

An analysis of reporting verbs in master's dissertations

Shirley Eli Banini^{✉1}, Ernest Kwesi Klu², Ramos Asafo-Adjei³

¹Department of Communication Studies, University of Professional Studies Accra, Ghana

²Department of English, Media Studies & Linguistics, Faculty of Humanities, Social Sciences & Education, University of Venda, South Africa

³Liberal Studies Department, Takoradi Technical University, Ghana

Article Info

Article History:
Received on 12 July
2023
Approved on 29
November 2023
Published on 30
November 2023

Keywords: Academic writing; dissertation; reporting verbs; Hyland's (2002) taxonomy

Abstract

This study was purposed on analyzing reporting verbs in the Literature Review sections of some master's dissertations in the field of Government and Leadership at the University of Professional Studies Accra (UPSA) in Ghana from the 2017/2018 to 2021/2022 academic year. The study sought to answer the main research question – what is the nature of the reporting verbs used in some master's dissertations of students of the UPSA in the field of Government and Leadership? 20 dissertations were conveniently selected, and the Literature Review sections were analysed for reporting verbs using Hyland's (2002) taxonomy which involves Research Acts, Cognition Acts and Discourse Acts as the analytical framework. These dissertations altogether contained 1,044,076 words. Results showed that students used various reporting verbs belonging to – Research Acts (observe, find), Cognition Acts (believe, conceptualize) and Discourse Acts (report, discuss) in their dissertations. Discourse Act reporting verbs were predominant compared to Cognition Acts and Research Acts, implying that the students used more of the reporting verbs associated with their mental processes. It is concluded that lecturers using English language and Research Methodology need to train students more in the use of reporting verbs in order to have their writing more impactful.

[✉]Correspondence Address:
Department of Communication Studies,
University of Professional Studies, Accra,
P.O. Box LG149, Accra, Ghana
E-mail: shirley.banini@upsamail.edu.gh

INTRODUCTION

Reporting verbs are terms that are employed specifically to describe the works of other authors or to indicate that a quotation or paraphrase has been made (Hyland, 2002; Thompson & Ye, 1991). Writing at the tertiary level requires certain conventions and specific writing styles which may seem discouraging for most students (Cullip & Diana Carol, 2003). Requirements for completing various tertiary programs vary; depending on the institution, students must produce research reports, research papers or dissertations by following well-defined formats. Producing dissertations requires students to use specific formats to construct and arrange their ideas carefully and coherently, particularly when integrating ideas from other sources which is an essential aspect of most academic writing (Jubhari, 2015). One important aspect of these writing tasks is the choice of suitable reporting verbs to produce coherent sentences in carefully structured arguments and to convey to readers explicitly and unambiguously what exactly the student writers have in mind. (Adika, 2015) indicates that reporting verbs indicate an attitude of writers towards the status of an author's ideas, theories or research; or an evaluation of the evidential status of the sources being reviewed. Citation, according to Pecorari (2008, p. 6), is a reference to "citing something external to the citing text" and is a rhetorical device used in academic writing. Citation affords writers the opportunity to present the ideas of other authors as well as writers' own through self-referencing (Hyland, 2002). Incidentally, reporting verbs are the vehicles through which such citations' incorporation into academic writing can be achieved (Agbaglo & Mensah Bonsu, 2022).

A way to comprehend the use of reporting verbs within the academic discourse community is through a study of how these verbs are actually used in context (Agbaglo, 2017; Bloch, 2010; Loan & Pramoolsook, 2015; Manan & Noor, 2014; Yang, 2013). Researchers around the globe have paid particular attention to understanding students' use of reporting verbs with the aim of improving such use in successful academic writing, especially in students' dissertations and theses (Jafarigohar & Mohammadkhani, 2015; Jarkovská & Jarkovská, 2020; Lee et al., 2018; Liardét & Black, 2019; Manan & Noor, 2014; Ramoroka, 2014). Manan and Noor (2014), for instance, examined the effects of reporting verbs used in the dissertations of Malaysian students who earned their master's degrees in the ELS programme. Manan and Noor (2014) found that master's students were more familiar with the reporting verbs from the Research Acts category than those from the Cognition Acts and Discourse Acts categories and that they were used the most frequently. For their part, Jarkovská and Jarkovská (2020) used a corpus of master's dissertation literature reviews written in English by Czech students of Economics and Management to evaluate the usage of reporting verbs in EFL learners' writing. According to Jarkovská and Jarkovská (2020), the students had little understanding of how to employ the various types of reporting verbs and their evaluative purposes.

The evidence from existing research on students' usage of reporting verbs worldwide is worrying. There aren't many studies that analyze how reporting verbs are used by students in the Ghanaian context, and the same is true specifically for how reporting verbs are employed in master's dissertations. Examining the use of reporting verbs in research articles written by lecturers in the English Department of the University of Cape Coast and examining the citation styles used in the Literature Review sections of master's dissertations published in the Economics discipline of the University of Ghana have been the main focuses of earlier research (Agbaglo, 2017; Agbaglo & Mensah Bonsu, 2022). Because government and leadership are currently not studied at other universities, the range of studies in students' usage of reporting verbs at the master's level is fairly constrained. This is a research space that needs to be filled through the study of a site such as the University of Professional Studies, Accra (UPSA) in order to enhance understanding of students' use of reporting verbs so that possible identified lapses could be addressed, and potential positive practices maintained or enhanced. This study was, followingly, purposed on analyzing the reporting verbs used in some master's dissertations of students of the UPSA in the field of Government and Leadership. The study was directed by the main research question: What is the nature of the reporting verbs used in some master's dissertations of students of the UPSA in the field of Government and Leadership? The following specific research interrogations guided the study: (1) What reporting verbs are used by the students and what is the frequency of such usage by the students? and (2) Which group of reporting verbs are used often by the students?

There are three reasons why this investigation was conducted. First, one of the gaps in Ghana's academic writing scene is addressed by this study. Although UPSA has long encouraged academic writing, particularly dissertation writing, there is hardly any published empirical research to show how students, particularly master's students, employ reporting verbs in their dissertations.

