focus and pedagogies. Most writing pedagogies across the globe are gravitating towards globalization in education, and it is important that the program at KNUST continues to align itself with the notion of World Englishes, to deconstruct the English-only language of instruction policy in the classroom. The whole culture around Standard English in Ghana (British English preferably) needs a reconsideration and reconceptualization. Pedagogies that are designed on a range of topics in English studies, but not fixated on finding errors in language use and punishing students for their errors, have gained more currency. It is important for the CS program to continue to align with such pedagogies.

Teaching the Communication Skills course for two semesters has proven to be helpful, as it gives both teachers and students ample time to cover a wide range of topics. As a recommendation to writing programs in the U.S. where the first-year composition is usually taught in one semester, if deep systemic revisions can be made, it first begins with U.S. universities acknowledging the depth of the significance of diversity and multiculturalism in higher education. The previously-held assumption of U.S. dominance in the classroom is not only counterproductive, but it also undermines the heterogeneous student demography in most U.S. writing classrooms. When this change is achieved and first-year writing is made more than a one-semester requirement, writing

administration and institutions will begin to designate funds for its operationalization for two semesters.

The monolithic approach to writing—the normative issue of what writing should be—has over the years been counterproductive. Today, more liberal composition writing forms are at the center of most writing discourses, and it is important that it finds expression in our writing pedagogies. According to Bernstein (2001), “For years, many writing programs have focused on refining writing skills through a step-by-step process in which the writer is encouraged to develop and expand upon ideas, and is ultimately responsible for [their] own progress” (p. 286). It is time for the CS program to follow suit. As writing researchers, we should look closely at the writing process and try to understand all that goes into it because there is no “one” way to create a text. Different people have different processes, even if they are creating the same kind of text. Therefore, the course would be better positioned structurally and methodologically if it works towards being more process-oriented than product-oriented.

Multimodal composition has become a global phenomenon, where there is the encouragement of multimodalities and multimedia in the teaching and assessment of writing, noting that students have different visual, alphabetic, spatial, aural, and oral literacies. We need to recognize the varying composition abilities and experiences students come with and harness these as resources. This will make the experience of teaching writing fulfilling, not just for students, but for us as teachers as well.

It is important for writing instructors to manage their expectations of student writers, accept global Englishes, and understand that styles of writing always come from someplace. Native English speakers use the English language in a certain way, and bilingual students are likely to use the English language differently. Thus, teachers’ responses to students’ writing must consider students’ backgrounds, linguistic styles, and logic behind their “errors.” According to Shaughnessy (1977),

“Learning is a sequence of approximations, some of them quite far from the intended mark, and it is not unusual for a student to sound worse before he sounds better” (p. 194). As writing instructors, it is important to provide adequate instructional support for all students who come into the classroom space, including those we erroneously think are “unintelligent” and their situation “irremediable.” They are the ones whose eventual transformation would promote our professional growth and shape our teaching philosophy positively.

The stories shared in this reflection highlight different lecture approaches, classroom conversations, out-of-class literacies, pedagogies, assessment practices, classroom embodiments, etc. This is a source of privileged knowledge that ought to be shared with others because it is a privilege to be a member of two writing programs—a Ghanaian and an American—which are equally rich and have a lot to offer in terms of writers’, researchers’, and instructors’ personal growth. I believe that by putting my experiences as a teacher and student in Ghana in conversation with one another, I am bringing my memories and hard-earned empirical knowledge of diverse classrooms and students into this epistemological realm of meaning-making.

### CHAPTER III: IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

In this final chapter, I discuss the practical and theoretical implications for the autoethnographic work began in this thesis and suggest possible directions for future studies. The purpose is to make visible some gaps in writing research and offer writing instructors, scholars, students, graduate faculties, and writing program administrators (WPAs) a scholarly opportunity to learn about some of the current concerns and evolving research in the field as well as provide a more interactive engagement platform where emerging outcomes of research, theories, pedagogies, and strategies from diverse writing traditions can be accessed and assessed in order to help shape the work of composition studies.

