

**INVESTIGATING THE EXTENT OF MEANING DISTORTION IN GRADE 10  
ENGLISH FIRST ADDITIONAL LANGUAGE LEARNERS' ACADEMIC ESSAY  
WRITING WHEN THEY USE WHATSAPP LANGUAGE**

**By**

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## DECLARATION

I declare that the dissertation hereby submitted to the University of University, for the degree of Master of Education in Language Education has not previously been submitted by me for a degree at this or any other university; that it is my work in design and in execution, and that all material contained herein has been duly acknowledged

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Mr. Golele TE

**22 June 2022**

Date

## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this study to my great grandmother Rachel Makhanane Golele and my grandmother Nomoqibelo Josephine Nkambule who are both late. May their souls rest in eternal peace. To my unborn child Xiluva, this world cannot wait to welcome you.

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## ABSTRACT

This study investigated the Grade 10 English First Additional Language (EFAL) learners' extent of meaning distortion they commit in their academic essay writing due to obsessive exposure to communication in WhatsApp language. This follows the researcher's observations that most Grade 10 EFAL learners' essay writing tasks in Kgakotlou Circuit are riddled with informal English register and a range of other language errors associated to the use of WhatsApp language. These include the use of slang, numerous spelling errors, fragmented sentences, and gross grammatical errors. In order to get a better understanding of the problem studied, a qualitative case study research design was employed. Data were successfully gathered from a sample of 4 educators and 22 learners. The participants were purposively selected from the Capricorn District's rural-based high school. The following data collection tools were used to collect data; participant observation, document analysis, focus-group discussions, and the semi-structured interviews. The collected data helped to address the problem investigated. Data were triangulated and analysed using two data analysis methods, namely; content analysis for observation and the thematic data analysis for the interview and focus-group discussion data sets. This study revealed that the learners' level of exposure to the WhatsApp language they use for informal communication makes them commit language errors that result in the deformation, omission, and substitution of the key words or phrases that help construct meaning in their academic essays. Secondly, the study established that learners perceive the use of WhatsApp language in academic writing as an effective tool to help them cope with the writing challenges they experience when communicating in English. Learners do not understand the academic writing concept. Thirdly, teachers need better and effective language error-correction strategies since their use of dictation is evidently ineffective to redress the WhatsApp language challenges their learners experience.

**Keywords:** Social media, WhatsApp, meaning distortion, slang, English First Additional Language.

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS USED IN THE DISERTATION

EFAL	=	English First Additional Language
ZPD	=	Zone of Proximal Development
BICS	=	Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills
CALP	=	Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency
CAPS	=	Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement
DBE	=	Department of Basic Education
MT	=	Mother Tongue
ATP	=	Annual Teaching Plan
LoLT	=	Language of Learning and Teaching
ELT	=	Extended learning Time
EMI	=	English Medium Instruction
LTSM	=	learning and teaching Support Material

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## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND**

#### **1.1. INTRODUCTION**

In the light of Krashen's Input Hypothesis (1978), the nature and level of literacy learners develop depends, to a large extent, on the context within which they are exposed to the information they receive through explicit or implicit instruction. This is evident in the manner in which the language learners use in their WhatsApp communication gets transferred to their academic writing when they are given writing activities in the classroom. However, the question of the extent to which this goes to distort the meaning under construction needed to be established. This chapter thus presents the background of this study, statement of the problem under investigation, the purpose of the study, and the research questions. It also highlights the nature of the research design adopted and the data collection instruments employed. The chapter outline concludes chapter one.

#### **1.2. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY**

The conception of language as a communication tool (Wittgenstein, 1922) as adopted by the DBE (CAPS, 2011) presents language as a dual-faced tool since it can either be used as vocal expressions or written symbols the purpose being to mediate (Vygotsky, 1962) communication between individuals or groups. This can only happen effectively where and when there is a shared meaning between the parties involved in the communication event. This makes human communication a two-way transaction of knowledge or what one knows, between the people interacting at any given point in time (Bonvillian, 2019). It involves putting together words or gestures to construct meaningful utterances. In Canal's (2014) emphasis, communication needs a language to mediate a conversation between individuals or a group of people to enable ideas to interface with emotions, attitude and perceptions in the process. This justifies why a shared language like the kind used in academic writing was developed and taught. Communication is the point at which literacy kicks in, and should be accompanied by the learners' positive receptive attitude

to master the language before they can effectively use it. The researcher believes that if this is not done right, language is then used out of context.

The dawn of WhatsApp language for communication through text-messaging, for instance, has generated a new language in the English First Additional Language (EFAL) learners' academic essay writing, which impacts their construction of meaning in one way or another. Miah and Omar (2012) observed that with so many social networking sites and so much communication on those social network sites on the internet, learners get tempted to abandon their school work and reading times in preference for chatting online with friends. They discovered that learners use WhatsApp language even in classrooms at school to chat to one another while their lessons are in progress. Of concern in the circumstances is that the nature of unconventional language learners pervades the best part of the essays they write, with the resultant distortion of the meaning they intend to convey.

What is worrisome about the problem studied is that it is not a phenomenon only affecting schools in the Kgakotlou Circuit, it is a new wave of writing anomaly experienced globally as evidently observed by Perkins (2014). Perkins (2014) also established that most formal academic tasks learners write are presented in informal register, contrary to what the academic writing style expects. In his/her view, the main cause of the distortion of meaning typical in the learners' work is the use of fragmented sentences. This clearly contributes to the construction of distorted meaning, which opens the learners' work up to a presentation of multiple layers of the intended meaning. Students seem to lose a sense of management of the register appropriate for academic texts. Perkins (2014) conceded that the use of WhatsApp language by learners was, however, increasing rapidly on social media platforms, with a detrimental effect on conventional standards expected to be upheld.

Jeffries (2010) warned students not to take meaning for granted when writing since it plays a critical role in human communication. The researcher agrees with Jeffries' warning on the basis of his observational experience. The observation is that the construction of meaning is not a simple exercise because what might be seen as being meaningful to the first reader might not be the case with the second one. It is imperative,

therefore, that learners strive towards presenting their ideas in a standardised way to avoid unnecessary distortions.

Grabe and Kaplan (2012) emphasised that there is a standard way of writing academically, which requires not only our basic writing competences and the construction of meaning but it also calls for the awareness of the “constitutive cultural system” that plays an influential role in academic writing. They (Grabe and Kaplan, *ibid*) insisted that in writing essays, learners must align language and meaning to avoid the temptation of falling into the trap of writing texts that are riddled with grammatical errors and distorted meaning.

In the South African context, the DBE (CAPS, 2011:4 – 5) promulgated an imperative that prescribed that a process-based writing approach be used to develop the Grade 10 – 12 learners’ writing and presentation skills. The rationale behind this imperative was to ensure that learners are gradually equipped to a level of communicative competence that would:

- Grant them not only access to higher education but also the capacity to cope successfully with the level of competence required at that level.
- Enable them “to communicate effectively using visual, symbolic and/or language skills in various modes” within local and global contexts.

The disturbing reality the researcher observed, however, was that WhatsApp language does not qualify to be called or used as a standardised language to be used as a communication tool for a local communication context. That is, like being a special jargon for the Limpopo communities in general. On the other hand, the learners’ scornful attitude towards mastering academic language in class does not seem to be of much help towards equipping them for effective communication at global level. Consequently, all the effort the DBE tried to give in its attempt to empower the learners’ growth in effective writing appear to be least welcome in the light of the learners’ reactions.

In a nutshell, the above assertions were sufficient motivation to prompt the researcher to do this study. Thus, idea the extent to which WhatsApp language affects the students’

academic writing in English First Additional Language classrooms was investigated. In addition, recurrent complaints informally shared among the educators such as how learners are obsessed with the use of slang, fragmented sentences, wrong spelling, as well as the use of short hand approach in academic writing added more impetus to the researcher's inspiration to carry out this study.

### **1.3 RESEARCH PROBLEM**

The researcher observed that the Grade 10 EFAL learners struggle to write essays that convey their intended meaning when they are given academic writing tasks due to linguistic errors identified in their work. The identified errors were linked to the use of social media language such as WhatsApp, among others, which creep into their essays in the course of writing. It could be concluded that the effects of social media language distort the meaning the learners strive to construct even though the extent thereof is unknown, and hence this study. The researcher's observation is consistent with Krashen's Input Hypothesis (1978) that indicates that this distortion is not coincidence because what learners hear or read more often ultimately determines how they later produce similar output either orally or in writing. Chavan (2018) agreed with the researcher's observation that learners tend to focus on instant message transmission rather than the language precision. This shifts learners' focus from correct spelling and the sentences' grammatical accuracy they construct in their academic writing. The result is an increase in flouting the expected syntactic order. This increases their likelihood to perform poorly academically across other learning areas offered in English (Chavan, 2018). Against this background, this study investigated the depth of distortion of meaning that follows when learners write their academic essays.

## **1.4. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

### **1.4.1 Purpose of the study**

This study investigated the extent to which Grade 10 English First Additional Language (EFAL) learners' daily communication in WhatsApp language distorts meaning when they use it in their academic essay writing.

### **1.4.2 Main research question**

To what extent does the Grade 10 EFAL learners' use of WhatsApp (social medium) language in their communication affect the construction of meaning in their academic essay writing?

### **1.4.3 Sub-questions**

- 1.4.3.1 What kind of language errors do learners commit in their academic essay writing due to their transfer of language structures that are associated with WhatsApp language?
- 1.4.3.2 What are the learners' perceptions of the phenomenon of WhatsApp language interference in their academic writing?
- 1.4.3.3 What corrective measures do teachers apply to help their Grade 10 EFAL learners to deal with the WhatsApp language they generally allow to creep into their academic essay writing?

## **1.5. THE ROLE OF THEORY**

The study was guided by Vygotsky's (1978) Social Constructivism Theory. The three concepts of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), Scaffolding, and Mediation were relevant to this study because they each play a role in helping to develop a conducive

atmosphere for the learners' collaborative learning in the classroom. The theory posits that learners develop language effectively when they engage in social interaction with their peers or interlocutors. The theory provided a lens through, which this study was done and interpreted. An atmosphere of constructivist language acquisition can be seen in any classroom where learners engage in social interaction through the WhatsApp language use. This is now the norm in this country where schools even supply learners with tablets as learning tools. This allows learners and their teachers to create their reality and understanding of the world collectively through experiencing issues and reflecting on those experiences.

Vygotsky believed that culture was the principal factor of cognitive progress. In Vygotsky's Constructivism theory, knowledge leads to further cognitive development. The societal configuration of intelligence states that an individual's growth could not be comprehended without indication to the societal and cultural context where the aforementioned evolution is entrenched and mind development is continuous.

#### **1.5.1. The Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)**

ZPD refers to the potential distance between the actual development level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential achievement as determined by the progress learner make or through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers (Vygotsky, 1978). This term basically means a room for potential development from a limited to an estimated point of one's growth. The principle entails that every learner can develop language skills from a poor to an advanced level within their ZPD. A learner can achieve certain progress alone, and that requires others' help. This can happen by giving learners challenging tasks, activities that learners cannot solve easily or cannot do on their own. Guidance should be provided to them to complete the task. This would in turn help the researcher to improve the learners' learning processes.



### **1.5.2. Scaffolding**

Scaffolding could be seen as a strategy that an educator can use to enhance the learners' room to develop their language skills through the help of advanced peers and the teachers' offer to learners who struggle with language (Raymond, 2000). It is a learning strategy that makes learners reach out to other learners and co-construct their knowledge through collaborative dialogue. Peer correction is critical where learners cannot self-correct. In this study's context, scaffolding means that learners can call in any of the peers to guide them through negotiations of meaning that might be created in the classroom. Scaffolding is about providing assistance to other learners or those who need the teacher's assistance.

### **1.5.3. Mediation**

Language is a medium that gives learners and teachers a functional tool to communicate for learning or other purposes. Without language, communication becomes almost impossible. William and Burden (2010) claimed that all language users begin from birth to build a relationship with people around them. Fisher (2005) stated that when mediation occurs in language classrooms, educators interact with learners and help them apply the language themselves rather than providing them with the language knowledge. For example, in EFAL classes, most learners apply the WhatsApp language to mediate their communication through text messages. However, the challenges develop when the language in WhatsApp is not the same language they are assessed in.

