

**EXPLORATION OF ESSAY WRITING CHALLENGES EXPERIENCED BY GRADE  
11 ENGLISH FIRST ADDITIONAL LANGUAGE LEARNERS IN MALEBOHO  
CIRCUIT, LIMPOPO PROVINCE**

By

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## DECLARATION

I, Ramokone Audrey Thaba [REDACTED] declare that this dissertation titled, **Exploration of Essay writing Challenges experienced by Grade 11 English First Additional Language learners in Maleboho Circuit, Limpopo Province** is my work, and was not submitted to this or any other university before for a degree or examination. The works cited in this study were fittingly acknowledged in the reference list.

**Signature**



.....

**Date**

JANUARY, 2022

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## **DEDICATION**

To the loving memory of my late mother, Ramaesela Dorah Thaba, who died when I was very young, and my late grandmother Ramatsobane Merriam Thaba who raised me. To my late aunt, Magolatseleng Virginia Makgoba, for her love, guidance, and support. To my aunt's children, for their love and support, always.

## **ABSTRACT**

Essay writing is one of the crucial skills required by learners to succeed in their education but is difficult to master. Essay writing benefits learners by helping improve their spoken English and enhances their writing abilities (Okpe & Onjewu, 2017). The study explored challenges experienced by Grade 11 English First Additional Language learners in Maleboho Circuit, Limpopo Province. The study sought to understand the learners' essay writing challenges and identify strategies to mitigate them. The study adopted a qualitative approach with a phenomenological design to grasp the learners' lived experiences in essay writing. Six learners were sampled from twenty-seven Grade 11 EFAL learners. Data were collected from the teacher and learners using observations, documents, and semi-structured interviews. The content analysis technique was used to analyse the learners' essays. The thematic data analysis technique was used to analyse data collected using the semi-structured interviews. The study found that learners experience many challenges in writing structured and coherent essays. The study discovered that learners were not effectively taught essay writing, thereby writing without planning, drafting, and editing. The study recommends that teachers should teach essay writing by following proper writing processes as recommended by the Department of Basic Education (DBE). The study also recommends that teachers should be continuously trained on the application of various writing strategies.

**Keywords:** English First Additional Language learners, essay writing, cohesion, coherence, process approach, product approach.

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## LIST OF ACRONYMS

<b>Acronym</b>	<b>Full explanation</b>
CAPS	Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statements
NCS	National Curriculum Statements
EFAL	English as First Additional Language
DBE	Department of Basic Education
LTSM	Learning and Teaching Support Materials
HL	Home language

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## **CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 BACKGROUND AND MOTIVATION**

Writing an essay is a process that requires thorough planning in line with the topic in question. A writer demonstrates the ability to present subsequent drafts logically (Ulugbek & Anora, 2020). Essay writing requires the writer to establish the purpose, gather ideas, organise facts, and then write the first draft. Secondly, revise and present a coherent and polished second draft of the essay. As one of the EFAL educators in the Maleboho Circuit, the researcher observed that the Grade 11 EFAL learners have problems with constructing and linking paragraph sentences. This has become a serious challenge to learners' writing of coherent and cohesive essays.

Maruma (2017) cited in Ngubane (2018) revealed that the learners' inability to write coherently and logically affects the effective expression of their thoughts, ideas, and emotions in their essays. It becomes difficult for the reader to grasp the effectiveness of the essay's content. According to Mpiti (2016), the South African learners' challenges in writing coherent and cohesive essays are a result of most South African teachers' limited proficiency in EFAL. He argued that teachers are not sufficiently competent and confident to teach EFAL, thus they tend to code-mix and code-switch in their native language in class. This affects the learners' academic performance from primary to tertiary institutions as they are expected to express themselves in English.

Drummond (2017) affirmed that most learners in South Africa start university with insufficient English writing skills. Cekiso, Tshotsho, and Somniso (2016) confirmed that South African university learners experience problems with writing introduction, developing coherent paragraphs, and conclusions. The authors asserted that the errors could be due to the learners' writing experiences at secondary school level. It was crucial, therefore, for this study to explore essay writing challenges experienced by Grade 11 learners. As an English educator, I would understand the challenges experienced by learners in writing coherent and cohesive essays.

A study conducted in an Iranian English additional classes shows that battling with writing a coherent and cohesive essay is not only limited to schools within the

Limpopo Province, it is a global challenge that stretches beyond South Africa (Derakhshan & Shirejini, 2020). The study established that learners find it difficult to coherently link ideas and properly conclude an essay. Alsied, Ibrahim, and Pathan's (2018) study conducted in Libyan EFAL classes discovered that learners had challenges with coherence and cohesion in essay writing.

Against this background, teachers should teach learners how to write their essays coherently. One way of doing so is to start by writing one idea in a paragraph. Fitriana (2017) recommended that learners should be given more guidance on essay writing but teachers claimed to be time constrained due to the large classes they teach. However, Akhtar et al. (2019) argued that it is not only teachers who are at fault in this regard; learners also show little interest in devoting their time to working towards improving their writing skills. On the other hand, Khatter (2019) stated that writing has always been difficult and challenging for EFAL learners. The writing process includes many aspects such as the generation and organisation of ideas, drafting, revising, and editing. Thus, the study investigated the essay writing challenges experienced by the Grade 11 EFAL learners in the Maleboho Circuit. Doing so helped the researcher to understand the learners' challenges in writing coherent and cohesive essays.