The previous chapter focused on how the Communication Skills (CS) program at KNUST-Ghana is conceptualized, highlighting the intersections of writing, language, and culture—and how they are constructed on top of and against one another—using my personal stories and experiences as a student and teaching assistant in CS in KNUST-Ghana. In this chapter, I expand the radius of the conversation to a cross-institutional level where I begin a connection between my experiences as a writing instructor in the Writing Program in Illinois State University (ISU) in the U.S. and a teaching assistant in Communication Skills at the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST) in Ghana. Although this chapter’s focus is only a preparatory stage for extensive future research, the purpose is to acknowledge and “respond to the exigent call in the field for researchers to draw from global research traditions in the study of writing and its teaching, and demonstrate how writing studies may transcend “traditional” borders along national, cultural, [institutional], or linguistic lines” (CCCC). The rationale for this cross-institutional discourse is to harness synergistic efforts between these two institutions, moving towards the introduction of exchange programs for faculty and students, internships, collaborative writing research, professional

teacher development programs, etc. as a potential way to transform scholarly and pedagogical conversations into practice.

The first part of the chapter is a brief reflection of my experiences as an instructor of Composition as Critical Inquiry (ENG 101 and ENG 101.10) in the Illinois State University (ISU's) Writing Program from 2019 to 2021 and a connection between those experiences and the stories of the Ghanaian experiences I shared in Chapter II. The second part of the chapter is a discussion of the research implications moving forward, in terms of [1] teaching writing to multilingual students and students from diverse cultures, and [2] researching and learning from writing programs across the globe. The second part of this chapter also weaves in some recommendations for pedagogical restructuring in writing classrooms in the U.S. and across the globe that will promote cultural-responsiveness in higher education.

### **Connections between Teaching First-Year writing in ISU-U.S. and KNUST-Ghana**

Illinois State University (ISU) is a public university in the midwestern United States with an enrollment of approximately 18,250 undergraduate students, the majority of whom are White students from the Chicago suburbs and rural Illinois. Among the diverse programs run by the university, the ISU Writing Program was established to support the work of English 101 and English 145 courses (each course has several variants), which are designed to serve both different populations of students as well as the needs of different colleges and programs throughout the university. The ISU Writing Program has a long history of commitment to pedagogy and literacy. The Program is productively situated within the Department of English, and its courses are taught almost entirely by non-tenure track faculty and graduate teaching assistants (M.A.- and Ph.D.-level students). Indeed, the ISU Writing Program is not a representation of all writing programs in the U.S., not even in Illinois, just as the Communication Skills program at KNUST is not representative of all the Ghanaian writing experience, but it does stand out as one that has successfully developed a

more expansive view of what writing is and does in the world, developed effective strategies for teaching writing, and recognized the necessity of attending to writing in digital environments. The Program has undergone so many transitions, moving radically away from more traditional models for teaching and assessing writing, toward one that focuses on teaching for transfer, assessing learning rather than visible mastery, and creating writing research identities for instructors and students. This makes the courses in the Program so special.

The Composition as Critical Inquiry (ENG 101) course, which is one of the Program's primary course offerings, is part of ISU's General Education Program and fulfills a requirement in Composition and Communication. The course is specifically designed to help new undergraduate students become more critical, creative, and capable as both consumers and producers of texts. The course offers them a chance to develop the skills and strategies needed for critical reading, analytical thinking, successful researching, and proficient writing.

When I was offered the Graduate Teaching Assistant (GTA) position in the Department of English at ISU, one of my immediate worries was how I was going to navigate the challenges associated with being a non-native speaker of English teaching an English-related course to a predominantly White English-speaking student population. I internalized this imagery of a Black body occupying the space of an instructor, co-existing with White student bodies in a White space as a "deviation from orthodoxy" (Canagarajah, 2012, p. 277)—a kind of distorted reality or situational irony—and this swelled my anxieties. To put my fears into the proper context, I had been an accomplished teacher in Ghana, but my mind could not be divorced from the impostor syndrome that my new environment had made me feel. Not only was I skeptical of my teaching competencies, and the legitimacy and agency of my voice, identity, language, and accent, I was also distraught about the inevitable trilemma—exporting the teaching strategies and pedagogies I was used to in Ghana,

abandoning them outright and imbibing new knowledge from my new environment, or merging the knowledges from both worlds.

Looking back, I think the writing program at ISU must have been aware of the existence of some of these internal challenges and conflicts of new GTAs, especially international students, which is why it has designed professional development trainings for new GTAs before and after their teaching assignment begins. As part of the introductory training, a week-long orientation is designed for new instructors where they learn about strategies for transitioning into their new environments, pedagogical theory in writing studies, and teaching writing in multicultural classrooms. I eagerly followed the activities and discussions, and it allowed me to get a good grounding in the way writing is conceptualized in my new environment. There was a clear focus on writing process rather than the writing product, as I had been used to in the past. This new uptake, in addition to my antecedent knowledge from Ghana, gave me a holistic perspective about the activity of writing and how it works in different sociocultural spaces. Mid-way into the orientation week, most of the initial fears I had had disappeared, and I felt better positioned to begin teaching ENG 101.