## **1.6. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **1.6.1. Research method**

The research approach employed in this study is qualitative. Shank (2002:5) describes it as "a form of systematic empirical inquiry into meaning" that is not based on numerical or statistical explanations to depict meaning. The researcher used the qualitative research

approach because the study's problem was social in nature, and it involved the learners' social conduct in their classroom.

Qualitative research derives its roots and focal direction from the interpretive paradigm, which emphasises that reality is subjective. That is, people create and interpret their reality through co-construction and negotiation of meaning. This entails sharing their thoughts, perceptions and experiences created in unique socio-cultural context (Elster, 2007). Thus, reality from an interpretive perspective can only be interpreted correctly when viewed through the eyes of the study's participants. That is, the interpretation or analysis of the participants' views, experiences, and feelings in relation to their use of WhatsApp in academic essays might not be read through the use of numerical devices and the participants' subjective output. This is the direction this study took in order to get a clear understanding of how communication through WhatsApp affected meaning in Grade 10 EFAL learners' academic writing (Travers, 2012).

### **1.6.2 Research design**

Research design refers to the overall strategy that a researcher chooses to integrate different components of the study in a coherent and logic way, thereby, ensures that they are able to address the study's research problem. It constitutes the blueprint for the data collection, measurement, and analysis (De Vaus, 2011). For this study, a qualitative case study research design was adopted. It entailed using a research method that helped to investigate a social phenomenon in its context of real existence (Lehmann, 2002). The units of analysis for this study were a group of Grade 10 EFAL learners and their teachers purposively selected from one school in Kgakoloti Circuit, Limpopo Province. The data collected through observation, interview, focus-group discussion, and document analysis were based on these participants. Detailed discussion of the population sample, data collection process, data analysis, ethicalities, and quality assurance are provided in Chapter 3.

## **1.7 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

The study's findings would shed light that could help us to make corrective intervention in the affected learners' work, and shed light on why learners use social media language in academic texts. This might help educators and the DBE to work towards reducing the rate of language erosion as it is the case now. Poor grammatical competency and errors raise critical issues that might lead learners into self-demotivation and could develop those who are unable to communicate with the outside world. In turn, this would damage the country as a whole because these learners are this country's future leaders. If not properly attended to and remedied, it might be a lifelong challenge that would affect them.

## **1.8 ORGANISATION OF CHAPTERS**

### **1.8.1 Chapter One: Introduction and background**

This chapter introduces the study. It lays out the study's background and what motivated the researcher to investigate the problem studied. Covered herein include the presentation of the purpose of the study and research questions. It also highlights the nature of research design adopted and specifies the key data collection instruments employed.

### **1.8.2 Chapter Two: Literature review**

The chapter critically reviews literature to provide multifaceted ideas of the role WhatsApp language plays, and also depicts the influence it has on the learners' academic writing. The chapter is organised according to the themes of the relevant literature reviewed. Included herein are literacy, the concept of social media language, CAPS imperatives on creative writing at the FET level, conventional standards in academic writing, and trans-language and its links with the WhatsApp language learners use in their academic written tasks.

### **1.8.3 Chapter Three: Research methodology**

This chapter outlines the research methodology and design the study adopted. This covers the research approach used, the research site chosen, the study population, and sampling. It also highlights the data collection instruments and process, as well as the data analysis strategies used. Ethical issues and quality criteria observed are also provided.

### **1.8.4 Chapter Four: Presentation and analysis of data**

In this chapter, the types of data collected using methods such as observation, focus-group discussion, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis are presented and analysed using a variety of data analysis strategies.

### **1.8.5 Chapter Five: Findings, conclusion and recommendations**

This chapter sums up the study by discussing the study's findings and their subsequent conclusions derived from the triangulation of the collected data. Recommendations regarding what further studies can be done further based on the findings established, are also furnished in this chapter. Lastly, this study's limitations are outlined. This is to allow other researchers to explore the issues regarding the implication of the WhatsApp language use in academic writing.

## **1.9 CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, this chapter introduced the study by touching on the key aspects of what is covered. This is highlighted in the background of the study, the problem investigated, the purpose of the study, and the research questions. Lastly, the chapter closes with a highlight of the research design, the significance of the study, and chapter organisation. The next chapter reviews relevant literature, old and current, reviewed to establish

different views, observations, and research findings different scholars share on the phenomenon investigated.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.1. INTRODUCTION**

This chapter reviews a range of literature on the learners' use of WhatsApp language for communication and how their exposure to that language affects their construction of meaning when writing academic essays. This follows the researcher's observation that the register used in the WhatsApp language is inappropriate to use in academic writing because it is not guided by conventional syntactical rules and order. The themes covered in this review include literacy, social media language, discourse analysis, the difference between spoken and written language, the importance of developing the learners' competence in academic writing, the question of nurturing in language development, the need for the knowledge of cohesion in a written document, BICS and CALP, standard English necessity in formal or academic writing, and translanguaging and how it relates to the social media language.

#### **2.2 LITERACY**

Lankshear and Knobel (2007) described literacy as a set of social practices, which arise from incidental events that are facilitated by written texts. The development of literacy is generally dependent on observable events often seen in written texts. Beekman, Dube, Potgieter, and Underhill (2019) believe that literacy goes a long way beyond a set of reading and writing material or activities. That is, it develops in learners the ability to think critically, interpret, and understand a range of concepts in written and spoken discourse. Learners should be able to demonstrate their competence in literacy when they deal with texts of digital, oral, or multimodal nature as they might encounter them in different contexts. Baynham's (2000) observed that literacy enables learners to label, structure, and organise texts in line with the set conventional standards in the area of writing.

In the context of language use in academic discussions or public speaking events, the role of literacy is seen where perceptions and mental processing are applied beyond the interpretation of graphic symbols only associated with the traditional hard copy visual text reading (Cazden, 2002). Cazden (ibid) revealed that literacy in context of use includes both internal and external circumstances that influence the nature of school literacy events and how learners learn in them.

Writing is considered as a multifunctional tool in all educational levels of teaching and learning. Coffin et al. (2003); Murray and Hughes (2008); Gillett et al. (2009) claimed that it is mainly through writing that one's success is measured at a higher institution. Writing plays a critical role in determining what learners have captured in academic subjects. In this sense, writing can be used as a tool to judge the quality of the learners' thinking capacity and the pace at which they learn due to the way it serves as a fundamental framework used to develop their progress across all the learning fields.

Teachers work towards developing their learners' writing competence in order to capacitate them with the skills or knowledge they need at individual level in order to respond to the social, communicative and learning challenges they encounter in different contexts (Derrick, 2016). According to Ellis (2008), competence in written discourse is important and can benefit learners in various ways. For example, it is good for complicated and vital instructions, which can be given in a precise and uniform manner. Secondly, written information can be checked at a later date and be used for reference with a slim chance for the message to be misinterpreted. Some of the benefits the researcher found relevant are that written discourse is the best way to easily represent any complex matter.

Mostly, the learners' level of literacy is gauged through giving them texts to read and demonstrate their knowledge levels. The given activities might be referred to as discourse analysis, which means a study of social life. Discourse analysis can be understood through the language analysis in its wildest sense, including face-to face talk, non-verbal interaction, images and symbols, and documents (Traynor, 2004). Van Dijk (2001) viewed

discourse analysis as a qualitative method of analysis, which discovers the meanings produced by language use and communication. The contexts and processes of these meanings and practices are triggered by these meanings. Hult (2017) emphasised that the concept of discourse analysis is, in terms of coherent sequences of sentences, propositions, speech, or turns at talk.

Bloom (1991) cogently indicated the first issue in her criticism of pivot grammar when she pointed out that the relationship in which words occur in telegraphic utterances are only superficially similar. She stated that children learn underlying structures, not superficial word order dependent on the social context. It was through Bloom's research that a way for a new wave of child language study was developed, this time centred on the relationship of cognitive development to language acquisition. Piaget (1955) defined the overall development as a result of the children's interaction with the environment. This researcher discovered that in the modern era, language development is twisted not with cognitive and memory but also with social and functional acquisition.

### **2.3 THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN SPOKEN AND WRITTEN DISCOURSE**

The differences between spoken and written discourse have specific uses to many types of practical language works. For example, in comparing consistency and the structure of a language, it is not possible for one to apply both spoken and written discourse concurrently. This has led to different conclusions. Biber and Paltridge (2006) stated that each discourse has its own characteristics, and hence there are different text types, and consequently, different homilies. Therefore, it is not logical to use them both in testing the learner's grammatical competence. Biber (2006) suggested that written and spoken English discourses do not have single absolute differences. These variations are as a result of different texts and genres in English. They can be mixed with each other in settings where spoken language occurs in forms of written language in emails or informal letters.



Paltridge (2006) classified the difference between spoken and written English into eight important features namely; nominalisation, spontaneity, contextualisation, grammatical intricacy, lexical density, explicitness, repetition, hesitation and, redundancy and continuum view. Each of these dimensions are discussed as follows:

### **2.3.1. Nominalisation**

Paltridge (2006) said that nominalisation are actions or events presented as nouns instead of verbs. He asserted that nominalisation is more recurrent in spoken language and have shorter noun groups. Meanwhile, written discourse has longer noun groups. Thus, this makes written language to have a more tightly packed way of delivering information where the information is packed into less spread out clauses and fewer words.

### **2.3.2. Spontaneity**

Most researchers and scholars believe that spoken discourse is ungrammatical and lacks good organisation because speakers might interrupt each other or speak simultaneously. This might lead to the topic being changed on purpose or unwantedly. Paltridge (2006) declared that spoken language is organised but it is organised differently from writing. Yet, the spoken form has a benefit for listeners in that they would be able to ask their speaker to simplify what they are saying. Thus, the speaker can correct and reformulate his/her sayings. Since the spoken form is formed spontaneously, we can see its production process as the person speaks but writing is more grammatical and has a well-formed organisation.

### **2.3.3. Contextualisation**

Dooley and Levisohn (2005) indicated that when we talk about context, we mean the circumstances in which an issue is rooted and is seen as part of a larger whole. In this venture, the kind of context that the researcher found important was the one that people are aware of. The mental representations context is a slice of one's mental representation, which is linked to or surrounds the concept, which he is talking about, and

the phenomena when the listener attempts to develop a viable mental representation for a text, and this is called “contextualisation” (Fillmore, 2009).

#### **2.3.4. Grammatical intricacy**

Halliday (2008) suggested that spoken form is not less highly organised than the written discourse. He added that it has grammatical intricacies and also has its own complexities, for example, English clauses in the spoken form are more extended than in the written form. However, Paltridge (2006) stated that for the written discourse, written mode is wildly open or complex, and has a lot of expansions. Halliday (2008) claimed that it is not always the case but he clarified that sometimes spoken forms have a more spread out sets of clauses, which form more complex relations than the written form.

#### **2.3.5 Lexical density**

Lexical density pressures a comparative relation regarding the ration of content words over the grammatical word within a given clause. Content words are nouns and verbs, while grammatical words refer to article, pronouns, and prepositions (Biber, 2006). In their spoken form, content words tend to extend over different clauses. Thus, they pack tightly into individual clauses in written language, that is, content words have a higher frequency than grammatical words (Paltridge, 2006). Halliday (2008) critically stated that the written language is lexically denser than the spoken form.

#### **2.3.6. Explicitness**

Paltridge (2006) explained that the explicitness is not absolute. When speaking or writing, individuals might say something directly or they might infer it. In this way, they can decide how much they say something directly or indirectly. Baber (2006) suggested that depending on what the speakers want their listeners to understand, both of these modes can be explicit. However, writing is more explicit because it is more pre-planned.

### **2.3.7 Repetition, hesitation, and redundancy**

Biber (2006) stressed that spoken language is produced in real time, it significantly uses higher amount of repetition, hesitation and redundancy. It often pauses to allow fillers such as “you know”, “uhh”, “err” to kick in. This helps the speaker to have time to think about what they would say next. Another application of these pauses is in turn talking when the speaker wants to start speaking after the person who is speaking.