## **1.2 RESEARCH PROBLEM**

The Department of Basic Education emphasises that learners in Grade 10-12 should develop opportunities to write for interpersonal reasons, develop cognitive academic skills, and write progressively more challenging texts and to prepare for the world of work (Department of Basic Education in CAPS, 2011). It is thus crucial for teachers to effectively teach, assess and ensure that learners practice writing coherent and cohesive essay frequently. Unfortunately, learners are not provided with sufficient opportunities to write essay in the classroom (Mhlongo, Pillay and Maphalala, 2018). Hence, the study identified the existing gap that learners are struggling to write coherent and cohesive essays in the EFAL classroom.

Pablo and Lasaten (2018) stated that the Grade 11 learners lack sentence connectives and have no sense of logical sequencing, and hence it is difficult to follow ideas in their essays. Alaro (2020) affirmed that Grade 11 learners use cohesive devices inappropriately, which leads to their essays lacking logical shifts

from one sentence to the other. It becomes difficult for the reader to clearly understand their essays. The challenge starts with sentence construction. That is, learners battle to choose or find suitable cohesive devices to meaningfully link up clauses. This manifests itself in the way the overall paragraph reads. Consequently, not only does this affect the organisation of their message but also the overall meaning of the essay produced.

In Indonesia, learners indicated that they have insufficient transition words to make their writing coherent (Toba, Noor, & Sanu, 2019). They put more ideas in one paragraph and that confuses the reader. Cekiso, Tshotsho, and Somniso (2016) confirmed that learners in South Africa do experience similar problems with essay writing. Oyedele (2016) observed that learners show a range of problems such as presenting essays with loose content, improper sequencing, and organisation of ideas. The poor organisation of ideas distorts the meaning learners put across. Learners tend to focus on expressing their ideas instead of ensuring that their ideas are logically and consistently arranged. Thus, it is important for this study to explore the challenges learners' face in writing coherent and cohesive essay, with the intention to conscientise stake holders in education to collaborate to mitigate this problem.

### **1.3 AIM OF THE STUDY**

The study's aim is to explore essay writing challenges experienced by Grade 11 EFAL learners at the Maleboho Central Circuit's selected secondary school.

### **1.3 STUDY OBJECTIVES**

The main aim of this study is to explore writing challenges experienced by Grade 11 learners particularly those who are taught through the medium of English First Additional Language. Therefore, this study will assist the researcher to understand the causes and identify effective strategies to teach essay writing in the EFAL classroom.

The objectives of this study are:

- To identify challenges experienced by Grade 11 EFAL learners in essay writing.
- To identify the causes of the challenges experienced by learners in essay writing.
- To observe and analyse the teaching strategies employed by teachers in teaching essay writing in the EFAL classroom.
- To identify strategies to improve the learners' essay writing skills.

## **1.5 RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

The study answered the following main research question,

- What challenges do Grade 11 EFAL learners experience in essay writing?

To fully answer the main research question, the study answered the following subsidiary questions.

- What are the causes of Grade 11 EFAL learners' essay writing challenges?
- How is essay writing taught in the English FAL classroom?
- Which strategies can be employed to improve the learners' essay writing skills?

## **1.6 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

Grade 11 learners should improve their writing skills if they are to express their ideas effectively in writing. This study would help inform various stakeholders in education about cohesive devices, errors committed, and causes of the challenges experienced by learners in essay writing. The study might assist the DBE to see the need to train qualified teachers in English. This might also assist in reducing the lower performance rate in EFAL. The curriculum specialists might be able to assist teachers to effectively apply relevant strategies in class to help learners write cohesive and cohesion essays. Teachers might reflect on their current methods and strategies used to teach essay writing skills and adopt effective ones. When teachers improve their teaching strategies, they might assist learners to write cohesive and cohesion essays. When learners become better writers they might develop love for

writing since this skill is crucial in their educational endeavours. Learners might be able to write diverse types of essays by arranging ideas logically and using cohesive devices to produce coherent essays that convey meaningful message. This might provide them with opportunities for further education and careers in writing after completing Grade 12. Academic abilities and achievements depend on one's ability to express themselves well in writing.

## **1.7 QUALITY CRITERIA**

In this study, the researcher followed the qualitative elements of the quality criteria to ensure that the findings were accurate. The following elements were followed; credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility refers to the research findings' plausibility and trustworthy (Stenfors, Kajamaa, & Bennett, 2020). It means that the researcher must ensure and impart supporting evidence to the readers to make them believe that the results accurately represent what was studied (Johnson, Adkins, & Chauvin, 2020). The researcher used the member check strategy to ensure the study's credibility. The analytical themes, interpretation of data, and conclusions were given to the participants to check if they accurately represented their views.

Transferability means that the study's findings might be transferred to another setting or context (Stenfors, Kajamaa, & Bennett, 2020). Therefore, the researcher should provide detailed contextual information that enables readers to determine whether the results are applicable to other studies (Johnson et al., 2020). The researcher explicitly outlined the study's findings to assist the EFAL teachers to apply the identified teaching strategies to improve the learners' writing skills. Doing so would also allow other researchers to relate the study's findings with theirs.