On my first day as an instructor of ENG 101, I had a very *difficult* conversation with students. I asked them if they were disappointed that their instructor was not an American but an African (specifically Ghanaian), and their responses thrilled me. Their unanimous responses implied that they had received instruction predominantly from American instructors throughout high school and other lower levels, so they were excited for the new journey with an instructor with a different nationality. This response emboldened me. I felt that this was a class that was ready for perspective-taking and cross-national learning, and I was ready to give my all. Some weeks into the semester, I asked them whether they had any challenges with my accent, language, or pedagogy. Few of them responded that sometimes they struggled to hear some of my words at the first instances but later on

when I repeated them, they understood what I meant. This was an honest feedback. I also expressed that I could not always move with their rapid spoken communication, so I missed parts of their contributions. This bi-directional challenge between us propelled a site of *negotiation* where they would slow down their pace when speaking, and I would also repeat myself where necessary and write the *uncommonly-used* words on the whiteboard. This cultural and linguistic negotiation opened up many areas of discussion for the class. I had a similar experience in Ghana where students requested that I minimize the use of *big* terminologies from my English background so that they could access my language without any struggles. These experiences have taught me that the classroom should be a site of negotiation, not a space for imposing rules on students or instructors abusing their power.

Much of this pedagogical repositioning and negotiation is treated in ENG 402 (Teaching Composition), a professional development course that helps new instructors to form a cohort which is required of all new instructors. ENG 402 focuses specifically on current theories and concepts related to Genre Studies, Cultural-Historical Activity Theory, Threshold Concepts, Multimodal and Multimedia Writing, Linguistic Diversity, and Access and Accessibility. The course provides new M.A.-level and Ph.D.-level instructors theoretical and practical knowledges about teaching writing, and trains them to understand and implement the new Writing Program Learning Outcomes. As part of the course, all new M.A. instructors create a detailed course plan, course syllabus, and complete detailed ethnographic observations from other instructors' classroom. This teacher discussion is extended to the Writing Program Summit.

The ISU Writing Program Summit is the main professional development for returning and new instructors. The Summit takes place on the two days prior to the start of both Fall and Spring semesters, offering a range of activities designed to help both new and experienced instructors learn about new Writing Program events and research projects, as well as a space for instructors to discuss

best practices for teaching in the Writing Program. When all instructors in the Writing Program—both M.A.s and Ph.Ds.—come together to participate in writing workshops, course (re)design sessions, formal mentoring by more experienced or expert colleagues, and teacher development workspaces, they exchange notes and build teaching capacities and networking opportunities.

Writing programs from different spaces privilege and value different kinds of knowledges and pedagogies, and this is usually culturally, geographically, and institutionally informed. In the CS program in Ghana, there are no specific professional development trainings for new Teaching Assistants (TAs), presumably because they are thought to have already been accustomed to the teaching and learning of the course in their first year during their undergraduate studies. While this is partly true, it should be reconsidered because [1] it is difficult for new TAs to revisit the CS course they studied four years ago and still be updated with its new content, learning outcomes, reading list, etc.; thus, a refresher training course is needed, and [2] not all TAs have teaching experience in the past; therefore, a new teacher preparation training is essential. An investment in the training and professional development of writing instructors is an investment in student learning and success.

In my new role as an instructor in a new environment, my initial goal was to aspire to have an insider identity in this professional community. I had wanted to learn basic U.S. culture (lifestyle, TV programs, food, music, etc.) as fast as I could, situate my examples and illustrations from areas that students could easily identify with, and refocus my worldview through a U.S. lens. However, Canagarajah (2012) shares a similar experience:

I realized that I could not become a complete insider to the professional community in the West and share their assumptions and practices. I had other identities and community memberships that made me different. My multilingual identity was just one of them. Rather than treating my multiple identities as a problem, I have to treat them as resources. I should use these other identities to gain voice in my professional community. (p. 269)

After I read this article in my personal research, my goal subsequently changed to how I could use my multiple identities to introduce students to the expansive nature of writing that exists in the world. I believe it is the kind of experiential knowledge the field needs in order to accomplish its goal of globalizing/localizing composition.