Therefore, by disclosing the sorts of reporting verbs used by the students and the frequency of such usage by the students, as well as the group of reporting verbs frequently used by the students, this study offers a significant contribution. The second goal of this study is to act as a springboard for future research into other pertinent aspects of Ghanaian master's students' use of reporting verbs, such as the misuse of reporting verbs and the effects of such misuses on students' chances of graduating. Last but not least, an understanding of the types, frequencies and group of reporting verbs frequently used by students will enable various stakeholders, including students, Research and English language lecturers, research supervisors and assessors, university managers and succeeding states to expand and implement appropriate policies to foster students' academic writing.

The Literature Review appears to be one of the most difficult jobs that students must complete for their dissertations, likely due to the difficulty involved in combining information from many sources to create a new work (Banini, 2021). Because this is where researchers establish connections between their own research and that of earlier authors, the Literature Review part of dissertations is crucial to the dissertation-writing process (Bruce, 1994). Zuber-Skerritt (2003), citing Bruce (1994), explain that the Literature Review is both a process and a final output. Bruce claims that when producing a literature review, researchers are looking at earlier works in the subject, posing a problem, solving it, and contrasting their answers to those of other researchers. Bruce claims that it also comprises a report, a list, a search, a survey, a learning tool, and a research facilitator. The process of conducting a literature review often includes the creation of a dissertation chapter. One phase in this process is choosing relevant papers (both published and unpublished) on the topic. Such documents are prepared from a perspective intended to achieve a particular goal or to represent a particular viewpoint of the nature of the subject and how it should be explored. They include information, ideas, data and evidence.

Bitchener (2010) mentions the goal of the dissertation's literature review section which is to give a thorough account of the background literature pertinent to the setting in which a study is conducted; this serves as an argument, a case or a justification for a study. According to Bitchener (2010), there are seven communicational purposes of the literature review: an examination of the background and contextual material found in summaries and syn-dissertations from the non-research literature, a review of the theoretical viewpoints that support or notify a research effort, a review of the research literature relevant to one's subject and a critique of earlier works. The other tasks include identifying information gaps or research weaknesses, arguing why the gap was critical and big enough to be filled and outlines the plan and carry out of the research. Writers can choose to give Literature Review chapters their own names or include them in other chapters (Swales & Lindemann, 2002); researchers present their knowledge and expertise, which are based on earlier research in the topic or discipline. The legitimacy of the researcher's results is firmly confirmed by demonstrating such linkages and relations (Banini, 2021). Given the importance of this chapter to students' research and dissertation writing, it is clear from the present discourse that the Literature Review of dissertations is entangled and embedded with technical nuances. This chapter, consequently, requires great skill and tact on the part of students to be able to execute.

Citation and meaning

Thompson and Ye (1991) mention that student writers frequently name sources without expressing their opinions on those sources. From a quantitative standpoint, writers frequently over or under-cite sources. From a qualitative standpoint, because they are required to acknowledge sources, student writers frequently utilize citations in order to adhere to English language academic traditions. Student writers place more emphasis on the formatting of citations, emphasizing proper grammar, spelling and overall 'display' of citations, to the neglect of practical function of citations in texts (Jalilifar, 2012; Thompson & Tribble, 2001).

Citations should include reporting verbs (Loan & Pramoolsook, 2015). In order to show how they feel about the given information, student writers must choose the proper reporting verbs (Yeganeh & Boghayeri, 2015). An original method of signal evaluation is the use of appropriate reporting verbs. Evaluation is described as "the conveying of the writer's view of the status of the information in her text" (Thompson & Ye, 1991, p. 367). A reporting verb is one of the most obvious indicators of the presence of evaluation, according to (Thompson & Ye, 1991). Similar to this, Hunston (1995, p.135) asserts that "the reporting verb is, in fact, capable of construing complex layers of evaluation". For a very long time, the issue of how to select proper reporting verbs has

piqued the interest of researchers. As (Hyland, 2002, p. 130) notes, reporting verbs might have a variety of purposes:

The choice of a specific reporting verb is a delicate one because it is essential to both properly situate one's work and communicate with peers, to interact with coworkers and to appeal to the epistemological and interactive understandings of one's community. By choosing a specific verb, the writer establishes a specific link with the reader and the reported text as well as indicating the reported voice and evoking exact meaning and judgment. This has a significant impact on a reader's readiness to accept a writer's arguments and conclusions.

A Reporting verb chosen by an author therefore conveys not just clear lexical meaning but also implied meaning in the text and discloses the author's perspective on the cited data (Gil-Salom & Soler-Monreal, 2014). This supports the assertion that students' success in the production of the Literature Review parts of their dissertations depends on sensitivity and competence with regard to the intricacies of reporting verbs (Hyland, 2002).

Role of reporting verbs in academic discourse

Reporting verbs are one of the key linguistic components that academic writers must incorporate into their writings to evaluate the sources they utilize and to be critical of such sources (Kwon et al., 2018). Again (Hyland, 2002, p. 115) discusses the significance of "reporting" in academic texts thus:

Even the most unique work incorporates and conveys ideas, thoughts, research findings and hypotheses from other sources; in fact, if it didn't, it wouldn't likely be accepted for publication. Simply defined, academic writing relies on its ability to integrate recent findings into a broader discipline narrative.

The author emphasizes that academic papers must incorporate materials from a variety of sources, and it is crucial to evaluate the ideas that are employed. To persuade readers and to demonstrate the importance and validity of the work being discussed, writers often include references to earlier research conducted by other authors. A writer accomplishes this by expressing whether they believe another writer's assertion to be true, false or neutral. The employment of reporting verbs is a crucial instrument in this. Hyland (2002) notes that it is crucial to acknowledge other authors while creating knowledge, and the way writers react to it or take a position is just as significant as the knowledge itself. According to Hunston and Thompson (2000), the connections that authors make between their arguments and those of others frequently determine the rhetorical impact of a paper. Therefore, the choice of reporting verbs is crucial to establishing the credibility of both the writer and the assertions (Bloch, 2010).