### **2.3.8 Continuum view**

Based on McCarthy’s (2007) observations, the differences between writing and speech are not merely one-dimensional but they are regarded as a scale or continuum from some texts like casual conversations that are more intricate interpersonally to some other texts as written public notices, which are more separated. Some written forms in English are clearer than the spoken form. McCarthy (2007) indicated that by considering a scale of differences, one can prevent people from having over-simplified views towards the differences between the two modes of discourse.

## **2.4. Academic writing**

The concept of academic writing is defined in many ways because of what it means to different scholars. Henning et al. (2012)) described it as a process-natured writing approach that involves researching, free writing, organising, editing, and referencing. It is not only the writing approach, which solely strives to develop the learners’ writing competences but also a way that seeks to establish the learners’ understanding of the constitutive cultural systems that govern academic writing. Of significance for teachers is to ensure that learners get to experience their writing process as a journey of negotiating meaning in their essays, as they use different strategies to meet their readers’ expectations (Grabe & Kaplan, 2012).

Grabe and Kaplan’s (2006) saw academic writing as a style of expression that writers and researchers use to express their ideas within the unique linguistic and intellectual

boundaries of their discipline and specific areas of knowledge. It is reliant not merely on general competence but also on the learners' understanding of the constitutive cultural systems of academic writing that govern its nature. In expressing their ideas, writers or learners negotiate meaning and interpret the underlying reader's assumptions, mostly influenced by their cultural bases (Grabe, 2006).

The DBE's CAPS document (2011) depicted writing as a powerful instrument of communication that allows learners to construct and communicate thoughts and ideas coherently. Wu (2010) revealed that writing is a form of communication that enables learners to pen down their feelings and ideas on a paper, to organise their knowledge and beliefs into convincing arguments, and to convey meaning through well-constructed texts. In the light of these definitions, it can be said that writing is a tool that can be used for communication, which helps people to express their thoughts differently.

The process-driven approaches have some similarities with the task-based learning in that learners are given ample freedom to do the task. Learners are not restricted by the tactical teaching of the lexical or grammatical items. Nonetheless, the process approaches do not repudiate interests in the product (the final draft). Nunan (2005) indicated that the aim is to achieve the best product possible, and what differentiates a process-focused approach from a product-centred one is that with the writing outcome, the product is not predetermined.

The approach that one decides to use depends on the teacher, the learners, and the genre of the text used. Certain genres lend themselves more favourably to one approach than the other. For example, formal letters in which the features are fixed would be more suited to a product-driven approach. The focus is on the layout, style, organisation, and grammar that could greatly help learners to deal with this type of writing task.

The researcher shares the view emphasised in the process writing as highlighted in the DBE's CAPS document (2011) that writing should start with planning, and the actual writing follows in exploration of the idea being discussed. That is, learners should have

an idea of what they want to write about or what they intend to communicate to their readers. This requires thorough planning, then drafting and editing might follow later on. Moyer (2004) pointed out that other genres such as discursive and narrative essays might lend themselves to the process-driven approaches, which focus on the learners' ideas. Discursive activities are suited to brainstorming and discussing ideas in groups. The collaborative writing and exchange of texts help learners to direct their reader, thus making a more successful text.

The Department of Basic Education (DBE) (2011) advocated the notion of language as a communication tool that enables learners to convey their thoughts or ideas coherently during classroom practice. The DBE believes that the physical and mental processes that occur in the learning process, which help learners acquire or discover idea are more about the nature and function of language in context. Learners get to learn to structure those ideas into grammatically sound sentences, paragraphs, or an extended speech or texts. This requires the continuous modification of the input that learners often contend with, in the form of letters of the alphabet and punctuation, among other factors (Krashen, 1982). Writing should thus be viewed as a form of activity that requires language to function as a tool for learning and communication, as learners try to organise their knowledge and beliefs into well-constructed convincing arguments (Nunan, 2013).

#### **2.4.1. The importance of meaning in academic writing**

The conception and crafting of meaning in human communication is naturally a two-way transaction between individuals, which is based on the logical manipulation of symbols, which might come in verbal, non-verbal, or graphic form (Fielding, 1997). In Sanchez's (2012) view, meaning is a presentation of logical sense that a person (sender) intends to convey or does convey in communication with another person (a receiver). In addition, Augustine et al. (2012) emphasised that the key issue about meaning is the understanding that is created from the relationship between a string of words (as symbols) used, and a common impression that is formed or stands to signify.

The researcher noted in the learners' use of WhatsApp language that meaning is socio-culturally context-bound in the sense that the words they use do not have a universally

shared value. This is why one word might be spelt five times differently by different learners. Learners should bear in mind that the language used in academic writing is also context-bound, and should be applied in its contextual sense. If this is not done, communication breakdown often ensues due to the possible out-of-context words used between the writer and the reader, which amounts to a distortion of the intended meaning.

Chomsky (1972) and Wittgenstein (1953) were among other writers who believed that meaning is dependent on syntactic order, and the way words relate in combination in a sentence. This is why there is a universal understanding that a grammatically correct sentence should be constructed in line with the universal basic sentence construction patterns or order for it to be meaningful. This is how the SV/SVO/SVC basic sentence structures are conventionally shared, something a WhatsApp language does not have.

#### **2.4.2. The importance of cohesion in a written document**

It was discovered that when people read a passage, they can find out whether it is a consistent whole or just a collection of some unrelated sentences. Halliday and Hasan (2010) noted that coherence and cohesion are necessary and vital in the text, and they help distinguish a coherent text from a collection of unrelated sentences. A text is a semantic unit. Cohesion is the construction of semantic and syntactic in markers in the linguistic form's surface of structure, or is the relationship between one section/component and another that can be explained within discourse (Xu, 2003). Halliday and Hasan stated that cohesion is the semantic relation, which helps to make a text. They added that cohesion is the most important factor to produce a coherent text and it is the basis of coherence. Any two sentences might be shown to have something to do with each other as long as their meaning is related, and sometimes some elements in the text need to be explained by another. According to Xu (2003, cohesion lies in where the meaning of the elements is explained. For example, if an element in the text requires making reference to some other item in the text, then cohesion is needed.

Halliday (2010) explains coherence as a state where all the sentences fit together well to form a united whole. The researcher understands coherence as the quality of perceived

propose, meaning, and connection of a text. The coherence of an article mainly lies in two situations where the meaning of each sentence should be related and the organisation should be clear.

According to Halliday, cohesion alone is not sufficient enough to construct a coherence text. Halliday discovered that there are many cohesive devices used in one passage but it is possible that the same passage would still not be coherent at all. However, using cohesive devices correctly would help to make an article coherent. Xu (2003) stated that coherence refers to the continuity in meaning, which is partly based on the cohesion of the text and partly on the readers' life experience or the basic understanding of the world from reading and other experiences. When people read, they can realise whether the passage is cohesive or not but cannot see if it is coherent.

#### **2.4.3. Observing English language conventions**

Gabe and Kaplan (2006) noted that most English writers develop thoughts in a linear fashion, advancing a thesis, forwarding supporting evidence in sequentially presented topic sentences, and developed in unified paragraphs. Kaplan also noticed that in every language, there are dialects that lead to the development of different languages from only one language. Kaplan developed a standard way of writing English, which is still used even today. In his development endeavours, he gave birth to the manner or way of writing standardised English so that it can be used by different nations to communicate to reach a common understanding. Wu (2010) indicated that there are developments that prevent standardised English language writing. Wu added that social media language hinders the development of vocabulary and grammatical competence and the skill of writing standardised English language, which is expected by the Department of English worldwide.

The most commonly known paradigm that has been influential in writing for decades is contrastive rhetoric by Kaplan. It was reassessed in 2012. The contrastive rhetoric tradition focused on the product of writing and established prescriptive approaches to the

teaching of writing. Kaplan claimed that in English, writers tend to develop their thoughts in a linear fashion, advancing a thesis, forwarding supporting evidence in sequential presented topic sentences, and development in unified paragraphs. Kaplan also learnt that in every language, there are dialects which lead to the birth of different languages from only one language. Kaplan developed a standard way of writing English which is still used up to date. In his development, he came up with a method or an approach of writing Standard English so that it can be used by multiple nations in communication without the distortion of meaning so that a common understanding is reached.

Pineteh (2013) established that there are factors that prevent standardised English language writing. Pineteh (2013) stated that learners lack the knowledge of proper vocabulary, and they do not know the appropriate use of words, and also have difficulties in grammar and syntax. They make mistakes in subject-verb agreement, pronunciation, tense, articles, prepositions, and basic sentence structure. Wu (2010) discovered developments that prevent the standardised English language writing. He stated that social media language hinders the development of vocabulary and grammatical competence and the skill of writing standardised English language which is expected by the Departments of Education worldwide. However, this researcher discovered that social media does not only hinder how to learn the standardised way of writing English but also contradicts the learners' understanding of the standardised way of writing English.

## **2.5 WHAT IS SOCIAL MEDIA (WHATSAPP) LANGUAGE?**

Several studies conducted on social media Boyd and Ellison (2012); Kietzmann (2011); Kapoor (2017); Riyanto (2013) have divergent views of the concept of social media as both a communication platform and a tool. This study's focal interest is, however, limited to the WhatsApp part of the social media, and how its language use affects the level of distortion of meaning in students' writing. This is because WhatsApp is the platform most popularly used by students or learners, and serves as a hive for the abridged and error infiltrated social media language evident in most learners' written essays. It can be perceived as a catalyst or enhancer to the adoption of the inappropriate language prevalent in English First Additional Language (EFAL) learners' written texts. The concept



varies from one author to another, as seen in Boyd and Ellison (2012); Kietzmann et al. (2011) and Kapoor et al. (2017); but the key issue is the provision of a global platform for us to share information through a website.

Boyd and Ellison (2012) viewed social media as a platform for the social profile creation and visibility. For Kietzmann et al. (2011), it simply means a web to facilitate interconnections and networking. Kapoor et al. (2017) took it as a relationship building platform across the globe. Riyanto (2013) saw the social medial language (WhatsApp) as a source of language and acquiring knowledge besides socialising with friends. Furthermore, Rambe and Chipunza (2013) argued that learners have more freedom in learning by interacting through WhatsApp instead of a restricted environment where face-to-face interactions take place like formal education systems. They suggested that WhatsApp could be used as an important tool to distribute knowledge and information among learners.

The worrying factor about social media is its violation of standard language rules, and this made it a major concern for this study. It is against this background that this researcher was of the view that learners do not do as much to curb the language challenges prevalent in the learners' academic writing.

## **2.6. GRAMMATICAL ERRORS LINKED TO SOCIAL MEDIA**

Several studies conducted about the impact of social media language on the learners' academic writing such as Yuliah, Purnamasi & Yunita (2020); Yunanda (2021); Chavan (2018) observed that the platform, in its different forms (twitter, face-book, Instagram, and WhatsApp) badly affect the learners' grammar and academic performance in the long run. Of significant interest picked up from those studies is the different grammatical errors they identified that are linked to the learners' use of social media in their writing. The types of errors the studies above identified and had in common include concord errors, fragmented sentences, spelling, prepositions, vocabulary, and omission. Chavan (2018) was particularly concerned about spelling, while Yunanda's (2021) concern was omission.

Yuliah et al. (2020) established concord errors as the learners' worst error committed in their academic writing.

## **2.7. WHATSAPP LANGUAGE AS A LEARNERS' SCAFFOLD**

Zander (2011) asserted that the learners' obsession with the use of WhatsApp language in their academic writing is the deficiency that the teachers and parents foster in our society. He maintained that the society supports the integration of WhatsApp language into the educational setup where WhatsApp groups and Facebook pages are critical. Limayem and Saleri-Sangari (2011) believed that social media (WhatsApp) language's distortion of meaning in the learners' writing could be dealt with by making use of a model developed (Structural Equation Model), which tests how social media language usage affects the learners' performance in writing EFAL. This model seeks to justify the relationship among social media, age, personality, or social background.

Pinker (2007) was content that a child is born with an innate knowledge of or pre-disposition towards language, and that this innate property (Language acquisition device /universal grammar) is universal to all human beings. The innateness hypothesis was discovered to be a possible resolution of the contradiction between the behavioral notion that language is a set of habits that can be acquired by a process of conditioning. The fact that such conditioning is much too slow and inefficient a process to account for the acquisition of a phenomenon as complex as language.