Of the nine (9) learning outcomes of the ISU Writing Program, I decided to focus on outcomes 8 and 9, which are *Cultures and Communities: Culturally-Responsive and Ethical Representations in Writing* and *Translingual and Transnational Literacies: Attention to Diverse Language Practices*, respectively. With learning outcome 8, students are expected to demonstrate awareness of how writing is accomplished differently in cultures and communities beyond the university environment, including social, civic and workplace settings. The learning outcome 9 also specifically addresses two aspects of language use: [1] students will be expected to demonstrate knowledge of the ways that language difference can shape our knowledge and activities as writers, and [2] students will also be expected to demonstrate awareness of English as a “global language” (“Learning Outcomes,” n.d.). These learning outcomes point to translingualism and globalization, and these are two important areas that I realized my multi-membership—as a multilingual and a participant of different writing programs in different countries—could be useful for students’ learning. It could also contribute to the transformative efforts of the writing program to shift the paradigms about writing and the tacit English-only language of instruction in most writing programs. My goal was to challenge the dominant assumptions by bringing new thinking, values, and practices from the outside. Perhaps, it is the crossing work of transient, migrant, and multi-membered teachers like me who are daring to bring their African cultural knowledges into predominantly White writing classrooms that have led to the dominant paradigms being reconstructed in the ISU Writing Program and the field of composition studies in general. For future research project, it may be important to conduct a study

of how the knowledges, cultures, languages, and experiences of international graduate students teaching composition at U.S. universities transform writing programs, theories, and pedagogies.

As a teaching assistant in the CS program at KNUST, however, my multi-membership was not that visible and critical to my teaching because I shared most of these memberships with students and faculty. Our languages, cultures, and educational experiences were broadly the same. This shows how the geographical space we embody informs our perspective or viewpoint, and the knowledges and resources we commit into the rhetorical act of teaching or writing. Locations are, therefore, important in our work as writing instructors, and they influence our biases, boundaries, and borders. We should keep our boundaries fluid because where one speaks from affects both the meaning and truth of what one says, and thus, one cannot assume an ability to transcend their location.

When I was teaching writing in Ghana, I had not been bothered about how writing is conceptualized outside the borders of Ghana, not only because there were no opportunities to, but just as hooks (1994) observes, most of the teaching styles and content we are introduced to in our classrooms “[reflect] the notion of a single norm of thought and experience” (p. 35), and we are conditioned to believe it is universal, and as a matter of fact, the only useful way. I did not have access to such critical literature on the diverse writing traditions and teaching practices around the world, and that limited my perspective about writing. However, here at ISU, I have gained multiple perspectives and also learned that there is a fascination with new methods and a search for the best method that would ensure successful teaching. So I employed values and practices from my Ghanaian communities into my teaching. I had the feeling that my training and expertise had finally found a home where they could thrive.

As I have already mentioned, Teaching Assistants (TAs) at KNUST-Ghana have limited duties to perform, but in my situation, my lecturer gave me a rare opportunity to do more than the

usual duties required of a teaching assistant. I got the unique opportunity to assist him in teaching, researching, and reviewing course materials, and this gave me so much exposure to writing pedagogies and classroom instruction. Integrating this prior experience into my duties as an instructor at ISU, I did not struggle with the Program's open syllabus policy, which allows each instructor in the program to freely develop different kinds of assignments and projects, and different kinds of uptake genres and models for assessment. All I needed to do was to capitalize on the knowledge from the environments that are known to students, while also allowing them to have a glimpse of artifacts, knowledges, and uptakes from Ghana as well. These cross-cultural knowledges benefitted students in many ways, and it was evident in their weekly forum reflections, course feedback, and observation reports from my ENG 101 Coordinator. The limited time for this study made it impossible to get the Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval in order to share specific examples from students' forum posts. However, the general themes/patterns from their posts pointed to the need to think about writing for multicultural and technocultural audiences, genre research for diverse cultures and community writing, and how writing works for monolingual and multilingual students. These themes were also evident in my ENG 101 Coordinator's observation of my teaching and course plan.

The importance of supervision and instructional support cannot be overemphasized in our quest to improve the teaching and learning of writing. To give an example of my efforts to harness the writing skills and abilities of the students I taught, in Ghana, I received experienced direction and mentoring from my lecturer who was my immediate supervisor. In my current program, there are both online and offline instructional supports that I access daily. There are also opportunities both to observe experienced teachers in the classroom and to have my teaching observed by teaching mentors. The ENG 101 coordinator who observed my teaching provided useful

suggestions and pedagogical directions to improve my teaching. These support systems have assisted me to improve on my teaching methods and navigate specific classroom challenges.