Reporting verbs can be used by writers to present, critique and contest the ideas and actions of other authors, which are crucial components of academic discourse. Thompson and Ye (1991) further point out that authors can refer to their own assertions and opinions as well as the assertions of others by using reporting verbs. According to McNamara (2013), reporting verbs reflect how authors and presenters present, assess and challenge their assertions as well as articulate their own connected viewpoints. A variety of lexical tools are used by authors to establish the veracity of the reported statements, take a stand and communicate their opinions to the audience through the use of reporting verbs (Bloch, 2010; Hyland, 2002). It is evident, thus far, that reporting verbs are integral to academic writing or, more specifically, dissertation writing. Their importance is highlighted by their ability to engender coherent and scholarly espousal and integration of ideas by students in order to facilitate, as envisaged, quality research outputs.

Analytical framework

Hyland (2002) cataloguing of reporting verbs, which is separated into three distinct types depending on the sort of action they relate to, serves as the analytical foundation for this study. Figure 1 illustrates these as Research Acts, Cognition Acts and Discourse Acts. Due to its popularity and suitability for evaluating reporting verbs, this framework was employed (Agbaglo, 2017; Banini, 2021; Agbaglo & Mensah Bonsu, 2022).

According to Hyland (2002), research acts are verbs that describe experimental action done in the real world. Such verbs are often found in explanations of discoveries or procedures and include observe, discover, notice, show, compute, assay, investigate, explore, and recover. Verbs like “believe”, “conceptualize”, “suspect”, “assume” and “view” are examples of cognition acts, which are verbs connected to the researcher’s mental processes. Verbs known as discourse acts are linguistic in nature and concentrate on the verbal expression of thought or inquiry. The verbs “ascribe”, “discuss”, “hypothesize”, “report” and “state” are a few of them.

Hyland (2002) added evaluative functions of the reporting verbs to the process functions to further develop an earlier 2000 study. The reporting verbs were separated into evaluation categories within each of the process areas. Writers can use Factive verbs (such as demonstrate, create, show, solve or confirm) to demonstrate their agreement with authors’ outcomes or conclusions. Verbs used to describe procedures are not evaluated on their own. These verbs just provide an unbiased report on the study techniques. In Cognition Acts, reporting verbs approach evaluation in different ways. Writers can ascribe a certain attitude to the cited author by selecting one of four possibilities rather than overtly expressing a personal position on the information that is being reported. Writers can: (1) demonstrate a favorable attitude toward the reported information by using reporting verbs like “agree”, “concur”, “hold”, “know” or “understand” as a method to acknowledge that the information is accurate, (2) hesitantly approach the reported knowledge by employing phrasal verbs like “believe”, “doubt”, “speculate”, “suppose” and “suspect”, (3) take a critical stance against the reported facts by utilizing reporting verbs such as “disagree”, “dispute” and “not think” and (4) maintain a neutral attitude regarding the reported information by using reporting verbs such as “picture”, “conceive”, “anticipate” and “reflect”.

Discourse Acts reporting verbs give writers the option of taking ownership of their interpretation of the information by expressing their doubt or confidence in the accuracy of the statements reported, or they can qualify the author (Hyland, 2002). The first category of discourse verbs, which directly reflect writers' thoughts, includes the subcategories of doubt and assurance. Doubt reporting verbs also fall under the categories of tentative reporting verbs (such as postulate, indicate, intimate, and imply) and critical reporting verbs (such as avoid, exaggerate, not account, and not make point). Assurance reporting verbs have two main functions, as opposed to Doubt verbs. First off, they are non-Factive reporting verbs that can be employed to describe the author’s stance objectively. In this context, verbs like “state”, “describe”, “discuss”, “report”, “answer”, “define” and “summarize” are utilized. The verbs “argue”, “affirm”, “explain”, “note”, “point out” and “claim” are examples of Assurance reporting verbs (Factive Assurance reporting verbs) that writers may employ to support their opinions. The final division of Discourse Acts verbs is Counters, which permits writers to deflect criticism or reservations by attributing them to the original author rather than accepting ownership of the assessment. Verbs like “deny”, “critique”, “challenge”, “attack”, “question”, “attack” and “rule out” are examples of this type. Figure 1 depicts the three acts of reporting verbs and their various sub-classifications.

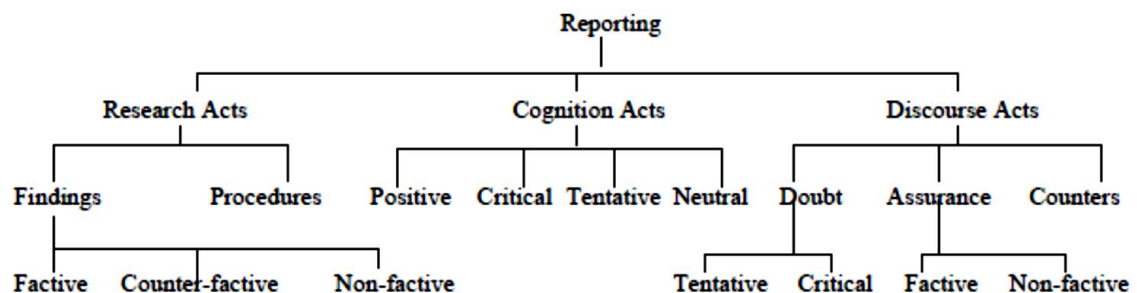


Figure 1. The three acts of reporting verbs and their various sub-classifications (Hyland, 2002)

METHODS

Population and sampling

The population was all postgraduate dissertations written by students of the UPSA. The target population was all dissertations written by students of Government and Leadership at the UPSA from the 2017/2018 to 2021/2022 academic years. This period was selected because the researchers wanted to obtain current reporting verb application practices on the part of the student authors to inform policy and adult practices in the domain of academic writing. In addition, Government and Leadership – a crucial programme in the UPSA – has not received the required attention in respect of its students' use of reporting verbs in their dissertations. One dissertation from each year was conveniently selected from the University's central library, and their respective Literature Review sections were purposively selected. The Literature Review sections were chosen because this is the main section of dissertation writing where reporting verbs are used predominantly to indicate writers' stance and to generate arguments (Soler-Monreal & Gil-Salom, 2011; Thompson, 2005). The Literature Review section also combines and synthesizes works from a variety of study fields, assesses the current strength of the evidence for a particular viewpoint, identifies gaps in the literature, and recommends areas that need more investigation (Hartley, 2008).