Brizendine (2010) stated that for years, linguists, psychologists, and educators have been embroiled in the "nature-nurture" controversy; what are those behaviours that "nature" provides innately, in some sort of predetermined biological time-table, and what behaviours are internalised by environmental exposure, "nurture", or conscious attention? Brizendine (2010) stated that observing language acquisition is universal. This researcher discovered that the innateness hypothesis is noticeably muddled by such questions.

## **2.8 LEARNERS' LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY LEVEL**

Language proficiency is a huge challenge for second language learners across the globe. The researcher observed that the comfort learners seem to enjoy in their resorting to WhatsApp language as it creeps into their academic writing is due to the linguistic limitations that make them struggle to use English as an instructional tool in their writing.

Cummins' (2007) classification of levels of language proficiency meant that the crop of the Grade 10 EFAL learners fall under a language competence level he calls Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS). This is a classification that comprises learners whose language proficiency is limited to social purposes. That is, learners who have limited language skills needed in social situations in order to interact face-to-face with their peers and teachers in their classrooms and people within their competence circles. For example, EFAL learners can employ BIC skills when they are at parties, shops or with telephones because it is not cognitively very demanding. It does not require the learners' specialised level of communicative competence that calls for deep critical debate across all curricular fields.

The second language proficiency level is the Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP). It is a highly specialised level of competence, only used by learners who have a sound linguistic foundation. Learners with this level of linguistic competence have the ability to go beyond using English for social purpose but get to use it as the tool to express their critical thinking skills and also use language with a reasonable depth of awareness of its sociocultural context. This is a language for academic and formal learning.

## **2.9 TRANS-LANGUAGING AND HOW IT RELATES TO SOCIAL MEDIA LANGUAGE**

Trans-languaging is an alternative language option learners resort to when an all English medium instructional approach does not work for them. This researcher considered it as a by-product of language challenges EFAL learners faced. Garcia (2009) defined trans-

laguaging as a linguistic act performed by bilinguals to accesses different linguistics features or different modes of what are described as autonomous languages in order to minimise communicative potential.

This researcher found trans-laguaging quite favourable with the EFAL learners, especially those with limited exposure to the use of English in deep rural villages. It has more in common with WhatsApp language because it is capable of generating a language of communication that can be used despite its gross fragmented nature. What is disturbing about social medial language is that the purity of English is lost and it brings about a challenge as one pursues specialisation fields in English teaching or studies.

## **2.8 CONCLUSION**

This chapter reviewed relevant studies to serve as references and justification for what is known about the topic. Most of the previous studies showed that there is a relationship between the use of social media language and the writing of English in formal or academic situation. However, their findings are stagnant, and showed negative impacts. The primary aim of this study was to build a stronger pillar for the previous investigation and to find out the relationship between media language and the learners' written tasks. The next chapter details the methodological steps and data collection tools used to collect the data that gave rise to this study's findings.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1. INTRODUCTION**

This chapter presents a detailed discussion of the research methodology followed to execute every step of the data collection process. This includes the research approach, population and sampling, the research site, data collection tools used, and the data analysis method. The issue of ethical principles and the quality criteria also formed part of this chapter. These are discussed at the chapter's tail end.

#### **3.2. RESEARCH APPROACH**

Creswell and Creswell (2018) described a research approach as a broader plan that specifies the kind of procedures to be followed, and the boundaries within which a study should proceed from the beginning to the end. They thus identified three types of approaches a study might adopt, viz; the quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-method approaches. The quantitative research approach is guided by the deductive logic in which researchers start their enquiry with a research hypothesis, and then design the whole research project in line with its requirements (Smith, 2011). The analysis of data collected in quantitative research is done in statistical or numerical values to determine how the data scientifically support the proposed hypothesis. This means that the data gathered should be explained in quantified or numerical terms.

Conversely, the qualitative approach depends on the subjective interpretation of the data gathered to investigate social phenomena that are numerically immeasurable. It requires data triangulation to offer rich and credible evidence in support of the problem investigated. A mixed-method research approach is a blend of the former two. Researchers applying it can use both to carry out their studies. Smith defined qualitative research as a type of social science research that collects and works with non-numerical

data. Shank (2002) viewed qualitative research as a form of systematic empirical inquiry into meaning. In the light of these definitions, this study adopted the qualitative research approach because of its focus on the social aspect of life. A mixed method approach is a combination of both qualitative and quantitative approaches. A study employing the mixed method approach strives to ensure that there is a complimentary balance between the two approaches.

### **3.3. RESEARCH DESIGN**

Research design refers to the overall strategy a researcher chooses to use to integrate the different components of the study in a coherent and logical way, thereby, ensuring that he effectively addresses the research problem. It constitutes a blueprint for the collection, measurement, and analysis of the data collected (De Vaus, 2001). For this study, a qualitative case study was adopted to focus the researcher's attention on the participants selected from one natural social context. That is, a selected group of Grade 10 EFAL learners and their teachers in a school in the Kgakotlou Circuit.

### **3.4. RESEARCH SITE**

This study was conducted in a high school located in the Kgakotlou Circuit of the Capricorn South District in the Limpopo Province, South Africa. All the data were gathered from the selected high school. The school offers Grade 8 to 12, and it is located in a deep rural village.

### **3.5. POPULATION AND SAMPLING**

#### **3.5.1 Population**

Population refers to all the organisms of the same group or species, which live in a particular geographical area (Hartl, 2007). In this study, it refers to all the Grade 10 EFAL learners that possess similar collective characteristics or traits outlined in the sampling criteria discussed hereunder. The school was selected from a pool of high schools within

the Kgakotlou Circuit following consistent poor performances at Matric level in the previous four years. The researcher chose it in the hope that this study's findings could eventually reveal ways through which the school could work out an intervention plan that could turn the pass rate around. The population consisted of 225 learners, of which 218 were Grade 10 EFAL learners and seven were EFAL educators from the same high school. The learners were from all the Grade 10's five classes with their seven teachers who teach them EFAL.

### **3.5.2. Sampling**

Sampling refers to the process of selecting units, people, and organisations from a population of interest so that it might fairly generalise the results back to the population from which they were chosen (Cobuild, 2011). The researcher found the purposive sampling method most suitable to adopt for this study because it allowed him to use his experience and prior knowledge of the learners and teachers to handpick relevant participants that would be representative of all the Grade 10 EFAL learners' population.

A sample of 26 participants was selected. It consisted of 22 Grade 10 EFAL learners and four educators chosen from five Grade 10 EFAL classes. The teachers roped in were selected by virtue of teaching Grade 10 EFAL learners. What made this selection smooth and convenient was the fact that the researcher also teaches in the same school. The issue of sampling eligibility was also purposively determined, and these factors were applied; high level of WhatsApp language used in essay writing, poor overall performance marks in EFAL as a subject, and poor marks in academic essay writing only.

## **3.6. DATA COLLECTION**

The following data collection methods as outlined by Heigham and Crocker (2009) were used in this study; observation, document analysis, focus-group discussion, and the semi-structured interviews.

### **3.6.1. Observation**

The researcher used this tool to collect contextual (school premises) data on the extent to which WhatsApp language is allowed, and thus used even in classroom activities in the selected school. To gain access to areas that would hardly be granted elsewhere, the researcher took advantage of being an educator in the school, and assumed the role of a participant observer in this study. Waller et al. (2016) described participant observation as a case where a researcher participates in activities relevant to what they are studying in order to gain an insider's perspective into the participants' reality. The research started the observation sessions way earlier, before all other data collection processes. This took him two weeks to complete. An observation schedule and a note-book were the resources the researcher depended on to note down observation data as he walked around the school grounds. Among the target sources of data the researcher took note of, the following were critical areas; school's notice boards, classroom media corners, staff-room, the learners' workbooks, the learners' assessment activities, the learners' behaviour, and the use of cellphones during lessons.

The researcher also noted the resources the school needed such as the privilege and lack of a media-centre or library to see how these helped to foster the development of formal academic writing. The researcher also looked at the activities the school did to foster writing such as hosting the writers' competition where learners received incentives for effective writing in adherence to the conventional standards of writing. All these were carried out to determine the extent of the teachers' efforts towards helping their learners curb the impact of WhatsApp language on their learners' academic writing activities.

### **3.6.2 Document analysis**

Document analysis is a form of the qualitative research data collection method. Documents are analysed to gain an understanding of the phenomenon being studied and derive empirical knowledge from them (Bowen, 2009). The key aspects here were the learners' academic essays. This method was used to identify the kind of language errors



learners commit when writing academic essays. The researcher used this tool to gather instances where the learners' WhatsApp language had crept into their essays. The researcher designed a creative writing activity that required learners to write an academic essay. The task gave them a range of essay topics to choose from. The purpose was to allow learners to write about what they felt comfortable to express themselves in. When marking, different language errors based on the use of WhatsApp were identified. The data gathered from the essays are analysed in chapter four.

### **3.6.3 Focus-group discussion**

Bryman (2016) defined a focus-group discussion (FGD) as a group interview based on a particular topic. Of significance when using FGD is not only the participants' behavioural patterns as they interact but what transpires in the process in relation to the topic under discussion (Bryan *ibid*). These include taking note of how the discussants share their views, perceptions, or beliefs about the theme under focus. It is for this reason that this tool proved to be compellingly valuable to use to gather the learners' perceptions on the question of how the WhatsApp language creeps into their essays and distorts the meaning under construction.

A classroom conducive to conducting this discussion without interruptions was organised. That classroom was used after school. The researcher used a set of sub-themes he organised beforehand to initiate the direction the discussion took. Twenty-two learners participated in the discussion but did so in two groups of eleven each to avoid overcrowding. This took two sessions. A voice recorder was utilised to capture the learners' perceptions on the role of WhatsApp language in their writing and in their communication beyond the classroom. The recorded discussions were later transcribed for easy use.

### **3.6.4 Semi-structured interviews**

Interviews form a qualitative data collection strategy, which allowed the researcher to be flexible and be in control when guiding them (Bowen, 2009). An interview, as a data collection method, is considered the most preferred tool employed in qualitative studies

because verbal interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee provides a high level of authenticity of the rich data collected (Geyer, 2021). Geyer (ibid) noted that interviews come in different forms, depending on the nature of the topic being investigated. They range from an individual type, a dyad to a group-based type such as focus-group interview.

This study used the face to face semi-structured interviews with teachers. The said interviews helped to gather the teachers' views about the causal attributes behind the errors learners commit when writing academic essays. The researcher had a set of questions prepared prior to the actual communication with the Grade 10 EFAL teachers. An interview guide/schedule followed during the interviews to facilitate the flow of the set questions. The purpose of using this method was to obtain the EFAL teachers' views on how they help their learners deal with their obsessions with using WhatsApp language, regardless of the language errors they generate in their academic essay writing. To guard himself against the possibility of forgetting or mishearing what the interviewees said during the interview (Creswell & Creswell, 2018), the researcher used a voice recorder to capture each interview session. This was done in one of the school's offices to guarantee privacy and to reduce distraction. This method made provisions for the researcher to get multiple chances to listen to the voice recorder when transcribing.

### **3.7 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

Ethical principles are guiding moral standards that regulate the conduct of people, especially in any field of research (Fouche, Strydom, & Roestenburg, 2021). They help set the norms, values, and standards people should adhere to in their relationship with one another. Ethical considerations help to prevent the fabrication or falsifying of data. They promote the pursuit of knowledge and truth, which is the primary goal of any research project. Four ethical principles employed in this study are discussed hereunder.

### **3.7.1 Permission to access the research site**

The issue of ethicality in research starts with upholding life's value and adopting a respectful attitude towards the participants (Heigham & Crocker, 2009). This entails following due protocols from the beginning to the end of the research process. The researcher adhered to all the ethical expectations as highlighted. Firstly, an application for ethical clearance certificate was made and the university granted it.

In addition to this, the researcher also wrote similar letters to different educational stakeholders for access to the research site. These letters were directed to the Department of Education's District Office, and the case school's principal. Only after receiving letters of approval to conduct this study there did the actual data collection start.