Dependability refers to the findings' consistency and replicability (Terrell, 2016). The researcher described the study process in more details such that the study could be repeated (Johnson et al., 2020). The researcher used the semi-structured interviews, documents, and observations to collect data. The steps for data collection were transparently described. Thus, the study's findings might allow other researchers to follow the same steps to replicate the same results.

Confirmability means that the findings must be the product of the participants' responses and not the researcher's interests or perspectives (Treharne & Riggs, 2015). This researcher communicated clearly to the reader that the findings are based on and reflect the information obtained from the participants and not her interpretations or biasness (Johnson et al., 2020). The researcher followed the audit trail strategy to ensure the study's confirmability. She detailed the research steps followed from the beginning of the research to the data collection and analysis, and reported the findings accordingly. The interview records, observation notes, and the participants' scripts are kept safely.

## **1.8 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

Ethical considerations refer to how moral principles and values form part of the research process (Johnson et al., 2020). In each step of the research process, the participants should be taken care of. The researcher considered their confidentiality and protected them from harm in terms of respect and dignity (Johnson et al., 2020). Creswell (2008) affirmed that the researchers should protect their participants, ensure trust amongst them, promote the study's integrity, avoid misconduct and impropriety that might reflect on their institutions, and handle new challenging problems effectively. In this study, the researcher addressed the issues to do with permission, consent, confidentiality and, anonymity and avoidance of harm. These ethical aspects guided the researcher to respect the participants' contributions and quotes and ensured that the findings were reported truthfully and reliably.

### **1.8.1 Permission to do the study**

Permission here refers to gaining an official permission from the study site's respective authorities (Arifin, 2018). The researcher was granted permission to conduct the study by the Turfloop Research and Ethics Committee. She was also granted permission by the DBE's provincial offices and the principal of the selected school to collect data at the said school. These respective offices were informed about the study and how it would be conducted.



### **1.8.2 Informed consent**

Informed consent is a written statement that informs the participants about the research and allows them to decide whether to take part in the study or not (Arifin, 2018). According to Fleming and Zegwaard (2018), the participants should be fully informed about what is required of them, how data would be used, and if they would encounter any challenges during their participation in the study. Marczyk, DeMatteo, and Festinger (2005) established that all potential study participants should be informed about the steps that would be followed in the study, the risks, and benefits (if any) of participating in the study, and their rights as the study participants. They should provide clear and signed consent to take part in the study and understand their rights to allow the researcher to access their information and the right to withdraw at any point. Parents were given consent forms to request permission for their children to be part of the study. The participants filled the consent forms before data collection. They were not coerced to participate. They were informed about their rights to voluntarily participate and to withdraw from the study with no penalties.

### **1.8.3 Confidentiality and anonymity**

The above means collected data is de-identified and the participants' identities are kept confidential (Fleming & Zegwaard, 2018). The researcher ensured that the information collected was not shared with anyone outside the research. All data collected are kept in the password-protected computer. Anonymity means that the participants remain nameless or unknown to protect their identity from disclosure (Fleming & Zegwaard, 2018). The researcher referred to the participants by coded numbers such as 'participant one,' to ensure their anonymity. And the name of the school will not be revealed anywhere in the study. By so doing, readers would not identify the participants by the information provided.

### **1.8.4 Avoidance of harm**

The harm could be physical, resource loss, emotional, and reputational (Fleming & Zegwaard, 2018). The face to face semi-structured interview technique requires the researcher to listen and respond to the participants' answers, thus, the participants might become stressed while expressing their views (Arifin, 2018). The researcher

conducted the interviews in an office that made them comfortable. The researcher was not harsh to the participants and assured them that they would not be harmed in any way by participating in the study.

## **1.9 DEFINITION OF KEY CONCEPTS**

**English FAL learners:** - EFAL learners refer to learners who are taught English as a second language. English is considered the instructional language in class. In this study, First Additional Language learners refer to a group of learners doing Grade 11 at the selected Secondary School.

**Essay writing:** - The skill that gives learners opportunities to build and develop critical thinking, to be trained to make judgments, decide their writing styles, and pick out scientific diction for their academic essay writing (Ahea, Ahea, & Rahman, 2016).

**Cohesion:** - Al-Qahtani (2020) stated that cohesion is the connection that exists within an essay. He identified two types of cohesion namely, grammatical cohesion and lexical cohesion. Grammatical cohesion is the cohesion expressed through the use of a grammatical system of a language such as reference, substitution, ellipsis, and conjunction. Lexical cohesion is the cohesion effect achieved in the selection of vocabulary (Poudel, 2018).

**Coherence:** - Poudel (2018) maintained that coherence is the meaning of an essay grasped through interpretation. It depends on the relation between the audience and the text. Coherence is a product of numerous factors, which are combined to make every sentence contribute to the text's meaning (Ahmed, 2019). Coherence refers to the logical flow of sentences and the arrangement of ideas to create a meaningful essay.

**Process approach:** - This is an approach to teaching writing that allows the teacher and the learner to go through the process writing's stages such as pre-writing, writing, and post-writing when doing an essay (Zakime, 2018).

**Product Approach:** - An approach to writing that suggests that teachers give the model of writing text to learners, and the latter have to imitate writing based on the given model, and the product must reflect the model (Nabhan, 2016).