Study design

For this study, a straightforward case study methodology was used (Creswell, 2013; Crossman, 2019) because it fosters a knowledge of social life through the study of specific target populations. An extended time of in-depth analysis of a particular person, programme, or event is provided through a case study, a research technique. The phrase "triangulated research strategy" is frequently used to describe it. It is a study technique based on an empirical investigation that looks at a phenomenon in its actual setting, per the description (Restivo & Apostolidis, 2019).

The use of a case study is appropriate because the goal of this investigation was to analyse reporting verbs in the Literature Review portions of several master's dissertations in the area of government and leadership. The following research questions served as the direction for the study, which involved numerous individuals at a single location: What reporting verbs are used by the students and what is the frequency of such usage by the students?

Which group of reporting verbs are used often by the students? The interpretivist paradigm influenced this research since it concentrated on how students understood and made meaning while constructing texts in an academic discourse community. Realisation and comprehension are built through social interactions (Pulla & Carter, 2018). Myers (2009) asserts that the core tenet of interpretive scholars is that reality (whether it be preset or socially constructed) can only be understood through social constructions like language, consciousness, and shared meanings.

Data collection Procedures

The lead researcher carefully followed the ethical guidelines to get clearance and approval for this investigation. The primary investigator requested approval from UPSA's School of Graduate Studies and the university's librarian, assuring them that the study posed no risk to the participants and would instead help them in their academic careers. By not reporting the names of the students who authored the dissertations, their rights to confidentiality and anonymity were guaranteed. The literature review sections of the theses were extracted and coded. Codes such as LT 1, LT 2, LT 3 were created to ensure anonymity of the theses writers. The lead researcher sourced one dissertation each from the 2017/2018 to 2021/2022 academic years from the repository at the University's library based on those that were readily available. Therefore, a total of 20 dissertations were obtained and used for this enquiry. This number was deemed sufficient because the Literature Review sections were considered to contain enough data to answer this enquiry's research questions.

Data analysis

According to Mugenda & Mugenda (1999), fieldwork-related raw data is challenging to analyse and necessitates data management. In data management, assumptions and extrapolations are made based on the information acquired during an experiment or survey (Creswell, 2007). A checklist was used to analyse the use of reporting verbs in the master's dissertations of UPSA students studying leadership and government. Hyland (2002) cataloguing of reporting verbs, which is separated into three distinct types depending on the sort of action they relate to, served as the analytical foundation

for this study. In specificity, Hyland's three categories of reporting verbs: research acts, cognition acts, and discourse acts underpinned the researchers' checklist which was used to identify the groups and roles of the reporting verbs in this enquiry. The best tool for an investigation like this one is the checklist. The explanation is that it can direct the researcher as to which crucial elements or traits should be highlighted (Gay et al., 2012).

The researchers ensured that all the verbs chosen for this study were used for citation since verbs like *report*, *claim* and *state* could function as nouns in particular contexts (Agbaglo & Mensah Bonsu, 2022; (Swales, 1990). The Literature Review sections of these dissertations were photocopied, scanned as a portable document format and converted into searchable Word 2019. Word 2019 was used to count the total number of pages, word count, line count, paragraph count, character count, and storage size.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The data were then converted from.doc to.txt, which is a plain text format for AntConc 3.5.8 processing (Anthony, 2020), because of its widespread use in the field of reporting verbs research (Agbaglo & Mensah Bonsu, 2022; Loan & Pramoolsook, 2015; Un-udom & Un-udom, 2020). Using AntConc 3.5.8, the reporting verbs used by the students were detected, together with how frequently they were used. A tally score was utilised to determine which category of reporting verb a word used falls within using simple frequencies [modes] and percentages. Table 1 provides a summary of the characteristics of the data studied.

Table 1. Information on dissertations used for the study.

Description	Academic Year					Total
	2017/2018	2018/2019	2019/2020	2020/2021	2021/2022	
No. of Pages	116	96	96	176	140	624
Word Count	30576	30388	26364	58520	36388	182236
Line Count	1452	1440	9148	2776	1728	16544
Paragraph Count	408	404	1144	780	484	3220
Character Count	174292	173216	155556	333584	207428	1044076
Storage Size (kb)	1080	1456	1316	2508	1080	7440

Source: Field work (2023)

Reporting verbs by the students and frequency of use

Universally, the reporting verbs used by the students and the frequency of such uses are crucial to enhancing and understanding students' usage of reporting verbs in their dissertations. Therefore, this domain was investigated; the outcomes are shown in Table 2. Research Acts Findings Factive (RAFF), Research Acts Findings Counter-Factive (RAFCF), Research Acts Findings Non-Factive (RAFNF), and Cognition Acts Positive (CAP) are the acronyms used. Also, CAC (Cognition Acts Critical), CAT (Cognition Acts Tentative) CAN (Cognition Acts Neutral), DADT (Discourse Acts Doubt Tentative), DADC (Discourse Acts Doubt Critical), DAAF (Discourse Acts Assurance Factive), DANF (Discourse Acts Assurance Non Factive) and DAC (Discourse Acts Counters) are the other categorisations and their respective abbreviations (Hyland, 2002) used. Additionally, their corresponding frequencies and percentages are shown.