### **3.7.2 Informed consent and voluntary participation**

With the help of the subject teachers in the research site, a meeting with all the participants was set up to brief them about what the study was all about and the role they were expected to play. This was aimed at not only informing them about the nature of the study but also to grant them the right and opportunity to decide voluntarily on their participation here. Voluntary participation means that the participants should understand why they have to commit to participate in the study without being paid to do so. This meeting, however, was not enough to elicit the learners' agreement to participate without their parents' consent since they were under the age of 18 years. The Children's Act No. 38 of 2005, amended in 2007 by the Children's Amendment Act argues that underage children's decision may not be dependable. Thus, their parents have to sign to consent that they participate in the study. The underage participants were then given voluntary assent forms to sign after receiving their parents' consent to do so. The emphasis was placed on the right participants have, which allows them to pull out of the research process should they feel like doing so. This was emphasised to settle their fears or anxiety related to their participation. As Fouche et al. (2021) put it, informed consent is signified

by the participant's signature. The participants should be convinced not coerced to sign forms. It should be out of their free will.

### **3.7.3 Privacy, anonymity, and confidentiality**

In the meeting referred to above, the participants were assured that their identities would not be revealed anywhere outside the research site. Instead, all participants were given pseudonyms to protect their privacy. This was implemented in the process of data collection. This is why they appear in this study as participant A1 – A22. To make sure that the data in the group is protected by the researcher as the only administrator, the researcher made sure that the data collected could not be shared or copied without his awareness. The researcher also ensured that all the learners that were under the age of 18 were indemnified by their guardians or parents.

### **3.7.5 Protection from Harm**

As part of adherence to The Children's Act No.38 (2005/2007) protocols, the researcher was compelled to disclose potential risks of participating in this study to assure them of what is at stake and to also allay their fears sparked by any potential risk. All participants wanted to be assured that they were safe in taking part therein. The researcher explained all these to the participants. That is, that their rights and safety were in place and they were well protected. Measures to withdraw should they opt to were explained to all the participants. This entailed informing the subject teacher participating in the project or reporting directly to the researcher.

## **3.8. DATA ANALYSIS**

Data analysis is the process of interpreting the meaning of the data that is collected, organised, and displayed in tables, bar charts, line graphs, or any other representation. Data analysis is a process of inspecting, cleansing, transforming, and modeling data to

discover useful information, informing conclusions, and supporting decision-making (Adèr, 2012).

Four different data collection techniques were used in this study but can be summed up as follows: The data that was collected and analysed using the thematic data analysis included the learners' focus-group discussion and the teachers' semi-structured interviews. Content analysis was also used to analyse the learners' documents (essays) and the observation data gathered. These laid the basis for the researcher to generate codes that amounted to the development of the study's main themes from which the findings emerged.

### **3.9. QUALITY CRITERIA**

#### **3.9.1. Credibility**

Gube (2010) explained credibility as the extent to which a research account is believable and appropriate, with a particular reference to the level of agreement between the participants and the researcher. This is done to guarantee the element of data credibility and trustworthiness, the researcher has transcribed the data captured, and ensured that each participant got an opportunity to confirm that the data transcribed is just as original as it was captured. That is, no omission or changes effected. Then the data was sifted and arranged according to themes before the analysis followed.

The researcher employed verification and monitoring. This implied that he ensured that he put the learners' data against the teachers' responses and monitored the imbalances. The researcher observed how learners wrote on WhatsApp after he created a WhatsApp group with the learners to see how they wrote. The researcher analysed how language was used, how the learners punctuated and also observed that a new language was born from these WhatsApp groups which learners found it easy to communicate. The researcher also used the document analysis to analyse data collected by reading and marking the learners' essays. He then identified new themes from what learners wrote. The researcher also used the focus group discussions to analyse what the learners said

during the interviews. He then transcribed the recorded data into written form to draw up conclusions. The last method the researcher used was the semi-structured interview. The data collected in this way was analysed by listening to the recorded educators' responses and transcribing. The study was assumed to at least require the researcher to spend a minimum of three days so that he had sufficient time to go through and confirm the data.

### **3.9.2 Confirmability**

Confirmability refers to what manner one can begin the degree to which the results could be confirmed or corroborated by others (Guba, 2010). To guarantee confirmability, the researcher indicated that the results were clearly related to the conclusions. He showed every step of data analysis to validate the decision made. During the interviews the researcher initiated a drill that allowed him to confirm and verify the teachers' responses. This drill was carried out in a manner that the researcher repeated the question and the respondent's response every time before moving to the next question. This drill helped in relating and merging the learners' written work with the responses to ensure that the context provided was relative to the data and easy to confirm.

### **3.9.3 Dependability**

Sandelowski and Streubert (2007) explained dependability as the evenness and trustworthiness of the research findings and the degree to which the research processes are documented, allowing someone who is not involved in the research to follow, audit, and review the research process. The researcher ensured that the research processes were explained to meet the research standard. The collection tools, the designs, methods, and data analysis were explained to the core in the methodology section. The researcher believes that a full presentation allows the study to be reviewed and audited without his presence. The study also comprised of the physical data's annexures.

### **3.9.4 Transferability**

Transferability is explained as a way to show the degree to which the results of a particular analysis might be applicable to other studies or context (Guba & Lincoln, 2010). Here, the researcher accepted that if this thesis is conducted somewhere else, and is going to be investigated in the current context to check if the similar data would be acquired and the correct qualitative techniques followed. Since WhatsApp usage exists in varied contexts, the manner in which it could affect academic language can be replicated in those different contexts.

### **3.10 Conclusion**

The rationale behind this chapter was to demonstrate the kind of methodological approach that used to collect relevant data for this study, guided by qualitative research principles. These entailed highlighting the research design adopted, the data collection methods, and procedural steps followed, and adherence to the ethical issues outlined in Chapter 1. In the next chapter, a step-by-step discussion of how the different data types were organised, interpreted, and analysed are provided.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### DISCUSSION, PRESENTATION, AND INTERPRETATION OF FINDINGS

#### 4.1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter analyses the data collected for this study from the case school's learners and teachers. The data collected speak to the research questions in chapter 1. The first segment of data is the observation data, followed by the document analysis, semi-structured interview, and focus-group interview data. However, it would be good to have a demographic profile of the school including the participants, and to recap the research questions posed. Thereafter, the nature of research paradigm that underlies the analysis parameters within which the qualitative data is analysed is provided.

#### 4.2. PARTICIPANTS' DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILES

**Table 4.2.1: Teachers' demographic profile**

Teacher	Gender	Age	EFAL Teaching Experience	Home Language	Qualification
Teacher A	Female	54	30	Sepedi	STD
Teacher B	Female	34	6	Sepedi	Bed(SPF)
Teacher C	Male	32	2	Xitsonga	Bed(SPF)
Teacher D	Male	28	1	Sepedi	Bed (SPF)

Table 4.2.1 indicates that there were four teachers, two females and two males aged as follows; teacher A - 54 years, teacher B - 34 years, teacher C - 32 years, and teacher D - 28 years. These teachers have different teaching experiences in the EFAL. That is, teacher A had 30 years' experience, teacher B had 6 years' experience, teacher C had 2 years' experience, and teacher D had 1 year experience by the time the interviews were



held. The table also shows that teacher A, B, and D used Sepedi as their Home Language. Meanwhile, teacher C is a Xitsonga. The table indicates that teacher B, C, and D had Bed (SPF) as their highest qualification and teacher A has a STD qualification.

**Table 4.2.2: Learners' demographic Profile**

<b>Learner</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Race</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Home language</b>
Learner 1	Female	African	19	Sepedi
Learner 2	Female	African	19	Sepedi
Learner 3	Male	White	19	Afrikaans
Learner 4	Male	African	18	Sepedi
Learner 5	Male	African	18	Sepedi
Learner 6	Male	African	17	Sepedi
Learner 7	Female	African	18	Xitsonga
Learner 8	Female	African	18	Sepedi
Learner 9	Female	African	18	Sepedi
Learner 10	Male	White	20	Afrikaans
Learner 11	Female	African	18	Sepedi
Learner 12	Female	African	18	Sepedi
Learner 13	Male	African	19	Xitsonga
Learner 14	Male	African	18	Sepedi
Learner 15	Male	African	19	Sepedi
Learner 16	Female	African	18	Sepedi
Learner 17	Male	African	19	Sepedi
Learner 18	Male	African	18	Sepedi
Learner 19	Female	African	18	Sepedi
Learner 20	Female	African	18	Sepedi
Learner 21	Female	African	18	Sepedi
Learner 22	Male	African	18	Sepedi

Table 4.2.2 shows 22 learners named as learner 1 to learner 22. There were eleven females and eleven males, all aged between 17 and 20 years. Two (learner 3 and learner 10) out of the 22 learners were white and used Afrikaans as their HL. Lastly, learner 7 and Learner 13 used Xitsonga as their HL, while the remaining 18 learners used Sepedi as their HL.

### **4.3. DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS**

Four forms or segment of data are presented and analysed in line with the data collection instruments used to gather them. The four segments are: observation, documents analysis, teachers' interviews, and learners' focus-group discussion. Each data segment presented was analysed to demonstrate how it responded to the research questions. In essence, these questions translated into the key themes that not only hold this study together, but also help place it in context.

#### **4.3.1. Research questions**

##### **Main Research Question**

To what extent does the Grade 10 EFAL learners' use of WhatsApp (social medium) language in their communication affect the construction of meaning in their academic essay writing?

##### **Sub-Questions**

- What kind of language errors do learners commit in their academic essay writing due to their transfer of language structures that are typically associated with WhatsApp language? The learners' documents analysis was used to respond to this research question.
- What are learners' perceptions of the phenomenon of WhatsApp language interference in their academic writing? The focus-group discussion was used to gather the learners' views on the type of data targeted.

- What corrective measures do teachers apply to help their Grade 10 EFAL learners deal with the WhatsApp language they generally allow to creep into their academic essay writing?

### **4.3.2 Data Presentation**

#### **4.3.2.1 Analysis of Data Segment 1: Observation**

Observation was the first data collection method used to collect data here. It was applied to gather data about the whole school's contextual factors that aid or hamper the development of the learners' academic writing skills. On the other hand, the data on the learners' classroom writing practice was also collected to identify the learners' behavioural patterns when writing activities teachers give to them in EFAL classes.

As an educator in the same school (research site), the researcher assumed the role of a participant observer in order to take advantage of being "a member of the inner circle of the group" (Welman & Kruger, 2001). This was to dispel any possible form of anxiety on the part of the participants. This also gave the researcher a privilege to access data in places he would otherwise not reach in other constraining circumstances.

An observation schedule and field-notes were used, with a view to giving the researcher a focal direction and also to help him note down the earmarked data. This process took four days to complete, giving the researcher a day to visit each teacher-participant in their respective classrooms to record additional unexpected emerging data over and above what was pre-outlined in the observation schedule. The content analysis technique was used to analyse the data collected in line with the observation schedule to point to the direction towards which the earmarked data were to be collected.

The general contextual data gathered showed that the school does not have facilities like a media-centre or library where they would source reading materials. Neither does it have

writing or reading competitions in order to entice more learners to participate in writing. Additionally, the whole school does not have any posters or visual materials posted around to offer models of what is written beyond the learners' classrooms. In fact, there were no posters or any large visual learning media displayed on school walls, noticeboards, or in the teachers' staff room to help aid the learners with proper spellings and the use of the formal language required in essay writing.

In the classroom context, the researcher observed that when learners were given written tasks in class, they tended to work much of their time using cell phones without their teachers' intervention to discourage them or guide their use of the phones as a purpose-driven learning tool. It appeared evident that a lot of the content learners were reading or writing in their phones had nothing to do with what they were given to write. Tendencies like this often affect the learners badly.

### **The findings of observation data**

In the light of the analysis of the data gathered above, the findings reveal that:

- The school does not do enough to provide facilities and support structures that should motivate learners to develop their academic writing skills.
- Teachers do not monitor their learners' writing activities as much as they should, and hence learners get a chance to text their friends at a time they should be finishing their writing tasks.