In my Ghanaian experience, there was a focus on grammar and language usage, which was an integral part of the Communications Skills (CS) course. However, I realized that the focus of the ENG 101 at ISU was different—there was less attention to grammar. But having been a beneficiary of grammar-integrated courses in the past, I looked for a way to incorporate some little studies in grammar into the course. I was inspired by Hunter and Wallace’s (eds.) (1995) work, *The Place of Grammar in Writing Instruction: Past, Present, Future*, where the crucial questions about the place of grammar in the writing classroom are asked and answered. They describe ways that grammar instruction has been, is, and should be used in our writing programs. Contributors to the edited collection are not grammarians in the conventional sense. Rather, they are voices from various writing settings who show college writing teachers how to reconnect writing and grammar. I felt that with a focus on grammatical usage and sentence structure, students would be able to articulate how sentence structure, grammar, and vocabulary define particular genres, then use those conventions appropriately in their own productions and identify or revise any areas for improvement. At the beginning of every class, we would spend five minutes looking at some confusing words in English and consider some grammar tips. Some of my students commended me for that initiative, and because of their love for it, they became punctual in class in order not to miss that segment of the class. This inspired me to look for more creative and innovative ways to make the learning of grammar interesting to them.

When I was sponsored by the ISU Writing Program for a Just Writing Conference in Marquette University at Milwaukee in Wisconsin, I was interested to know how other scholars conceptualized writing in their programs, and whether the argument about the need for grammar in writing courses was still topical. At the conference, I presented a paper titled: *Toward a Sociocultural*

*Approach to Writing: Diversity, Agency, and Identity* in which I sought to establish a relationship between writing programs in different spaces (specifically at KNUST and ISU) and how they are culturally informed. I emphasized how grammar was integral in teaching writing at KNUST, but was not evident in the writing curricula at ISU. Other participants shared similar experiences about the lack of attention to grammar in modern writing instruction and the need to revisit it. What was also key in my paper was the argument that internationalization is not a footnote to the quest for responsible inclusion in composition studies; rather, it is central to advancing the cause of multiculturalism in writing classrooms. The professional exchanges and sharing of books and materials among participants at the conference who came from different states in the U.S. facilitated more multilateral exchanges. The emergent global resources, research papers, and collaborations among attendees at the conference played a crucial role in my teaching of ENG 101 in that semester and beyond.

What has been evident and consistent in my classrooms is the focus on researching, reading, and thinking critically about writing critically. My course content always seeks to explore how writing works, how people use writing, how the problems related to writing and reading can be solved, and how students can trust themselves as credible resources, as well as acknowledge scholarly sources in their work. Without the teaching assistantship program, none of these teaching practices would be possible for me. The teaching assistantships offered in both Writing Programs at KNUST and ISU are essential and should be funded and supported because they provide a critical opportunity for undergraduate and graduate students to gain the needed experience in the classroom, particularly in the application of practices and content covered in first-year composition.

In conclusion, I argue that the knowledges of first-year writing gained from both worlds as an outsider and insider are not compartmentalized in my memories, but they are well coordinated; they overlap because they are fluid, and it is the more reason I could reflect on them practically in this study. As my experiences in Ghana as a student and teacher continue to shape my uptake of

new knowledges in different cultural settings, I believe the knowledge I have shared in this study can help instructors in the U.S. design more culturally-responsive writing pedagogies for the teaching and learning of FYC in the U.S. It can open up discussions for incorporating different kinds of knowledge in cross-institutional and transnational curricula as is recommended in the CCCC's Statement on Globalization in Writing Studies Pedagogy and Research. Researchers in the field can conduct ethnographic studies on different writing programs from across the world to study how culture and native languages inform pedagogy designs.

### **Practical Implications**

It is essential to continually reexamine all our classroom practices in the light of contemporary scholarly discussions so as to achieve the transformations that our field envisions. Based on the issues that foregrounded the reflections in the Chapter II and earlier in this chapter, the following strategies are worthy to be considered.