The results from Table 2 show that various reporting verbs were used by the students. Their use varied widely with some reporting verbs having a very high occurrence, and low occurrences for others. For instance, in the RAFF category, "show" and "demonstrate", had high occurrences whereas "confirm" had low occurrence. In the RAFCF category, "fail" and "ignore had the highest rate of use whereas "misunderstand" and "overlook" had the lowest. In the RAFNF "found",

“find”, were used greatly as compared to “obtain”. In the CAP category, “support”, “know” had high occurrences, whereas agree, in this category was not used as much. In the CAT category “believe,” “doubt” was used and “suppose” had a rare occurrence. These are thus, the reporting verbs groups and their specific examples found to be predominantly used by the students. In addition, DADT (indicate, postulate), DAANF (define, report), DAAF (explain, argue), DAC (question, challenge), CAC (disagree, dispute) and CAN (reflect, conceptualize) also received attention in the Literature Review sections of the students’ dissertations (Table 2). With respect to their frequencies of usage, RAFF (show = 6.08%), RAFCF (fail = 1.16%), RAFNF (found, 8.39%), CAP (support, 6.51%) and CAT (believe. 1.74%) are the respective most used reporting verbs among the stated groups of reporting verbs. Furthermore, DADT (indicate, 2.03%), DADC (evade, 0.29%), DAANF (define, 1.59%), DAAF (explain, 4.49%), DAC (question, 1.16%), CAC (disagree, 1.59%) and CAN (reflect, 0.72%) are the most used reporting verbs in the various reporting verbs groups in the dissertations of the students.

The following examples exhibit how some Research Acts verbs were used in the data examined:

The research findings of Khan (1993) *showed* that with the growing interest in pragmatism, with its great emphasis on democratic values it had a considerable influence in bringing about a revolt against autocratic style of leadership. **LT 10**

Stone et al. (2004) *confirmed* that servant leadership in comparison to transformational leadership, is predominantly a relations-oriented leadership, with the worker as its primary focus, while organisational outcomes are secondary. **LT 17**

Ogbonna and Harris (2002) *found* that leadership is indirectly linked to performance, while the specific characteristics of an organisational culture for example competitiveness are directly linked to it. **LT 3**

Avolio et al. (2004) *found* a positive association between transformational leadership and organisational performance. **LT 11**

In examples 1 and 2, *showed* and *confirmed* are used factively to present research findings. The choice of these verbs signifies the writers’ agreement with the research findings. In examples 3 and 4, *found* is also used to depict the findings of the research non-factively. This varies from Loan and Pramoolsook (2015) finding that students used verbs that relate both to findings and procedures in the construction of their literature review chapters. The choice of these non-factive verbs shows a concentration on merely reporting the general outcomes of research by other writers rather than highlighting the procedures involved and on persuading the reader.

In addition, Cognition Acts verbs were used by the students. Hyland (2002) explains that Cognition Acts verbs show a writer’s mental processes, as he/she is able to assign an attribute to a cited author as having a positive, negative or neutral attitude. A positive attitude is perceived via the use of RVs such as *agree, hold, support, understand*; a neutral attitude is perceived via the use of RVs like *picture, conceive, anticipate*. Words such as *believe, doubt* and *suppose* are suggestive of a tentative attitude towards the information being reported. Representative examples that illustrate the use of Cognitive Acts verbs in some of the theses are presented below:

Ngodo (2008) *believes* leadership is a reciprocal process of social influence, whereby leaders and subordinates influence each other so as to achieve organisational goals. **LT 2**

Ali (2012) *support* the view of leadership as that kind of direction which a person can give a group of people under him in such a way that these will influence the behaviour of another individual, or group. **LT 5**

Bhardwaj and Punia (2013) *suggested* that management performance is related to managers themselves than to positions and authority within the organisations. **LT 8**

Cardoso (2018) *agreed* that as much as ‘strategy’ is an elusive concept, so also is ‘leadership’. **LT 3**

Govender (2016) *disagrees* that leadership is a process by which a person influences others in a team or organisation to achieve a certain common goal. **LT 4**

The use of the verbs *support* (example 5) and *agreed* (example 6) and *suggest* (example 7) indicate a positive attitude and show support for and an acceptance of the information as

convincing. Verbs that show a critical stance to the information presented were seldom used; however, in example 9, the use of *disagrees* shows a strong refutation. This finding is in consonance with the suppositions of Agbaglo (2017), Hyland (2002) and Loan and Pramoolsook (2015) who also found very minimal or no use of verbs that show a critical viewpoint.

Discourse Acts verbs which are used to report claims of other writers were also evident in the data. Illustrative details of Discourse Acts verbs used in the theses are:

Vroom and Jago (2007) *defined* leadership as a process of motivating people to work together collectively to achieve great things. **LT 1**

Lam (2014) *explains* that market risk describes the sensitivity of the value of positions to changes in market prices and/rates. **LT 9**

Biondi (2020) *indicate* that when owned funds are managed by an entity, it natural that very few regulators operate and supervise them. **LT 4**

In Example 10, *define* is used from the assurance non-factive category of verbs to just recognise information presented by a researcher, while still maintaining a neutral attitude. *Explain* (example 11) is used from the Assurance Factive category of Discourse Acts to support the argument the writer makes, whereas in example 12, *indicate*, which belongs in the doubt category of Discourse Acts, is used to tentatively present the information. In this way, the writer does not commit him or herself to any particular point of view.

It is significant to note that apart from Hyland (2000) study which focused on native speakers, the other studies were on non-native speakers, but results produced are comparable. The nature of the discipline under study (Government and Leadership) is equally technical; hence, writers make choices of some verbs more than others. This further supports the views of Hyland (2002) that there are noteworthy variances in the various disciplines with regard to reporting verb choices in writing.