## **1.10 OVERVIEW OF CHAPTERS**

Chapter one: Introduction and background of the study. This chapter outlines the study's context, the study problem, its aim and objectives, research questions, the significance of the study, the quality criteria and ethical considerations, the definition of key terms, and the chapter layout.

Chapter two: Theoretical Framework and Literature Review. This chapter illustrates this study's theoretical framework and reviews recent literature related to this study's topic. The chapter examines studies on essay writing, its importance, its structure, and how the essay is taught. It also examines what the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statements (CAPS) stipulate about essay writing. Lastly, studies about the South African learners' essay writing challenges are reviewed.

Chapter three: Research methodology. Issues to do with the research methodology adopted for this study are outlined here. That is, the research design, sampling methods, and procedures used in the collection and analysis of data are outlined.

Chapter four: Data presentation and analysis. The fourth chapter presents, analyses, and interprets data collected from the study's participants. The said data is integrated with that collected from the studies reviewed in chapter two.

Chapter five: Summary, recommendations, and conclusion. This is the study's last chapter. It provides the study's summary of the major findings, the study's recommendations, and then its conclusion.

## **1.11 SUMMARY**

This chapter presented the study's background about the learners' challenges to writing coherent and cohesive essays. Also outlined here are the study's aim and

objectives, the research questions, the significance of the study, quality criteria, and the ethical considerations that were followed to ensure the participants' safety, the definition of key terms, the study's layout. The following chapter provides the theoretical framework that underpins this study. Thereafter, literature related to the study topic is reviewed. The next chapter also discusses what the CAPS indicate about the essay writing skills. The importance of cohesion and coherence in essay writing is also discussed. Lastly, chapter two outlines the background to the South African learners' essay writing challenges.

## **CHAPTER TWO: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW**

## **2.1 INTRODUCTION**

The previous chapter introduced this study and outlined its background. It also outlined the problem statement, the study's aim and objectives, the research questions and significance of the study, and defined key concepts. This chapter provides the study's theoretical framework and reviews recent literature about the learners' essay writing skills. In discussing the study's theoretical framework, the researcher justified why the said theoretical framework was adopted. When reviewing literature, the researcher emphasises essay writing issues, its importance, structure, how essay writing is taught, what the CAPS say about essay writing, and the importance of coherence and cohesion in essay writing. Lastly, the background on South African learners' essay writing challenges is outlined.

## **2.2 THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

The theoretical foundation is the base from which knowledge is constructed to build a research study (Grant & Osanloo, 2015). The framework is the structure and supports the study's rationale, the problem statement, the purpose, the significance, and the research questions (Grant & Osanloo, 2015). In other words, it is the plan that underpins the study. In this study, the researcher employed Vygotsky's (1978) Social Constructivism Theory to guide it. Social Constructivism is a learning theory that states that learners experience, communicate, and comprehend reality through frameworks such as language and culture (Akpan et al., 2020). That is, learning how to write an essay is imparted using language interpreted and understood by experience and interaction within an EFAL classroom.

In this study, the social constructivism theory focuses on the learners' learning of the essay writing process to produce a coherent and cohesive essay not their performance. Learners are viewed as active co-constructors of meaning and knowledge. The theory emphasises the idea of guidance as it builds an EFAL teacher-learner relationship, seeks to engage learners in essay writing activities that are challenging but worth to be tried, and emphasises on assessment as an active process of revealing and equipping shared understandings (Adams, 2006). During the process of essay teaching and learning, what a learner grasps is crucial, and the

teacher's role is to assist learners to achieve knowledge that is beyond their level through effective assessment. Mvududu and Thiel-Burgess (2012) established that constructivism as an educational theory emphasises that teachers must consider the learners' essay writing prior knowledge and build on it to allow them to use their knowledge in practice to produce an improved essay. Teachers ought to teach cohesive devices and frequently engage learners into writing progressively more challenging texts.

The Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) and Scaffolding concepts associated with Vygotsky's theory are relevant to understand the learners' essay writing challenges and the suggested appropriate instructional support. ZPD was defined by Vygotsky (1978) as the distance between the actual developmental level determined by a learner working alone to solve a problem and the level of potential development determined through solving a problem guided by the teacher or in collaboration with capable peers. Scaffolding refers to the support and guidance provided to a learner by the teacher or a more knowledgeable other. The relationship between the two tenets is that as learners develop within their ZPD, they gain confidence to tackle writing tasks with the help of an educator or peers (scaffolding). Knowledge of the learners' ZPDs is of strategic importance. It has strong implications for how teachers use scaffolding techniques to enable learners to write better essays. Knowing the learners' ZPDs help maximise the learning opportunities so that learners could reach their maximum potential (Hashem, 2021).

Thus, the researcher maintains that teachers employ the ZPD and scaffolding to ensure that learners follow the writing steps. In the planning stage, learners should be grouped and given a topic. They must discuss the topic, share ideas, and write a mind map. By so doing, they would be interacting and learning from one another. Each learner should use the said mind map to write his/her first draft. Learners are expected to organise sentences logically to create coherent paragraphs appropriate for the essay written. They should exchange their drafts and assist each other to revise, edit, and proofread. Lastly, learners should then write their final essays.