### **Designing Professional Development for Writing Teachers**

It is important to engage writing instructors in professional development trainings because the professional preparation of writing faculty positively affects the teaching and learning of writing. The Conference on College Composition and Communication's 2015 "Position Statement on the Preparation and Professional Development of Teachers of Writing" recommends that writing programs should prepare teachers to address linguistic and multicultural issues through both graduate seminars and workshops that include interactions with culturally and linguistically diverse students. Writing programs should create professional development opportunities that include the study of relevant developments in applied linguistics, English as a lingua franca, foreign language pedagogies, rhetoric and composition, second-language writing, translingual approaches to composition, and related approaches, disciplines, and fields.

Most recent scholarship and research in the field recommend translanguaging as an integral part of multicultural learning that legitimizes the languages and identities of diverse students in the classroom. The question Glenn et al. (2003) ask is: “Given the range of voices, styles, genres, discourses, and language varieties available to student writers, how should teachers of writing respond to and evaluate student texts?” (p. 288). How does an instructor with no literacies in the “uncommon” languages of students effectively assess students in those languages if all language variations are legitimized in the classroom? The answer to these questions can be found in professional teacher development trainings in service of students’ learning. Instructors do not necessarily have to be fluent in students’ diverse languages; they need to recognize and appreciate them, and allow their use when it becomes necessary.

In the Chapter II of this study, I shared that even though the lecturer of Communication Skills course was not a native Twi speaker, and was not under any compulsion to learn the language for the sakes of students, he had gone a step further to learn to speak Twi since he got his teaching appointment at KNUST in Kumasi, a city where Twi is the dominant language. This commitment to teacherly professional development in service of students’ learning encouraged some level of code-switching and code-meshing in the classroom. It was a great way to practicalize translanguaging and students’ right to their own languages. The CCCC identifies that “[e]xemplary writing instructors are highly competent, reflective practitioners who prioritize students’ learning needs and experiences, integrate contemporary composition theory and research into their teaching practices, and contribute their disciplinary expertise to improve their departments and institutions.” The time has never been more ripe for all teachers of writing to build themselves professionally and gain insights from studying important works such as Geneva Smitherman’s *Talkin and Testifyin*; Xiao-Ming Li’s “*Good Writing*” in *Cross-Cultural Context*; Carmen Kynard’s *Vernacular Insurrections*; Shaughnessy’s *Errors and Expectations*, Staci Perryman-Clark et al.’s *Students Right to Their Own Language*, etc. as a central part

of their pedagogy. WPAs and graduate faculty should design professional development events that incorporate knowledges from this scholarship.

There is sufficient evidence to prove that in writing programs such as those in the U.S., it is possible that there might not be attention given to grammar or to language because they operate on the assumption that most students are native-born, and thus, have natural proficiency in the use of the language. This aligns with the argument that U.S. writing teachers need to know more about how language actually works. This is one of the reasons professional development is needed for writing teachers because quality writing instruction is essential for helping students develop advanced literacy practices.

The CCCC further recommends that in preparing graduate teaching assistants to teach writing, graduate programs should design intensive and comprehensive TA training and frequent workings discussing aspects of composition pedagogy. This will provide them with varied opportunities to cultivate and apply a theoretically informed writing pedagogy to work with diverse populations such as non-native speakers of English, students with special learning needs, non-traditional students, and at-risk student populations. There should also be mentoring partnerships with experienced teachers of college writing that should include regular formative assessments of teaching (classroom observations, course evaluation reviews, syllabi and assignment reviews).

To fully acknowledge the importance of teacher professional development, it will be essential to conduct longitudinal studies about the impact of teacher professional development on the teaching and learning of writing. It will be important to find the impact of this study on students, teachers, and writing program administrators.

### **Teaching Writing to Multilingual Students and Students from Diverse Cultures**

The full impact of diversity in writing classrooms has become unavoidable, and it has become one of the major concerns of writing teachers and researchers across the globe. Glenn et al.

(2003) note that “even a supposedly homogeneous group of students will reveal wide diversity, and most of our classrooms are far from homogeneous” (p. 289). How do we design pedagogies that incorporate diverse student backgrounds when instructors may not even know the backgrounds of students before the semester begins?