#### **4.3.2.2 Presentation and analysis of data Segment 2: Document analysis**

The purpose of reviewing the learners' documents (academic essays) was to answer the research question on the kind of language errors learners commit in their essays through

their exposure to the WhatsApp language they use in their informal communication with their peers.

Document analysis is a systematic procedure to review or evaluate documents both printed and electronic (computer-based and internet-transmitted) material (Corbin & Strauss, 2011). It requires that data be examined and interpreted in order to draw meaning, gain understanding, and develop empirical knowledge. To gather the document-based type of data from the learners, an essay writing activity was given, consisting of seven different essay-topic options. Learners had to choose one topic they felt comfortable doing. Twenty-two essays were sampled and analysed using the content analysis technique. Here, the coding of recurrent language errors amounted to the emergence of the sub-themes presented hereunder.

The objective behind the use of WhatsApp language was to convey the message in the shortest way possible. That is, this is why contraction, omission, and abbreviation of words are recurrent in the learners' essay drafting. The reality is that when these errors are committed, meaning gets distorted in the process of shortening sentences.

Discussed here-under were the most recurrent common language errors associated with the use of WhatsApp language, which affect meaning construction when learners write their academic essays. These language errors are presented as emergent sub-themes that surfaced when analysing the sampled 22 learners' essays.

- Fragmented sentences and Omission
- Abbreviations and contraction
- Slang
- substitution

#### **4.3.2.2.1    Fragmented sentences and omission**

A fragmented sentence is a language error in which a sentence does not conform to the grammatical rules of a basic sentence structure construction in English. In other words, a correct sentence construction consists of a subject and a finite verb (SV) or subject,

verb and an object / compliment (SVO / SVC). Where this basic sentence construction is flouted, a sentence is considered fragmented (Paltridge, 2012).

The fragmentation of sentences and omission of words or phrases is a common practice in WhatsApp language. These are techniques adopted to convey messages without paying much attention to grammatical accuracy. The following sentence was extracted from one of the sampled learner-participant to demonstrate what sentence fragmentation negatively does to the construction of meaning in academic writing.

Excerpt 1

*In older days and older people they use to listen kwaito. They was use kwaito as happinies songs.*

The first clause in the sentence above has subject conflict. What was supposed to be a predicate is also a mix up of a pronoun that is not clear in terms of what subject it substitute. Meaning is clearly distorted in this sentence because it becomes a matter of assumption, rather than rule-driven construction. This reflects the difficulty Grade 10 learners in the sampled school experience when given academic essays to write.

Secondly, omission also played an influential role in the deconstruction of meaning in the sentence above. The omission of the pronoun “to” in the two clauses, as well as a conjunction to link the clauses into one further blew the meaning away. Most of the sampled Grade 10 EFAL learners’ essays reviewed were riddled with multiple examples of fragmented sentences that reflected their difficulty in constructing meaningful sentences when writing academic essays.

Omission mostly happens unconsciously or sometimes consciously through omitting a letter, word, or phrase in a sentence, which leads the deformation or omission of the key word required for the construction of meaning in a sentence. Excerpt 3 below is a case in point.

## Excerpt 2

*But now days the youth love House and Amapiano. Other people they listen music when they have stress or when they have promble on their homes. Their listen music and their use to cry until they feel better*

The underlined parts of the sentences above show a missing preposition “to” in clauses 2 and 3, while the added and omitted “m” in the word “promble” shows that a deliberate or unconscious deformation of words leads to the distortion of meaning in that sentence or a paragraph.

### 4.3.2.2.3 Abbreviation and contraction

The idea of shortening sentences in WhatsApp language depends largely on the use of abbreviation and contraction of words used for the drafting of the essay being written. This does not always end well in the construction of meaning process because most words do not only lose their form but correct spellings ultimately. The following excerpt illustrate this:

## Excerpt 3

*We are throwing a big party surprise party 4 her. We celebrate it cos it's good news for us as her fam and for self two. She's independent nou n intelligent. . so we also want 2 make her happy by suprising her, cul ryt?*

### 4.3.2.2.4 Slang

Slang is the usage of highly informal words and expressions that are not regarded as standard in English (Hudson, 2011). Finnegan (2011) argued that this carefree (informal) language is generally used a lot when people are around those who know them well, or when they are with people they feel compelled to use a language that will help them fit in.

## Excerpt 4

*I told mum that I don't want to be a doctor but I want to b a famous actor. I can't follow the career that I don't lyk. If they kip on forcing I will hv to run away from home or do sumtin to make them understand that I luv acting nd will not change that.*

#### **4.3.2.2.5 Substitution**

Substitution, on the other hand, refers to a replacement or swapping of one word with another word or phrase that carries similar meaning to the one being replaced. This happens for word-economising or shortening purpose. Code-switching applies here when learners have no other options but to resort to it rather than leave open spaces. In the sentence below the phrase shows that.

- “nothing for mahala” is a substitute in a vernacular used for lack of better word.
  - “2” has been used to replace an infinitive marker “to” in the phrase “it is said to be”.
- A word has been replaced with a numeral for shortening purpose.

The disturbing aspect about using numerals to replace English words is that numerals are not language specific, nor grammatical, and hence, they do more harm to the linguistic value of the word replaced.

#### **Excerpt 5**

*For the past years relations were based on lv, respect, care and trust; but this day is all abt wat you have. If you've got nothing, you got nothing. Literally even jobs are bought. Nothing for mahala. It is said 2 be called “izandla ziya gexana”. You scratch my back, I scratch urs. The youth of today got into many troubles bcoz of going for material possessions. (substitution).*

### **The findings on the identified language errors learners commit in their academic essays**

The study established that most language errors committed through the deformation, substitution, or omission of the key word, phrase, or clause (sentence), which serves as



a backbone of meaning in a given sentence, tend to distort the meaning or change the register from formal to informal when learners write their academic essays.

#### **4.3.2.3 Presentation and analysis of data segment 3: Focus-group discussion**

The purpose of using a focus-group discussion was to elicit the learners' views or perceptions about the persistent interference of WhatsApp language in their academic essay writing regardless of the continuous teachers' warnings against it. A focus-group discussion was used to gather data, which involved a group of 22 learners, split into two groups of 11. This was done on the same day but separate times with each session running for about 45 minutes to an hour. The researcher followed a set of the semi-structured schedule questions to lead the discussion where learners were advised to base their responses on their experience and understanding of the use of WhatsApp language in writing entails.

The following sub-themes formed the basis upon which the questions revolved:

- Learners' understanding of the concept "academic writing".
- Language challenges they experienced when writing academic essays.
- Level of WhatsApp interference in the learners' academic writing tasks.
- The extent of the impact it has on meaning or not.
- Reasons for the learners' continuous use regardless of instructions against.

The FGD unfolded in response to the five questions arising from the sub-themes outlined above.

#### **Q 1: What is your understanding of academic writing?**

This question was repeatedly asked three times, and silence remained the response learners could give. However, learners later openly admitted that they did not know the

answer, except for one out of the 22 learners sampled, whose attempted answer proved inadequate. This is what she gave out in her response:

Excerpt 1

*Academic writing is something that goes with education...*

The learners' reaction to this question demonstrated that the academic writing concept was foreign to them. In the light of this reaction, it looks like teachers expect learners to practice the writing skills they lack conceptual knowledge of. This explains why learners stick to the informal language they practice elsewhere.

**Q 2: What kind of language challenges do you experience when you are given academic essays to write?**

Among a range of responses learners gave out to answer this question, the following came out repeatedly:

Excerpt 2

*I don't know how to explain a word in English but in my home language I know the word.*

Excerpt 3

*Sometimes when it comes to spelling and punctuation we struggle.*

Excerpt 4

*Running out of words.*

Excerpts 2 and 4 shows that learners' have limited language proficiency or linguistic competence academic writing demands of them. As a result, some of them resort to code switching into their mother tongues to look for equivalent substitutes to fill the gap. Punctuation and spelling challenges, as seen in excerpt 3, also form part of what learners battle with in their writing.

**Q 3: Does the language you use to communicate with your friends on WhatsApp also creep into your academic essays? Please explain.**

Most learners admitted that the WhatsApp language they use to communicate with their friends does creep into their academic writing work. This was articulated in the learners' unanimous responses in excerpt 5 below.

Excerpt 5

*Yes, obvious.*

Excerpt 6

*Usually, when I write words, I shorten them on WhatsApp.*

Excerpt 7

*I cut them short because I do not know how to come up with new words. I write the way I communicate with my friends on WhatsApp.*

The learners' responses as demonstrated in excerpt 6 and 7 reveal that the shortening of sentences achieved through omission and contraction, is a technique learners use to improvise when they run short of vocabulary suitable to complete their ideas in their essay writing.

**Q 4: In what ways does WhatsApp language affect the construction or transmission of the intended meaning if allowed to creep into your academic writing essays?**

Most of the learners in the two groups agreed that WhatsApp language does affect the meaning they construct in their essays. The following responses demonstrate how so:

Excerpt 1

*Yes, because we sometimes use bombastic words that we even do not know and we add these words when we write. I think it is good but sometimes we do not understand the words but as time goes, we would understand them.*

Excerpt 2

*Some teachers do not know these nowadays words, so they will just put a wrong because they do not know that word.*

**Q 5: *Why do you keep on using WhatsApp language even when you are told or warned not to use it?***

The answers learners gave in response to this question show a unanimous preference in favour of using WhatsApp language regardless of the impact this has on their academic performance.

Excerpt 3

*We are addicted to WhatsApp words.*

Excerpt 4

*For people like me who take time to write, those words help me a lot because they are easy and short. So, I am able to finish writing in time.*

Excerpt 5

*We are used to cutting sentences shorter in social media.*

### **Findings from Focus-Group Interviews**

The FGD's findings were worked out using the thematic analysis technique. In the light of the learners' responses that were coded and categorised, sub-themes emerged. The excerpts noted above revealed that the learners' use of WhatsApp language is driven by different factors. Most of the learners involved in the discussion appeared more comfortable responding to short questions rather than the long ones that demanded them to speak a little longer. This pattern was similar to what they write in essays. The results suggest the learners' laziness to write. Another significant observation the researcher made here was that some of the learners tended to speak more using facial expressions and body language. Traynor (2004) spoke of discourse analysis as a study of social life, understood through the analysis of language in its widest sense, including the face-to-face talk, non-verbal interaction, images, and symbols.

### **Peer pressure or trying to fit in**

Hudson (2011) explained peer pressure as a feeling of doing the same issue as other people of the same age or a social group in order to fit in or be liked. He stated that learners tend to write in the same style in order to fit in or to be liked by their peers. The researcher discovered that learners spoke in a different language from the one which they used to write. Learners stated that they wanted to fit in and that when they did not use it their peers thought that they were out dated.

### **It is interesting and stylish**

Church (2013) stated that WhatsApp offers real time texting or communication, including the ease of sharing information or media content such as audio, video files, images, and location data. WhatsApp application enables learners using it to interact easily and effortlessly as if they are in the same area, standing face to face talking to each other. It is based on what the researcher wanted to know about the learners' interests in using the WhatsApp language. Learners stated that it is interesting and they keep on learning new words, which they can use the next day or to a different person. During the FGD, learners used words such as words "*wud*" when they wanted to ask what one was doing and "*Lol*" when they wanted to say laughing out loud. It is on the basis of this that the learners use such words they believed were stylish.

### **The amount of time spent on social media**

Pinker (2007) was contented that a child is born with an innate knowledge of or pre-disposition towards language. An innate property (Language acquisition device /universal grammar) is universal to all human beings. Brizendine (2010) stated that observing language acquisition is universal. It is in this notion that the researcher stated that learners write the way they do because of the amount of time they spend on social media. Learners also stated that they are addicted to social media language and they even bring

cellphones to school in order to communicate and teach each other social media language.

### **Social media language is easy to write and saves time**

Wu (2010) asserted that writing is a form of communication that enables learners to pen down their feelings and ideas on a paper, to organise their knowledge and beliefs into convincing arguments, and to convey meaning through well-constructed texts. It is in the context of this study that the researcher noticed that learners were able to write or express their thoughts in the language they use on social media. Learners stated that it saves time and gives them an opportunity to pen down what they want not, considering that the reader might not even understand what they wrote. These are examples of social media sentences the researcher identified when analysing the learners essays. A case in point is demonstrated below.