Table 2. Reporting verbs, category, their frequencies, and percentages

Category	Words	Freq	Percentage (%)	Category	Words	Freq	Percentage (%)
RAFF	Demonstrate	56	2.03	DADT	Postulate	16	0.58
	Establish	64	2.32		Hypothesize	4	0.14
	Show	168	6.08		Indicate	56	2.03
	Solve	56	2.03		Intimate	12	0.43
RAFCF	Confirm	16	0.58	DADC	Evade	8	0.29
	Fail	32	1.16	DAANF	Describe	84	3.04
	Misunderstand	4	0.14		Discuss	64	2.32
	Ignore	16	0.58		Report	104	3.76
Overlook	4	0.14	Answer		16	0.58	
RAFNF	Find	120	4.34	DAAF	Define	196	7.09
	Found	232	8.39		Summarize	4	0.14
	Identify	76	2.75		Argue	116	4.20
	Observe	40	1.45		Explain	124	4.49
CAP	Obtain	36	1.30	DAC	Note	60	2.17
	Agree	32	1.16		Claim	20	0.72
	Hold	56	2.03		Deny	4	0.14
	Know	160	5.79		Challenge	24	0.87
	Think	40	1.45		Attack	8	0.29
	Understand	116	4.20		Question	32	1.16

	Assume	48	1.74	CAC	Disagree	44	1.59
	Support	180	6.51		Dispute	16	0.58
	Suggested	116	4.20		Reflect	20	0.72
CAT	Believe	48	1.74	CAN	Conceptualize	4	0.14
	Doubt	8	0.29				
	Suppose	4	0.14				

Source: Field work (2023)

Group of reporting verbs employed in the theses

The different terms from the corpus were put into groups using Hyland (2002) categorization as a reference in order to determine which categories of reporting verbs the student authors frequently utilized

The frequencies and corresponding percentages of the categories were also examined. To paint a more complete picture of the frequency of usage of reporting verbs in the categories, the frequencies of the subcategories of reporting verbs used by the students were also examined.

From Table 3, the reporting verbs from the Discourse Acts category had the highest usage of 952 verbs contributing to 34.4% of the overall verbs; this was closely followed by the Research Acts of 920 occurrences representing 33.29%, and, in the Cognitive Acts category, there were 894 occurrences representing 32.34%. Students used reporting verbs from all the categories. The differences in use of reporting verbs from various categories appear to be related and reflects the students' use of the reporting verbs, rather than idiomatic expressions. This observation agrees with Banini (2021).

Table 3. Category, raw frequency, act category and percentage frequency of reporting verbs

Category	Frequency	Act Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
RAFF	360			
RAFCF	56	Research	920	33.29
RAFNF	504			
CAP	748			
CAT	61	Cognitive	894	32.34
CAC	61			
CAN	24			
DADT	88			
DADC	8			
DAANF	468	Discourse	952	34.44
DAAF	320			
DAC	68			
TOTAL	2766		2766	100

Source: Field work (2023)

Verbs that link to authors' research activities or experimental techniques were chosen from the Research Acts category (Hyland, 2002; Loan & Pramoolsook, 2015). These verbs, according to Hyland (2002), are typically used in procedures (such as analyses, calculate, assay, explore, plot, and recover) or statements of findings (such as observe, discover, notice, and show). Specifically, in

respect of the Discourse Acts, it is evident that DAANF (468) was patronized the most by the students. DAAF (320), DADT (88), DAC (68) and DADC (8) followed in that order. With respect to the Research Acts category, RAFNF (504) ranked as the most used reporting verb by the students in the construction of the Literature Review sections and was followed by RAFF (360) and RAFCF (56). It may be explained that RAFNF verbs were mostly used because they usually occur in statements of research activity or procedures. Regarding the Cognitive Acts, the evidence suggests that the CAP (748) reporting verbs received the most attention. CAT (61) and CAC (61) which follow the CAP received equal patronage in the Literature Review sections and were followed by CAN (24), which were rarely used. The results here are in good agreement with earlier findings by (Agbaglo & Mensah Bonsu, 2022).

According to the study, Findings and Assurance categories were utilized more frequently in evaluative categories than Research Acts and Discourse Acts, respectively. These incidents allow students to thematize their discussions. Although Hyland (2002) claims that students rarely use counterfactive verbs, this study shows that students frequently use them when they utilize reporting verbs like “fail”, “misunderstand”, “ignore” and “overlook” in their dissertations. The results presented here disagree with those identified by Agbaglo (2017), Charles (2006) and Hyland (2002). This account possibly alludes to the disciplinary classification or the nature of the Government and Leadership discipline as comparable to Business Management and Administration, Accounting, Information Technology Studies and Communication. These fields of study entail testing hypotheses and debating claims, and researchers are likely to use defiant verbs to do so. This may likely account for the high prevalence of this group of reporting verbs identified in our investigation.

In addition, it was discovered in this study that the factive verbs recorded instances of 320 reporting verbs inside the Assurance category, as compared to Doubt and Counters, representing 11.6% of all verbs and 33.6% with respect to the Act group. This finding indicates that assurance verbs are among the most frequently used categories, as found by Agbaglo (2017), Loan and Pramoolsook (2015). However, there were distinctions between factive and non-factive subgroups. While Agbaglo (2017) notes that non-factive assurance verbs are more frequently used, our study found a higher prevalence of factive assurance verbs. Discipline differences are responsible for this discrepancy in results: Agbaglo (2017) concentrated on English Studies, a Humanities field where reporting verbs are likely to be employed differently. The use of tentative verbs in citations is reported by Loan and Pramoolsook (2015), Agbaglo (2017), Wen and Pramoolsook (2021), which were also observed in present investigation.

Additionally, the Discourse Acts were the most often used category of reporting verbs in this study compared to the Research Acts and Cognition Acts. It reveals that writers remained objective in information presentation and is thus in line with the posits of Agbaglo (2017), Hyland (2002), Jafarigohar and Mohammadkhani (2015) and Yeganeh and Boghayeri (2015) who equally had results within a similar range. The nature of a discipline sometimes lends itself to the selection of choice reporting verbs, and writers tend to use some verbs more frequently than others. This high occurrence of the use of Discourse Acts verbs could be due to disciplinary variations, as found in earlier studies by Cullip and Diana Carol (2003), Jafarigohar and Mohammadkhani (2015) and Loan and Pramoolsook (2015). This finding, however, contrasts with that of Manan and Noor (2014), who discovered that the Discourse Acts verb group appeared in master’s dissertations the least frequently. According to Hyland (2002), soft disciplines are distinguished by the frequent use of reporting verbs and the seeming individuality of each discipline’s disciplinary practices. The Research Acts were the ones that were utilized the most frequently among the several instances of reporting verbs. In contrast, Manan and Noor found that “state” was the one that appeared the most in Discourse Acts. Finally, “know” and “support” had an occurrence of 160 and 180 respectively in relation to the verbs identified within the Cognition Acts. In an earlier study, Banini (2021) found that these verbs were also used in the writings by students in their dissertations, but the occurrences were not as prominent as observed in this study.