Palincsar (1998) confirmed that Vygotsky introduced the ZPD concept as a primarily innovative approach to the issue that learning must be matched with the child's level of development. This means that the essay writing development occurs as learners

learn the general content of an essay and processes that can be applied to new essay tasks and problems. Thus, the researcher contends that teachers should evaluate the learners' prior knowledge of essay writing, build on what they already know by grouping them, and allow them to interact and facilitate their learning. This might enhance their existing knowledge to enable them to appropriately use cohesive and cohesion devices in their essay writing.

Fani and Ghaemi (2011) argued that for learners to reach full ZPD, they must have more social interaction. The learners' increased ZPD depends more on their effective social interaction to gain more knowledge and improve their essay writing skills when collaborating with others than working as individuals. As such, the theory and its tenets were relevant to this study. They assisted the researcher to outline the learners' challenges, causes, and remedial strategies to improve their essay writing skills. The study might provide teachers with a clear description of how to facilitate and mediate learning in EFAL classes to allow learners to actively participate and achieve their essay writing goals.

The relevance of Vygotsky's Social Constructivist theory is the assumption that learning is a social rather than an individualistic process, where learners' essay writing skills could improve if they are provided with opportunities for peer feedback through collaborative writing activities. The Social Constructivist theory is described by Valizaden and Soltanpour (2020) as learning that takes place through social interaction that highlights the importance of active learner participation in the classroom. Scaffolding and ZPD are the social constructivism's important tenets, which have significant relevance in this study. That is, they inform the writing pedagogy where the researcher identified what individual learners could do without assistance and what they could do with the help of the more knowledgeable peers when engaging in essay writing activities.

Furthermore, Kim (2001) argued that social constructivism is based on specific assumptions about reality, knowledge, and learning. To apply scaffolding and ZPD in essay writing, teachers should consider the following strategies; reality (writing skills), which is believed to be constructed through human activity. It means learners would develop and improve their writing skills through the teacher-learner

collaboration or interaction with peers. Through such interactions, learners discover their capabilities to write coherent and cohesive essays.

The second is knowledge. Knowledge is a product of human beings that is socially and culturally created (Kim, 2001). For learners to produce coherent and cohesive essays, they should work together under their teacher's supervision. Learners must approach writing as a process, brainstorm the topic for ideas, write a rough first draft, work on the sequencing and linking of paragraphs, prepare the final draft and then present a meaningful final report. Learners develop skills through meaningful social interaction and with the environment (classroom) they work in.

The third aspect is learning. Learning is perceived as a social process. It neither takes place only within an individual, nor is it a passive development of behaviours shaped by external forces (Kim, 2001). In this study, social constructivism demonstrates that learning effectively develops as individuals interact and work together in teams, not alone. Thus, the study emphasises the importance of teamwork to improve the learners' essay writing skills.

## **2.3 LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.3.1 Essay writing**

An essay is a piece of writing that consists of the main topic and is arranged into paragraphs, with each paragraph consisting of the main idea (Okpe & Onjewu, 2017). An essay follows a certain structure. That is, it has an introduction, body, and conclusion. The essay's first paragraph must grasp the reader's attention. The first paragraph gives an overview of what the essay is about. The body of the essay is the longest part divided into paragraphs. Each paragraph contains one main idea. The last part is the conclusion. This is a paragraph that wraps up the essay. It ties up the whole essay without necessarily introducing new ideas (The Department of Basic Education (DBE) in CAPS, 2011).

Essay writing is a crucial skill as it allows learners to express their ideas and thoughts in written form, and is linked to the process of language learning that allows



learners to communicate effectively (Nassir & Nasser, 2018; Hidayati, 2018; Salma, 2019). Hence, Yuce, and Atac (2019) indicated that to successfully fulfil communication in essay writing, a learner must use the target language accurately, present, and organise ideas coherently. In agreeing with Hence et al. (2019), Amalia, Abdullah, and Fatimah (2021) stated that learners must know that essay writing involves not only the process of discovering ideas in the text but also to putting words on paper, choosing, and organising ideas by considering several components.

But the reality is that learners are challenged to organise their essays, creating coherence and unite their writing (Jat et al., 2020). Concurrently, there is significant consensus in recent studies (Akram et al., 2020; Mustika and Adnan, 2019; Pablo and Lasaten, 2018) that learners' essays tend to display lack of coherence and cohesion; the connectives are often not used in their essays, no sense of logical sequences and ineffective introduction, weak support, and poor conclusion. Thus, it is difficult to follow the ideas in the essay.

Hidayati (2018) demonstrated that a good writer must consider the fundamental writing aspects such as vocabulary, content, and organisation of ideas to produce a comprehensible essay. To achieve the aspects above, learners should spend time reading to activate their willingness, desire, personal initiative, and commitment. Through external reading, learners could familiarise themselves with common English words that would improve their vocabulary and enable them to write a cohesive and coherent essay (Dunn, 2021; Semamora et al., 2022).