Excerpt

*Com down of the own to do.*

*Some are lef wif sicknessess bcoz of nt lving and settling fr less...*

*We mus be proud abt it.*

#### **4.3.2.4 Presentation and Analysis of Data Segment 3: Teachers' semi-structured Interviews**

Similar to the learners' FGD, the semi-structured interviews were administered on the teachers to obtain their views on the teaching challenges and corrective measures or strategies they employ to redress the challenges WhatsApp language imposes on their learners' academic writing. All the four Grade 10 EFAL teachers who were sampled were interviewed. They were selected because the study focused on how the Grade 10 learners' use WhatsApp language in the academic writing tasks that they (as subject

teachers) teach and assess. The interview took two days to complete. That is, the researcher interviewed two teachers per day. The following sub-themes formed the basis upon which the interview schedule was structured.

- The kind of language challenges teachers encounter in their learners' academic writing.
- Teachers' awareness of WhatsApp language interference in the learners' academic writing tasks.
- Corrective measures teachers use to redress the WhatsApp language interference in the learners' academic writing tasks.
- Teachers' views on what makes learners persistent on their use of WhatsApp language in their learning.
- Teachers' estimation of the extent to which WhatsApp language affects meaning construction in the learners' essays.

The four participant-teachers answered five open-ended questions in the order they are presented hereunder.

**Q 1: What kind of language challenges do you experience when your Grade 10 EFAL learners' write academic essays?**

This question was asked to establish the nature of language challenges teachers contend with when their learners write academic essays in the EFAL classrooms in the context of WhatsApp. The interviewed teachers' responses raised a few and diverse language challenges that are due to the learners' obsession with the use of WhatsApp language in communication with their peers. These are some of the remarks they made in response to the question above:

Teacher A:

*Mostly learners shorten sentences ungrammatically as if they are talking to their peers on WhatsApp. Most of the words they use are meaningless or wrongly spelt.*

Teacher B:

*The challenges I experience as an English First Additional language teacher are that learners fail to construct sentences using formal language.*

Teacher C:

*My learners have insufficient knowledge of grammar.*

Teacher D:

*Learners fail to write full words properly because they are used to social media language, so they use that language when they write formal.*

The challenges teachers' responses revealed include sentence construction. The learners' sentences are mostly shortened and fragmented, and thus ungrammatical. The other challenges also identified include spelling mistakes, improper use of register in formal writing activities, and limited vocabulary. These subsequently open them up to the use of the language, mostly riddled with meaningless words, linked to the WhatsApp language they use with their peers elsewhere.

The findings above indicate that learners do not follow correct grammatical rules when writing and they do not use formal language as well. Misbah (2017) pointed out that learners are not familiar with general English words and are shy to use such English words. Their exposure to the English language rules is inadequate at school and limited to one book (textbook). Most of the learners fail as they are unable to follow grammar rules with understanding. Ai Zoubi (2018) observed that learners who are weak in English language use are those who have insufficient knowledge of grammar. El- Omari (2016); Hussain (2017) argued that the best way learners could improve their skills is to practice using it. They believe that exposure and willingness to use the language in their classroom practice gives learners more chances to master grammatical rules in context.

**Q 2: Do you think WhatsApp Language creeps into the learners' academic essays when you give them academic writing tasks to do? Elaborate.**

This question helped to assess the teachers' awareness of the source of language problems their learners encounter. This was done in the hope of thinking of possible ways



in which they (teachers) could curb the generation of more input from that identified source. The response to this question was just as unanimous as the way learners responded to the similar question in FGD, as can be noted below:

Teacher B:

*Hmm, it happens a lot! A lot, almost all the time, you find learners writing words that should be written in full in short. They use the language they use when they text one another.*

Teacher C:

*Yes, it does creep into their essay writing because these learners spend most of their time on social media texting their friends.*

A common observation appeared to be that cell phones are a big source where learners generate their new language from. They further lamented the fact that when learners are at home, they spend most of their time on social media platforms, and that clearly build a habit that leads to the short hand writing every time they write on social media platforms such as WhatsApp. The wrong influence the WhatsApp language evidently leave on the learners' language acquisition is noticed in their use of grammatical errors are wrong verbs, incorrect spelling, and inappropriate vocabulary adopted and words unheard of in the English language. Teachers attribute their learners' use of wrong vocabulary as an attempt to find alternative words whenever they run out of appropriate ones. This may just as well serve as a shield against being adjudged to be linguistically incompetent by their peers.

Teachers agreed that the language used by learners on social media also creeps into their learners' academic essays because learners lack suitable words. This makes them uncomfortable to express themselves using the EFAL, which makes it difficult to write an error-free essay. Madoda (2015) argued that when learners are deficient in the language of instruction, it follows that they would not perform well in other subjects taught in the target language.

**Q 3: What corrective measures do you apply to help learners deal with the WhatsApp language problem?**

The above question sought to provide strategies teachers use or can use to curb the use of WhatsApp language in their learners' academic essay writing. Teachers responded as follows:

Teacher A:

*I could introduced a lesson where I teach them phonics or use a method of dictation so that these learners write these words in correctly, and also get used to writing them in full in their essays.*

Teacher D:

*Normally, I explain to them that WhatsApp language is different from formal language when we write essays. I introduce dictation to them in order to correct their spelling errors, which should be repeated three times mostly.*

Teachers constantly mentioned that they re-teach learners' vocabulary, starting with phonics and correcting them every time they write incorrect words. Teachers indicate the difference between formal and informal language when writing by constantly teaching them dictation to correct errors. This follows the teachers' observational experience that learners fail to construct grammatically accurate sentences using the formal language. Mostly, they do not have peer-encouragement in this era of obsessive WhatsApp language practice, inside, and outside of their classrooms. Learners seem to do so to protect their affective filter, which is more of a case of 'do as your peers do if you want to survive'. Krashen (1985) claimed that low motivation, low self-esteem, and debilitating anxiety can combine to form a mental block that prevents comprehensible input from being used for acquisition.

**Q 4: Why do you think learners' use WhatsApp language writing in their essays even when you taught them the academic way of writing?**

This question helped to establish the teachers' views on what pushes their learners into the persistent use of WhatsApp language in their academic essay writing even when they had been continuously warned against that. Pal et al. (2016) identified the use of home language for instruction in general as a long standing stumbling block to the learners' acquisition of the level of English language proficiency they need to deal with the demands of academic writing. The common assumption is that the more instruction is given in the mother tongue, the slimmer are the learners' chances to understand the teachers' instruction in English (Akram, 2020). Contrary to Pal et al.'s (2016) view, however, the teachers interviewed do not apportion blame to the home language as a challenge but rather on the deep-rooted language habit learners have cultivated to the extent of addiction. This is depicted in the following teachers' views.

Teacher B:

*I think social media has an effect on academic language. Learners use it so often that they tend to believe that it is a proper way of writing. The way learners text each other using meaningless words also happens when they write formal essays.*

Teacher D:

*I think they are used to texting short messages because of their addiction to social media. What keeps coming to your mind whenever you write stays on your mind.*

**Q 5: In a scale of 1 – 10 comment on the extent to which you think WhatsApp language may affect learners' construction of meaning in their essays? Provide a reason**

The purpose of this question was to gauge the extent to which WhatsApp language affects the learners' construction of meaning in their essays. Teachers gave their responses as follow:

Teacher A:

*I would give it 3.*

Teacher B:

*I think it could be about 4.*

Teacher C:

*Should be 7.*

Teacher D:

*It must be 8, definitely!*

Teachers' ratings in response to the question above were given in line with their observation of the current classroom practice in the classes they teach. Among the reasons given to justify their rating was that social media affects the EFAL educators' achievement rate. That is, when learners write essays, educators expect their essays to be constructive and have clear meaning but learners omit words, and write shorter and fragmented sentences. The researcher views this as a reflection of laziness because effective essay writing takes patience, effort, and being attentive to details.

#### **4.4 AN OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY'S FINDINGS**

The participants who played a role in the study were 22. These were learners from Grade 10 and four educators who teach Grade 10 EFAL at the case school. Purposive sampling was used to select the participants because in this type of sampling, the researcher chose the participants following his judgment. The purpose of the study informed his judgment. Here, learners from Grade 10 were selected purposively. It was purposive because this is where the problem was detected. High, middle, and low performing learners in Grade 10 were selected purposively in order to cater for the study's population.

From the data collected from the focus-group interviews, it was clear that the high performing learners have better writing skills. Learners indicated that they use social media gadgets. This in turn has lead them into using slang or casual language, writing incomplete sentences or short hand approach, making grammatical errors, not using standard ways of writing, and poor vocabulary. This was evident on their essays and

when they responded to the questions. Most participants indicated that they are addicted to social media.

Learners with the middle level cognition have problems in writing complete sentences or short hand approach, make grammatical errors, do not use standard way of writing, have poor vocabulary, poor sentence construction, use social media style of writing, and spelling mistake. These learners encounter the above problems as this was proven to be true when the researcher analysed data. These learners still make sense from what they are writing and show some signs of improvement. The major problem that might delay their improvement is the use of social media language. They are also taught in their mother tongue. This is a major thorn in their mastering of English.

There are learners who have the lowest cognitive level who experience extreme challenges in writing incomplete sentences or short hand approach, making grammatical errors, not using standard way of writing, poor vocabulary, poor sentence construction, the use of social media style of writing and spelling mistake, and the inference of mother tongue. As the researcher interpreted data, he discovered that these learners have a problem in reading or understanding questions because some cannot follow the correct structure of writing an essay. Learners could not follow instructions on the question paper. They even wrote capital letters in the middle of a sentence. They started a sentences using small letters or they just wrote words that do not exist.

There were four educators who participated in this study. These educators were selected purposively. That is purposive sampling because they were selected by virtue of being involved in teaching Grade 10 EFAL at school. These educators had a common problem when responding to questions asked by the researcher. The problem was that learners fail to construct a simple sentence using formal language. They lack insufficient knowledge of grammar. Learners do not plan when writing their essays, spelling errors, and incorrect punctuation. Educators indicated that the root of the problem was that learners use WhatsApp language in their formal tasks as they spend most of their time on social media. This was proven to be true because the researcher gave learners essays to write and their essays showed that indeed they use the WhatsApp style of writing when writing formal tasks.

#### **4.5. CONCLUSION**

This chapter analysed and interpreted the data collected. Firstly, clarity was demonstrated in terms of how data triangulation was done and consolidated. The purpose hereof was to show how the study responded to the research questions it sought to answer. The data analysis gave a clear picture of how learners perceived their cell phones as an essential tool. This was demonstrated by how they battled with the idea of leaving them at home during school hours. It became clear that the practical language of instruction used in the research site was the language that learners used when writing essays. The mother tongue and WhatsApp languages, regardless of the curriculum expectation that English be used as the LoLT in all learning areas, except for their Home Language, predominated. This reduced the target language amount of input learners should receive in the course of their language learning in favour of the HL and WhatsApp. Of significance about the chapter is that the main themes generated from each research question helped to answer the research questions. The last chapter concludes this study. This is done by the summing up the study's findings, conclusions, and the study's recommendations.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **SUMMARY, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSION**

#### **5.1 INTRODUCTION**

This chapter sums up the study by discussing its findings and highlighting its recommendations and conclusions derived therefrom. The different forms of data, which were collected using different research methods are discussed here in line with the order of the research questions in chapter 1. The study purposively selected four EFAL teachers and 22 Grade 10 learners from a secondary school in a village within the Kgakotlou Circuit. This study's findings might regretfully not be generalised to other secondary schools in the Capricorn South District and the Limpopo Province as a whole due to the following reasons.

#### **5.2. OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY**

This qualitative case study investigated the extent to which Grade 10 EFAL learners' daily communication in WhatsApp language affects the learners' construction of meaning when they are given academic essays to write. The study was undertaken in a selected high school in the Kgakotlou Circuit in the Limpopo Province involving four EFAL teachers and 22 Grade 10 learners. These were purposively selected from a secondary school in a village within the Kgakotlou Circuit.