CONCLUSION

This study analysed reporting verbs in the Literature Review sections of master’s dissertations in the fields of Government and Leadership at the UPSA in Ghana from the 2017/2018 to 2021/2022 academic year. The dissertations written in English were conveniently selected, and the Literature Review sections were extracted and analyzed for reporting verbs using text-based analysis software.

Hyland (2002) taxonomy constituted the analytical framework. Based on the findings of the study, the following main conclusions were drawn: First, the students made use of diverse reporting verbs in their dissertations. This is evidenced by the identification of reporting verbs and their various categories in their dissertations. Second, the RAFF category was the most frequently used reporting verb category by the students. This is based on an inquiry registering 6.08% for “show” which falls under this category. Third, the reporting verbs from the Discourse Acts category had the highest usage. There were 952 occurrences representing 34.4%. Moreover, the reporting verbs category that received the least citations in the students’ dissertations was the Cognition Acts category; there were 892 occurrences representing 32.27%. In addition, in respect of the Discourse Acts, DAANF (117) was patronized the most by the students. With respect to the Research Acts category, RAFNF (504) ranked as the most used reporting verb by the students in the construction of the Literature Review sections. Also, regarding the Cognitive Acts, the CAP (748) reporting verbs received the most attention. These findings suggest the need for more research in the field of second language teaching and learning in universities in Ghana.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

We are thankful to the University Librarian and Head of Department of Communications Studies, UPSA for partnership in this research.

FUNDING STATEMENT

The authors received no financial support for the research and/or authorship of this article.

REFERENCES

- Adika, G. S. K. (2015). Credibility and Accountability in Academic Discourse: Increasing the Awareness of Ghanaian Graduate Students. *Practice and Theory in Systems of Education*, 10(3), 227–244. <https://doi.org/10.1515/ptse-2015-0021>
- Agbaglo, E. (2017). The types of and the frequencies of reporting verbs in research articles by lecturers in a Ghanaian University. *Journal of Literature, Languages and Linguistics*, 34, 51–57.
- Agbaglo, E., & Mensah Bonsu, E. (2022). Functions of reporting verbs in the literature review of masters’ theses in economics. *Journal of English Language Teaching*, 9(2), 347–359.
- Ali, A. (2012). Leadership and its influence in organizations—a review of intellections. *Nternational Journal of Learning and Development*, 2(6), 73–85.
- Anthony, L. (2020). *AntConc* (3.5.8). Waseda University. <https://www.laurenceanthony.net/software>
- Avolio, B. J., Zhu, W., Koh, W., & Bhatia, P. (2004). Avolio, B. J., Zhu, W., Koh, W., & Bhatia, P. (2004). Transformational leadership and organizational commitment: Mediating role of psychological empowerment and moderating role of structural distance. *Journal of Organizational Behavior: The International Journal of Industrial, Occupational and Organizational Psychology and Behavior*, 25(8), 951–968.
- Banini, S. E. (2021). Reporting verbs used in the literature review chapters of doctoral theses by psychology students in a Ghanaian university. Takoradi Technical University. *Journal of Technology*, 7(1), 58–101.
- Bhardwaj, A., & Punia, B. K. (2013). Managerial competencies and their influence on managerial performance: A literature review. *International Journal of Advanced Research in Management and Social Sciences*, 2(5), 70–84.
- Biondi, Y. (2020). Ownership (Lost) and Corporate Control: An Enterprise Entity Perspective. *Accounting, Economics, and Law: A Convivium*, 10(3). <https://doi.org/10.1515/acl-2019-0025>
- Bitchener, J. (2010). *Writing an Applied Linguistics Thesis or Dissertation*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Bloch, J. (2010). A Concordance-based Study of the Use of Reporting Verbs as Rhetorical Devices in Academic Papers. *Journal of Writing Research*, 2(2), 219–244. <https://doi.org/10.17239/jowr-2010.02.02.7>
- Bruce, C. S. (1994). Research students’ early experiences of the dissertation literature review. *Studies in Higher Education*, 19(2), 217–229. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079412331382057>
- Cardoso, A. A. (2018). *A Mixed Method Study of Transformational, Transactional, Innovative Leadership Styles in Large Accounting Firms*. University of Phoenix.