But, reading skills alone would not enhance the learners' writing skills. Shuvra and Roy (2022) declared that learners require various kinds of writing strategies to apply in class. Even so, the application of strategies needs to be aligned with practical work to make learners get used to writing. Consequently, insufficient practical work in class leads to writing challenges learners face. This is evident in a study conducted by Mhlongo et al. (2018) where they found that the majority of learners believed that they face writing challenges because they are not provided with enough opportunities to practice writing in class. This implies that there must be more practical writing activities in EFAL classes. Such activities would enable learners to interact in groups, use the process approach, share ideas about writing, and engage in peer feedback to improve their writing skills.

Learners should be creative in essay writing. They must obtain reflective and communicative skills because essay writing requires them to follow the cycle that implies having sufficient skills to connect ideas coherently and generate new ones. This cycle of writing includes pre-writing, drafting, revising, and editing (Hashem, 2021). As learners approach essay writing as a process, they would plan to logically develop the main and supporting ideas and themes (Ulugbek & Anora, 2020). By so doing, they improve their writing skills and become effective writers.

### **2.3.2 Essay writing's importance**

Essay writing skills are important to learners as they increase their thinking abilities and allow them to achieve impressive grades at school. When learners have mastered the essay writing skills, they would represent themselves well on paper. This would assist them to secure jobs or entry into institutions of higher learning after Grade 12 (Kamariah et al., 2018). Furthermore, essay writing inspires language learners to be logical and creative thinkers (Akram et al., 2020). It demands learners to express their ideas and opinions in a meaningful and well-organised manner, giving explanations and details, selecting words, and providing correct structure (Hashem, 2021).

Furthermore, Peter and Singaravelu (2020) stressed that when a learner writes, he tries to bring out his knowledge, and traces his prior information about the related topic, incident, success, failures, current situation, and future possibilities. Doing so increases the awareness, and improves memory, sharpness, creativity, and imagination. Acquiring these writing characteristics makes learners become critical thinkers who express their thoughts and ideas without fear.

Essay writing skills are crucial for writing correspondences, reports, term papers, research papers, homework, and examinations. They provide learners with the opportunity to express themselves logically, develop their vocabulary, and writing skills. These writing skills help develop the learners' social skills and promote their critical thinking while giving arguments and judgments (Okpe & Onjewu, 2017; Amalia, Abdullah & Fatimah, 2021). Learners become motivated to pursue their studies and aim to achieve more success after Grade 12.

According to Ahmed (2019), essay writing is important because it is a means of communication in educational contexts and a major factor for success academically. Ngubane, Ntombela, and Govender (2020) pointed out that the process of essay writing teaching, learning, and assessment in an EFAL tutorial must not be ignored. That is, it has implications for learners' writing competencies for post-school education. Yet, Akhtar, Hassan, and Saidalyi (2020) stressed that learners are taught to write from their high school level but they still experience challenges to produce a better piece of writing at their post-school level. As such, the process of writing is regarded as the most challenging skill to improve as it requires more time and attention (Ahmed, 2019). EFAL teachers, however, complain of having insufficient time to progressively teach and guide learners to improve their essay writing skills. This is evident in a study conducted by Salma (2019). Salma's findings reveal that essay writing skill is an effortless task for learners, and the researcher indicated that essay writing skills must be given more emphasis and practice in EFAL contexts. The language teachers, however, do not have adequate time to assist learners with writing practices in class (Akhter et al., 2019). Thus, learners encounter challenges to write coherent and cohesive essays.

Akram et al. (2020) reported that learners are not provided with feedback and it is challenging as they struggle to understand the part of essay writing they lack. However, the DBE established that learners receive regular and timely feedback to help them know where and how to improve their writing. Furthermore, it is convincing that the language teacher's critical role is to give high-quality feedback to learners (DBE, 2011). Nonetheless, language teachers fail to do so, and consequently, learners face endless essay writing challenges. In this regard, it was worthwhile to explore essay writing challenges experienced by EFAL learners.

### **2.3.3 Essay structures**

The essay should have an introductory topic that stimulates the readers' interests, a topic, body paragraphs, and a concluding paragraph (Toba, Noor, & Samu, 2019). Toba et al. (2019) pointed out that a paragraph is the basic element of writing composition that contains numerous sentences or related statements that work together to develop one main idea. Sentences in a paragraph are between five and

ten. The paragraphical organisation consists of three structural elements, the topic sentence or sub-topic that supports the main topic, supporting sentences, and a concluding sentence. The ideas in paragraphs must logically flow.

Rababah, Alshehab, and Melhem (2017) indicated that during interviews, learners claimed that they are unable to stick to the essay topic because they had no idea how to do so. As such, it is important for teachers to thoroughly teach process writing to improve the learners' essay writing skills. In addition, an essay's length should be between 150-200 words for Grade 10s, 200-250 for Grade 11 learners, and 250-300 words for a Grade 12 class. An essay's content and planning weighs 60 percent of the essay; language, style, and editing is allocated 30 percent, and the structure is ten percent (DBE, 2011). It is, therefore, important for language teachers to emphasise the essay writing process in class to ensure that learners achieve 60 percent of content and planning, and also improve their writing skills.

Amalia et al. (2021) demonstrated that for effective process writing, the teacher should pay attention to the organisation and development of ideas to build arguments and information. Furthermore, teachers should provide learners with opportunities to write for interpersonal reasons, and develop their imaginative abilities and cognitive skills to prepare for post-school opportunities. Learners should know the purpose for which they are writing and to develop the sense of audience (DBE, 2011). Learners could only become critical thinkers and write creatively if teachers are actively engaged in their writing process.