This study investigated the extent to which the Grade 10 EFAL learners' daily communication in WhatsApp language affected their construction of meaning when they were given academic essays to write. An attempt to address this challenge called for the response to three sub-questions that sum up the nature of this study. The three questions are:

- What kind of language errors do learners commit in their academic writing of essays due to their transfer of language structures that are typically associated with WhatsApp language?

- What are the learners' perceptions of the phenomenon of the WhatsApp language interference in their academic writing?
- What corrective measures do teachers apply to help their EFAL learners deal with this innovation?

The questions above were answered through gathering different data using the following data collection techniques:

- Learners' documents (essays) were used to provide the findings on the question of the kind of errors they commit in their academic essay writing.
- FGD was used to establish the perceptions learners held about the use of WhatsApp language.
- Observation and interviews were used to elicit strategies teachers used to address or deal with their learners' writing challenges.

### **5.3 SUMMARY OF THE MAIN FINDINGS OF THE STUDY**

- The main finding based on the purpose of this study revealed that the learners' use of WhatsApp language in the academic essays distorts the meaning they strive to convey when they are given writing tasks, especially when given under controlled circumstances. The study revealed that distortion is inevitable because:
- Learners commit many language errors that are caused by deliberate deformation of words from their original meaningful state in attempts to shorten what they say through their wrong use of omission and substitution of the key words or phrases that help construct meaning in their academic essays.
- Secondly, the study also established that learners perceive the use of WhatsApp language in academic writing as an effective tool for them, which helps them cope with the writing challenges they experience when they use English as a medium of communication since they do not understand the concept of academic writing. They



believe that the use of WhatsApp language scaffolds them in the event they run out of appropriate words to use in their essays.

- Thirdly, teachers do not have effective language error-correction strategies. Their current use of dictation to deal with their learners' whatsapp-driven language errors does not work for them since the problems evidently continues unabated.

### **5.3. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE FINDINGS**

The study was a success in the sense that it shed light on how the learners' addiction to the use of WhatsApp language for their communication beyond classroom gets out of their hand, and negatively creeps into their academic language and distorts meaning in their academic essay writing.

Firstly, it is an eye-opener for educators to be exposed to the truth that their learners do not know much academic writing that they (teachers) demand their learners to use whenever they are given creative writing to do. This naturally calls for teachers to invest their teaching energies in the direction they want their learners to head. This suggests that there is a need for the EFAL classes to have more input on academic writing literacy to counter-feed learners with an overflow of the right language they need for their academic writing.

The findings of this study would also be significant to the subject advisors and curriculum reviewers. It would be interesting to see how they work towards closing the teachers' gap in the intervention strategies in view of the difficulties teachers have in stopping learners from committing an overflow of WhatsApp related errors in their academic essays despite their use of a hopeless dictation approach they currently use in their EFAL classroom.

Lastly, the study also revealed that there is no conventional standard of punctuation, contraction, or spelling of words as far as the use of WhatsApp language goes. There are many words learners used with multiple spelling errors such as the word "because". Some would use it as "cos", others would cut it into "bcos" while another group would have it as "cause". This means that for WhatsApp language to be considered as a language to be recognised for instructional purpose, lexicographers and language planners should give

it serious consideration for a common conventional standard. The authors are also needed to consider moving along towards bringing out the learner materials that are in line with the current deficiency in order to expose them to learners within the activities they publish in their texts books.

#### **5.4 RECOMMENDATIONS**

Firstly, the study established that any language error that is committed through the deformation, substitution, or omission of the word, phrase, or clause (sentence), which serves as a backbone of meaning in a given sentence, carries a degree of meaning distortion in the learners' academic writing essay. Teachers should introduce peer-proof reading or review to allow learners to check out the use of Whatsapp language in their peers' work.

Secondly, teachers should not only make learners aware of the impact of using WhatsApp language on meaning but should also thoroughly teach them what the concept of academic writing entails. This would expose learners to the knowledge of the concept and put it in practice. It is always good to see learners showing their ability to describe their language structures and conventions as applied in real life texts.

Thirdly, to avoid pushing learners into using meaningless words or leave spaces open in their essays due to the lack of suitable English words required to uphold the expected formal register, teachers should rather encourage their learners to use trans-linguaging to bridge the linguistic barrier challenge that pushes them to the use of WhatsApp language.

Fourthly, beyond correcting the learners' language errors through raising awareness of the impact of the WhatsApp language on meaning construction, and using dictation to instill correct language form, there is a need for educational stakeholders to find concrete remedial strategies that can curb the production of WhatsApp-based language errors in the learners' writing habits.

Lastly, in the light of the range of language errors learners commit through the influence of WhatsApp language interference in their academic essays, teachers and learners unanimously admitted that whatsapp language does, to a large extent, distort intended meaning when learners write. Therefore, educational stakeholders should stop fighting this, and work together on designing a common writers' manual or a dictionary fit for universally shared whatsapp language.

## **5.5. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

The first limitation of this study is that when the researcher conducted it in the research site some Grade 10 EFAL educators at school showed no willing to participate or to offer any form of support to see it progress to the end. As a result, the learners from their classes had to be excluded from participation since the teachers would possibly be biased against it.

Secondly, the learners who were not selected to participate in the study deliberately kept on interrupting the process of collecting data during the FGD sessions by constantly making noise that affected the quality of the audibility level during the discussion. An attempt to overcome these limitations involved calling in the Deputy Principal to intervene and normalise the noise level around the FGD venue.

Thirdly, the teachers' interview schedule had a critical omission of the question on how or when teachers strategically use social media platform for instructional purpose. This followed the observation that learners do stealthily use their cellphones to do something else rather than the activities teachers give them during normal class sessions. It would be enlightening to see how the use of social media platform could be turned into a helpful tool that could be embraced rather than be scorned at.

## **5.6. IMPLICATIONS**

Firstly, the researcher believes that this study has a potential of giving rise to further studies that can explore how a triangular relationship between learners, parents, and teachers can collectively bring about a regulatory strategy that could help determine the role each stakeholder's impact towards reducing or escalating the distractive impact of WhatsApp language in academic writing.

Secondly, the study revealed the need for researchers, educators, and the EFAL subject advisors to research about new intervention strategies that could help minimise the production of language errors based on the use of WhatsApp language in the learners' formal academic writing. Teachers, learners, parents, and the DBE and all relevant stakeholders that are involved in the education system should work tirelessly to take out the use of social media language (WhatsApp language) in the learners' academic writing by creating conducive learning environment that could set up a positive culture that is linguistically less pollutive.

## **5.7. CONCLUSION**

Finally, this chapter sums up the findings and conclusions related to this study's findings. It further tables the recommendations and implications this study puts forth for further studies regarding the need to explore further the area of social media. In the light of what this study raised about the distortion of meaning the use of WhatsApp platform brings, it is clear that unless teachers find an effective way to curbing this new wave, the foundation of meaning distortion that is rife at high school level poses threats to constructive writing beyond high school.

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## **APPENDICES**

### **APPENDIX A: CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE (TREC)**

**APPENDIX B: PARENT / GUARDIAN CONSENT FORM**

I \_\_\_\_\_ (full names and surname)  
parent/ guardian of \_\_\_\_\_ (name and surname of  
learner) in Grade 10 \_\_\_ hereby grant my son/daughter the permission to participate this  
study.

Signature of parent/guardian

Date

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**APPENDIX C: UNDERAGE LEARNER'S ASSENT FORM**

I \_\_\_\_\_ (full names and surname),

Grades 10 \_\_\_\_ (A/B/C) learner at Mothimako Secondary School, agree to participate in

this study, for the duration specified.

Signature of parent/guardian

Date

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## TEACHER'S CONSENT FORM

I \_\_\_\_\_ (teacher's name ) at Mothimako

Secondary School acknowledge that I clearly understand the concept of his study; and I

agree to participate in the study, and offer any relevant support the research will need to

complete this study.

Signature

\_\_\_\_\_

Date

\_\_\_\_\_

**APPENDIX E: LETTER TO THE CIRCUIT MANAGER**

PO Box 26

ROZANO

0723

THE CIRCUIT MANAGER

KGAKOTLOU CIRCUIT

BAG 1234

SOVENGA

0727

Sir / Madam

**AN APPLICATION FOR PERMSSION TO DO RESEARCH IN THE SCHOOL SPECIFIED BELOW**

I am writing to request you for the permission to undertake a research project on Grade 10 EFAL learners' use of what's, to establish how it affects their academic creative wring of essay, at your school. The duration of the data collection will take a maximum of two months. This venture will certainly be of great awareness raising for the, school, the circuit and the province at large.

I would appreciate your understanding and assistance in this regard

Yours faithfully



Mr. T.E Golele



## APPENDIC F: LETTER TO THE PRINCIPAL

PO Box 26

ROZANO

0723

THE PRINCIPAL

MOTHIMAKO SECONDARY SCHOOL

BAG X1118

SOVENGA

0727

Sir / Madam

### **AN APPLICATION FOR PERMSSION TO DO RESEARCH IN YOUR SCHOOL**

I am writing to request you for the permission to undertake a research project on Grade 10 learners' use of what's, to establish how it affects their academic creative writing of essay, at your school. The duration of the data collection will take a maximum of two months. This venture will certainly be of great awareness raising for the, school, the circuit and the province at large.

I would appreciate your understanding and assistance in this regard

Yours faithfully

 . . .

## DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENTS

### INSTRUMENT NO. 1: OBSERVATION SCHEDULE

Key Focal Points:

	<b>Focal Point</b>	<b>Observation Notes</b>
<b>1</b>	Classroom media on walls	
<b>2</b>	Teacher's written instructions, issued out to learners	
<b>3</b>	Creative writing texts types given to learners	
<b>4</b>	Use of cell phones as a reference tool	
<b>5</b>	Learners' general use of cell phone on school grounds	
<b>6</b>	Any other additional classroom point of attraction	

## **INSTRUMENT NO. 2: TEACHERSS' INTERVIEW SCHEDULE**

1. What kind of challenges do you experience when your Grade 10 English First Additional Language learners write academic essays?
2. Does the language learners' use when they communicate using WhatsApp also creep into their academic essays? Please explain your answer.
3. What corrective measures do you apply to help learners deal with the challenge referred to above?
4. Why do you think learners' use WhatsApp language writing in their essays even when you taught them the academic way of writing?
5. In a scale of 10 to what extent do you think the WhatsApp language affect the learners' construction of meaning in their essays? Please explain your rating.

### **INSTRUMENT 3: LEANERS' FOCUS-GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. What is your understanding of academic writing?
2. What kind of language challenges do you experience when you are given academic writing essay?
3. Does the language you use to communicate with your friends on WhatsApp also creep into your academic essay when you write formal essays? Please explain your answer?
4. Do you think your use of WhatsApp language in your academic essay writing does or does not affect the meaning of the essay given to write ultimately? Please explain.
5. Explain why you keep on using WhatsApp language in your academic essays even when your teachers keep warning you against that?

**INSTRUMENT NO. 4: LEARNERS' WRITTEN DOCUMENT: ESSAYS**

**NATIONAL SENIOR CERTIFICATE**

**GRADE 10**

**ENGLISH FIRST ADDITIONAL LANGUAGE P  
CREATIVE WRITING: ESSAY**

**MARKS: 50**

**TIME: 1H30**

**INSTRUCTIONS AND INFORMATION**

1. This question paper consists of SIX essay topics. Choose from them and respond accordingly.
2. Answer ONE question.
3. Number the answers correctly according to the numbering system used in this question paper.
4. Do NOT write in the margins of the ANSWER BOOK.

5. Write neatly and legibly.

Note: This question paper was adapted from DBE/November 2021

Write an essay of between 150 and 200 words (approximately One to One and a half pages) long on ONE of the following pages:

1.1. I own my future [50]

1.2. Write a story that includes the following words, "As I entered the room ..."

NB. The words given in the topic **MUST BE INCLUDED** somewhere in the body of your essay. You may give this essay a topic of your choice, as long as those words are part of the essay. [50]

1.3. What a celebration! [50]

1.4. We can save this planet by turning waste into wealth. [50]

1.5. The mystery was finally solved. [50]

1.6. We can live in a world where people are too much about material possessions.

[50]