- Charles, M. (2006). Phraseological patterns in reporting clauses used in citation: A corpus-based study of theses in two disciplines. *English for Specific Purposes*, 25(3), 310–331. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.esp.2005.05.003>
- Creswell, J. W. (2007). *Qualitative inquiry and research method: Choosing among five approaches*. Sage.
- Creswell, J. W. (2013). *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*. Sage.
- Crossman, A. (2019). *An overview of qualitative research methods: Direct observation, interviews, participation, immersion, focus groups*. <https://www.thoughtco.com/quality-research-methods>
- Cullip, P. F., & Carol, D. (2003). Tailoring an EAP course to disciplinary needs: The UNIMAS effort. *The English Teacher*, 28, 1–23.
- Gay, L. R., Geoffrey E., & Airasian, P. W. (2012). *Educational research: competencies for analysis and applications* (10th edition). Pearson. <https://thuvienshoasen.edu.vn/handle/123456789/9427>
- Gil-Salom, L., & Soler-Monreal, C. (2014). Writers' positioning in literature reviews in English and Spanish computing doctoral theses. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*, 16, 23–39. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jeap.2014.08.002>
- Govender, D. (2016). *The influence of leadership styles on organizational team culture in a South Africa mining organization* [Durban University of Technology]. <https://doi.org/10.51415/10321/3141>
- Hartley, J. (2008). *Academic writing and publishing: A practical handbook*. Routledge.
- Hunston, S. (1995). A corpus study of some English verbs of attribution. *Functions of Language*, 2(2), 133–158. <https://doi.org/10.1075/fof.2.2.02hun>
- Hunston, S., & Thompson, G. (2000). *Evaluation in text: Authorial stance and the construction of discourse*. Oxford University Press.
- Hyland, K. (2000). *Disciplinary Discourses: Social Interactions in Academic Writing*. Longman.
- Hyland, K. (2002). Activity and evaluation: Reporting practices in academic writing. *Academic Discourse*, 115–130.
- Jafarigohar, M., & Mohammadkhani, A. (2015). Reporting Verbs in Applied Linguistics Research Articles by Native and Non-native Writers. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, 5(12), 2490. <https://doi.org/10.17507/tpls.0512.08>
- Jalilifar, A. (2012). Academic attribution: citation analysis in master's theses and research articles in applied linguistics. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 22(1), 23–41. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1473-4192.2011.00291.x>
- Jarkovská, P., & Jarkovská, M. (2020). A Contemporary Approach to Managing Social Responsibility in Relation to Employees as Perceived in Academic Papers. *Journal on Efficiency and Responsibility in Education and Science*, 13(3), 101–112. <https://doi.org/10.7160/eriesj.2020.130301>
- Jubhari, R. (2015). Comparing Indonesian and Australian Undergraduates' Citation Practices in Thesis Background. *Journal of English as an International Language*, 10(2), 132–158.
- Khan, U. A. (1993). Type of administrator differences in work satisfaction of secondary school administrators. *Education*, 113(4), 574–579.
- Kwon, M. H., Staples, S., & Partridge, R. S. (2018). Source work in the first-year L2 writing classroom: Undergraduate L2 writers' use of reporting verbs. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*, 34, 86–96. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jeap.2018.04.001>
- Lam, J. (2014). *Enterprise risk management: from incentives to controls*.
- Lee, J. J., Hitchcock, C., & Elliott Casal, J. (2018). Citation practices of L2 university students in first-year writing: Form, function, and stance. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*, 33, 1–11. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jeap.2018.01.001>
- Liardét, C. L., & Black, S. (2019). “So and so” says, states and argues: A corpus-assisted engagement analysis of reporting verbs. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 44, 37–50. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jslw.2019.02.001>
- Loan, N. T. T., & Pramoolsook, I. (2015). Reporting verbs in literature review chapters of TESOL master's dissertations written by Vietnamese postgraduates. *ESP Today*, 2(4), 140–145.
- Manan, N. A., & Noor, N. M. (2014). Analysis of Reporting Verbs in Master's Theses. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 134, 140–145. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2014.04.232>
- McNamara, J. (2013). The challenge of assessing professional competence in work integrated learning. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, 38(2), 183–197. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02602938.2011.618878>
- Mugenda, O. M., & Mugenda, A. G. (1999). *Research Methods: Quantitative and Qualitative Approaches*. Acts Press.

- Myers, M. D. (2009). *Qualitative Research in Business and Management*. Sage.
- Ngodo, O. E. (2008). Ngodo, O. E. (2008). Procedural justice and trust: The link in the transformational leadership–organizational outcomes relationship. *International Journal of Leadership Studies*, 82–100.
- Ogbonna, E., & Harris, L. C. (2002). Managing organisational culture: insights from the hospitality industry. *Human Resource Management Journal*, 12(1), 33–53. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1748-8583.2002.tb00056.x>
- Pecorari, D. (2008). *Academic Writing and Plagiarism: A Linguistic Analysis*. Continuum.
- Pulla, V., & Carter, E. (2018). Employing Interpretivism in Social Work Research. *International Journal of Social Work and Human Services Practice*, 6(1), 9–14.
- Ramoroka, B. T. (2014). Integration of sources in academic writing: A corpus-based study of citation practices in essay writing in two departments at the University of Botswana. *Reading & Writing*, 5(1). <https://doi.org/10.4102/rw.v5i1.41>
- Restivo, L., & Apostolidis, T. (2019). Triangulating qualitative approaches within mixed methods designs: A theory-driven proposal based on French research in social health psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 16(3), 392–416. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14780887.2019.1605670>
- Stone, A. G., Russell, R. F., & Patterson, K. (2004). Transformational versus servant leadership: A difference in leader focus. *Leadership & Organization Development Journal*, 25(4), 349–361.
- Swales, J. M. (1990). *Genre Analysis: English in Academic and Research Settings*. Cambridge university press.
- Swales, J. M., & Lindemann, S. (2002). Teaching the Literature Review to International Graduate Students in Johns. *Genre in the Classroom: Multiple Perspectives*, 105–119.
- Thompson, G., & Ye, Y. (1991). Evaluation in the reporting verbs used in academic papers. *Applied Linguistics*, 365–385.
- Thompson, P., & Tribble, C. (2001). Looking at citations: using corpora in English for academic purposes. *Language Learning & Technology*, 5(3), 91–105.
- Un-udom, S., & Un-udom, N. (2020). A corpus-based study on the use of reporting verbs in Applied Linguistics articles. *English Language Teaching*, 13(4), 162–169.
- Vroom, V. H., & Jago, A. G. (2007). The role of the situation in leadership. *American Psychologist*, 62(1), 17–24. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.62.1.17>
- Wen, S., & Pramoolsook, I. (2021). A comparative analysis of reporting verbs used in literature review chapters of bachelor’s and master’s theses of Chinese English majors. *International Journal of English Language and Literature Studies*, 10(4), 320–332.
- Yang, L. (2013). Evaluative functions of reporting evidential in English research articles of Applied Linguistics. *Open Journal of Modern Linguistics*, 3(2), 119.
- Yeganeh, M. T., & Boghayeri, M. (2015). The frequency and function of reporting verbs in research articles by Native Persian and English speakers. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 192, 582–586.
- Zuber-Skerritt, O. (2003). *New directions in action research*. Routledge.