There are several clear implications here for writing instructors and others concerned about providing the needs of their multicultural classroom. First, instructors must design pedagogies of possibilities, pedagogies that are proactive and flexible. Writing faculty should keep all students in mind when selecting teaching materials and pedagogical strategies. The absence of diversity in the classroom does not mean students do not need knowledges about the existence of diversity in writing in educational spaces. Teaching materials should promote intercultural communication and understanding in class and beyond. Pedagogies should take into account students’ prior literacy experiences across languages and dialects, valuing students’ ways of life, ways of knowing, and ways of making meaning. Second, instructors should capitalize on the strengths of the cultural discourses, rhetorics, and commonplaces from students; these provide a rich reservoir that students and the instructor can and should tap into. Third, instructors should encourage students toward being generous with their cultural knowledges and experiences, which enable them to produce more powerful and meaningful class contributions and forum posts. Fourth, instructors need to deconstruct the notion of cultural dominance and power of some identities in the classroom. Instructors need to be aware of the asymmetrical power relations in our classrooms and rather encourage the respect of rhetorical sovereignty. Lyons (2000) defines rhetorical sovereignty as “the inherent right and ability of peoples to determine their own communicative needs and desires in this pursuit, to decide for themselves the goals, modes, styles, and languages of public discourse” (p. 449). The hegemonic act of seeing students of color as inferior and attacking their identities rather than valuing their contributions to knowledge production in the classroom contributes to the

immortalization of social injustice, making them look more as clones to their peers. All the bodies, voices, and identities in the classroom must be treated equally.

Another methodological approach is appreciating language and language diversity, and legitimizing all languages in the classroom, which is also an arena for exploring the complex relationship between theory and practice. Language is powerful. It empowers individuals to explore and change themselves and their worlds. Baron's article "Language, Culture, and Society" as cited in Gibaldi (1992) posits that "[l]anguage use carries not only the idiosyncratic stamp of the individual but the mark of a nation as well. Consequently, language becomes both a primary vehicle for the transmission of group culture and a badge of national identification. Language takes on symbolic value as the embodiment of culture" (p. 29). A belief in this power of language and the abilities of writers to ethically use language is a core principle of the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC).

How do we as instructors handle language diversity in the classroom? What premium do writing program administrators place on language diversity, in terms of student placement, against the backdrop that some WPAs, graduate directors, and graduate faculty who serve on admissions committees sometimes fail to recruit a globally diverse range of students and faculty in order to avoid the perceived challenges language diversity brings to the program? The flames of multicultural learning have exploded, and they cannot be quenched by some of these exclusionary practices. According to Tardy (2011), "In 2006, for example, language diversity was the focus of two important special journal issues. The *College English* special issue on 'Cross-Language Relations in Composition' brought together scholars who contested the monolingual assumptions that have dominated the field, arguing for the creation of new norms and assumptions that recognize the multilingual nature of today's writing classrooms" (p. 634). This is a crucial part of the deep systemic revisions that should take place in composition studies, not only because of the counterproductive

nature of an English-only language policy, but also because of the increasing shift in student demographics in the U.S. A few months later after this journal publication, Tardy (2011) continues, “*WPA: Writing Program Administration*’s special issue on ‘Second Language Writers and Writing Program Administrators’ examined ‘the growing multilingual student population specifically from a WPA perspective, arguing that second language writing is a sine qua non of writing program administration today (Matsuda, Fruit, and Lamm 11)’” (p. 635). Change in this direction is likely to happen if faculty work together with WPAs, while keeping students at the center of negotiations and discussions.

It is important for instructors to manage their expectations of student writers, accept global Englishes, and understand that styles of writing and speaking always come from someplace. Native English speakers use the English language in a certain way, and bilingual or multilingual students are likely to use the English language differently. Thus, teachers’ responses to students’ writing must consider students’ backgrounds, linguistic styles, and logic behind their “errors.” According to Shaughnessy (1977), “Learning is a sequence of approximations, some of them quite far from the intended mark, and it is not unusual for a student to sound worse before he [sic] sounds better” (p. 194). As writing instructors, it is important to provide adequate instructional support for all students who come into the classroom space, including those perceived to exhibit *too much* cross-language influence; those whose use of the English language is inappropriately characterized as *amateurish*, and those we mistakenly think are *unintelligent* and their situation *irremediable*. They are the ones whose eventual transformation would promote our professional growth and shape our teaching philosophy positively.

Looking at the rate at which Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) students are moving into many writing classrooms in the U.S., it will be important to conduct studies on how writing programs can serve TESOL students better through non-judgmental writing

assessment, expansive teaching practices, and translingual methodologies. It will be important to investigate the obstacles to and opportunities for transforming language policy and enacting a new multilingual norm in U.S. postsecondary writing instruction.