### **2.3.4 Teaching of essay writing**

Essay writing skills are some of the significant language skills needed by learners for academic success. They increase the learners' learning, thinking skills, and reflective abilities on previously learned knowledge (Ajagbe & Lazarus, 2020). Essay writing skills are crucial because they include all knowledge and abilities for a learner to successfully express his ideas through written texts. Learners need to be taught and guided on how to apply writing strategies to improve their writing skills. Teachers should play their role in the learners' essay writing development. It is their responsibility to use different approaches to develop the essay writing skills among learners (Venkentsamy & Sibanda, 2021).

According to the DBE (2011), there are three approaches to teaching essay writing. These are text-based, communicative, and process approach. Both the text-based and communicative approaches are dependent on an on-going use and production of texts (product approach).

#### **a. A text-based approach**

The text-based approach is about understanding how texts are constructed as it involves producing several types of texts for certain purposes and audience. It is crucial because it focuses on producing competent, confident, and critical readers, writers, viewers, and designers of various texts. The text-based approach's aim is to develop learners who could engage meaningfully with different texts in different contexts (DBE, 2011). It ensures that the learners' communicative competence is developed. The development of communicative competence is done through the mastering of diverse types of texts (Mumba & Mkandawire, 2019). It encourages learners to view and analyse texts to comprehend their production's effects. It involves learners developing their skills to evaluate texts through critical interaction (DBE, 2011).

This approach could be implemented in the EFAL class when teachers ask learners to complete written texts to improve their writing skills. The text should lead to several topics such as word study, vocabulary extension, cohesion and coherence, and text's structure (Mumba & Mkandawire, 2019). The teacher should exploit various texts' structures for communication purposes. When teachers explicitly explain the text's structure and its purpose, learners understand how the text's structural and language features contribute to meaning making (Ragawanti, 2018).

#### **b. A communicative approach**

This approach focuses on communication practices (Yadgarova, 2022). Learners should engage in real-life communication activities to develop and improve their writing skills. The approach is important because it emphasises on engaging in more practical work to improve writing skills. It stresses that for learners to learn an essay

writing skill, they must be continuously exposed to various kinds of essays and many opportunities to practise and produce essays.

The teacher should implement this approach by encouraging learners to interact with others during the writing process. Learners should work in groups to share ideas about essays, their purpose, structure, language features, and the text type's register. Learners must grasp the importance of steps followed when writing essays to produce comprehensible texts.

### **c. The process-based approach**

According to the DBE (2011), the process approach is used when learners produce written texts. Learners engage in various stages of the writing process. They are required to consider the audience and the purpose during these processes. This approach is important as it enables learners to communicate and naturally express their thoughts. It highlights that the teaching of writing should focus on product, purpose, and the writing process. The language teacher could implement this approach in class by taking learners through the writing process. Learners would be taught how to generate ideas, think about the purpose and audience...and present a written product that clearly communicates their thoughts.

Researchers support the use of the process approach to teach essay writing skills (Alabere, 2017; Pillay, 2020; Akram et al., 2020; Venkentsamy & Sibanda, 2021). Pillay (2020) maintained that the process approach has a major impact on comprehending both the nature of writing and the way writing is taught. It emphasises the significance of the pre-writing recursive procedure, organising, drafting, revising, editing, and making a final draft (Pillay, 2020). These steps enable learners to make decisions about their work's direction through discussions, tasks, drafting, feedback, and informed choices, thus enabling them to take responsibility to improve themselves (Ngubane et al., 2020). Similarly, Akram et al. (2020) proposed that teachers adopt the process approach such as group discussions, peer teaching, and oral presentations to promote creative writing.

In addition, Gubane et al. (2020) maintained that teachers should apply the following stages of the writing process in their classes; pre-writing where teachers guide learners to select a topic and plan their ideas; writing, learners write the first draft, focusing on outlining their ideas than on errors made; revising, learners make

changes to improve their writing; editing and proofreading, learners put more emphasis on expressions and punctuations; and evaluation of their written work by assessment. This could be by peer or teacher assessment. The success in applying these processes would improve the learners' essay writing skills. Moreover, the process approach to writing makes the writer an independent text producer. The teacher's role is to respond to numerous learners' drafts so that they improve their writing skills (Pillay, 2020). The proposed approach is significant to this study as the researcher explored the learners' essay writing skills in EFAL classes.

#### **d) Product approach**

The product approach resembles the traditional way of teaching writing because it requires that learners put more emphasis on the model, the form, and the duplication of the teacher's text as much as possible (Ngubane et al., 2020). Teachers who adopt the product approach focus on the grammatical features and organisation of the text rather than the ideas and thoughts within the text (Ngubane, 2018). Al-Tamimi (2018) argued that the product approach regarding writing is criticised because it neglects the writing process and insufficient attention given to the audience and the writing purpose. The teacher and learners focus on the importance of grammar, syntax, the use of vocabulary and mechanics, and neglect the writing processes such as pre-writing, drafting, evaluating, and revising.

Furthermore, the product approach includes four stages in teaching essay writing skills as described by Alabere (2017). The first stage is when learners are taught to understand the model texts, followed by identifying the genre's features. For example, in teaching how to write an argumentative essay, the teacher puts the learners' attention on the language used to make an argument.