### **Researching and Learning from Writing Programs across the Globe**

There have been landmark conversations in the field regarding which writing traditions we are studying, the teaching practices we are privileging, and at the expense of which pedagogies and cultures. According to CCCC, “Researchers’ practices—who researches whom and what, how, prompted by what exigencies, with what sponsors, and with what aims—are implicated in global geopolitical relations and the transnational circulation and transformation of writing knowledge.”

As CCCC’s position statement on writing research recommends: we need to consider expanding the focus of writing research and encourage writing programs to pay attention to writing research from an array of research sites, representing a broad range of research traditions and including publications in diverse languages. Unlike some other areas of English studies that have been intensively examined over the centuries, composition studies offer many areas in which the surface has hardly been scratched, thus, it calls for expanding research. Royster’s (2003) landscaping metaphor calls on us to theorize how the field might be reconditioned to accept the possibility that other writing traditions from other locations, other genders, and other class positions might be just as rational and worthy of study. How can the field be persuaded to listen differently?

It is important to reconceptualize the focus of internationalization. There should be an intentional exportation and importation of writing curricula across borders, while opening our doors to writing instructions from “less desirable” places. But we need to do this carefully and thoughtfully to avoid reductive uptakes and cultural appropriations. We should emphasize respect for different kinds of knowledge in cross-institutional and transnational curricula. As CCCC recommends, “Scholars should also conduct research with students to understand their backgrounds, and with

faculty to understand what they bring to the project, including dispositions toward language, methods, contexts, and expectations.” A bi-directional internationalization is essential because, as Connors (1989) affirms, “I do not believe there is any one methodological or scholarly approach that is central in composition studies today, marginalizing all others. My tacit position is that we need every kind of knowledge that diverse approaches can bring” (p. 231). The field of composition is vast and ever growing, and it engages cross-cultures, traditions, practices, and ideologies. These diverse constructs are perceived by the world from different lenses and locations; therefore, there cannot be one tacit way of learning or examining the field. To argue the opposite would be dabbling in the fallacy that there is a rhetorical hierarchy, where obviously Western-centric (particularly UScentric) writing traditions are “perched at the top and the rest of the world rhetorics are being grouped below, looking up and gravitating toward the very top” (Mao, 2013, p. 43). We need, therefore, to redesign this intellectual space to be accommodating to multiplicity of approaches and strategies that altogether help work against latent centres and margins in our writing research.

### **Conclusion**

I believe there is a crack in everything; that is how light gets in. The recent movements for diversity and inclusivity are effectively working against some of these age-old racial inequalities in the classroom, and that is some racial progress in higher education. In this autoethnographic study, I argued that in the twenty-first century, the need for culturally-responsive writing pedagogies has necessitated continuous pressures by scholars, writing teachers, and students for deep systemic revisions in composition studies in the U.S.

In this thesis, I discussed the importance of culturally-responsive pedagogies in writing programs in multicultural classrooms, especially in the U.S. where student demographics are gradually shifting from the former U.S. dominance to a more heterogeneous learning community. The study examined the ways the experiential research can help teachers of FYC in the United States

reimagine composition studies outside the U.S. and practice inclusivity through the design of inclusive pedagogies for first-year composition classrooms. I proposed translanguaging, multiliteracies, and internationalization as methods to attain culturally-responsive pedagogies. To arrive at these conclusions, I used composition studies as a site, cultural rhetorics as a lens, and autoethnography as a method.

The autoethnography focused on my undergraduate experiences as a student and a teaching assistant in First-Year Composition (FYC) classrooms in 2009 and 2014, respectively, in the Department of English at the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST) in Ghana. The primary research goal was to discuss how my personal narrative, or autoethnography in the FYC program, can act as a source of privileged knowledge to expand knowledge in the field. I argued that autoethnography is a significant form of knowledge because it provides an insider account and analysis of weaved power structures that an outsider cannot dismantle. This makes autoethnography a genre and a way of knowing for the unknown and the rarely spoken of.

I presented and interpreted the data from my personal stories and experiences as they are rhetorically connected to the larger Ghanaian educational and cultural contexts. The purpose was to emphasize the value and power of stories, self-reflection, cultural context in education, and agency of voice. I talked about experiences teaching in ISU's writing program and made connections between those experiences and the stories I shared in Chapter II. In the end, a dialogical engagement with institutions and discourses as a path to a stronger and culturally-responsive field of composition studies is the moral of this autoethnographic study.

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