In the second stage, learners are provided with an example of an argumentative essay, or they read a story. They focus on the techniques used to make the essay or story more appealing to the reader. Learners then engage in a controlled practice of the identified features of the text separately. For instance, practising the key parts of an argumentative essay such as using cohesive devices. The third stage reveals the organisation of ideas to learners, which they believe is more important than the ideas it contains. The last stage is for learners to use skills, structures, and vocabulary to produce their written texts. They compare written tasks to show language use and

the writer's discourse structure. As such, the product approach does not seem to effectively develop learners to become active, competent, and critical thinkers. Thus, it is important that teachers adopt the process approach in developing the learners' essay writing skills.

### **2.3.5 The Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement about essay writing**

Language is used as a tool for thought and communication. Learning to use a language effectively enables learners to acquire knowledge, to express their identity, feelings, and ideas, to interact with others, and to manage their world. The aim is to ensure that learners are able to write and present the language with confidence and enjoyment. Express and justify in writing their ideas, views, and emotions confidently in order to become independent and analytical thinkers (DBE, 2011).

To achieve the above aim, the DBE (2011) proposed a process writing, which has three steps, planning or pre-writing, drafting, and revising, editing, proofreading, and presenting. In the pre-writing stage, the teacher ensures that learners analyse the structure, language features, and the text type's register. Learners evaluate its purpose, audience, and context, which allow them to brainstorm ideas using a mind map. Learners must identify main and supporting ideas.

In the second step, learners write a rough draft that reveals the purpose, audience, topic, and text type. They choose appropriate words to the chosen text. Learners organise their ideas and use logical connectors to make their argument more interesting. The teacher provides meaningful feedback or encourages learners to engage in peer feedback (DBE, 2011).

In the revising, editing, proofreading, and presenting stage, learners evaluate their essays and others' for improvement using the set criteria. They refine word choices, sentences, and paragraph structures. Learners work on sequencing and linking paragraphs. They check the correct use of grammar, spelling, and punctuation. After correcting their mistakes, learners prepare the final draft and present it (DBE, 2011). Furthermore, the policy emphasises that language teachers should teach the language structures and convention that learners must consider during the writing



process. The policy also ensures that teachers give learners more essay practical tasks. Doing so helps learners adopt the writing process to improve their writing skills.

### **2.3.6 The importance of cohesion and coherence in essay writing.**

Cohesion and coherence are considered the most crucial features of a good essay (Saud, 2015; Patriana, Rachmajanti, & Mukminatien, 2016). Coherence refers to the stylistic aspects of writing, which include the development and support of arguments, synthesis, integration, organisation, and clarification of ideas (Rahmtallah, 2020). It is reflected in a sequence of words, sentences, and paragraphs in which the reader's attention is captured. The reader can grasp the connections and comprehend the structure and, therefore, the meaning as he reads (Coetzer, 2019).

Cohesion is defined by Rahmtallah (2020) as how a text makes sense to readers because of the important and usability of its meaning, idea, and theory configuration. Thus, to promote the text's comprehension, Rahmtallah (2020) stated that all sentences that make up each paragraph must be organised logically by following a continuous order based on the meaning they try to convey. The essay that comprises these features is, therefore, easy to understand as ideas flow logically. Thus, teachers should put more emphasis on teaching learners to generate and organise ideas and to use cohesive devices. Crossley, Kyle, and McNamara (2016) showed that cohesive devices are important indicators of essay comprehensibility because an increase in essay cohesion leads to greater essay comprehension.

Rahmtallah (2020) reported five features of a coherent text thus; the text as a macrostructure that suits the purposes and functions of its communication. The macrostructure is the text's summary of its main categories or features; the text has an organised structure that directs the comprehension of information and subject development. That is, the information is given in an organised manner that allows for the inclusion of the logically added information; the text is coherent if it displays the connectivity of the underlying content, as demonstrated by the relationships between offers, and when the ideas it contains are clearly clarified; the text contains cohesive devices that effectively create the connection between sentences and paragraphs.

Thus, for learners to successfully write a coherent essay, they must be able to use the following five ways as described by Rahmallah (2020); learners must repeatedly link ideas, phrases, and paragraphs; connect concepts, phrases, and paragraphs using transitional terms; link sentences using the pronouns; connect ideas and build diversity by using synonyms; and link ideas, phrases, and paragraphs together using parallel structures. When learners are able to apply these five ways when writing essays, they would be able to produce high quality texts that are comprehensible to attract the reader's attention. Learners would successfully achieve their essay writing tasks in class, ready to achieve greater success in their post school life.

### **2.3.7 South African learners' essay writing challenges**

Numerous studies in South Africa confirm that learners face challenges in essay writing skills at all levels of schooling, from primary to tertiary (Moses & Mohamad, 2019; Mhlongo, Pillay, & Maphalala, 2018; Cekiso et al., 2016; Abongdia & Mpiti, 2014). Their challenges to write comprehensible essays negatively affect their academic performance and the teaching and learning process in EFAL classes. The DBE encouraged teachers to develop the learners' writing skills so that they could become independent and lifelong writers. Moses and Mohamad (2019); Venketsamy and Sibanda (2021) stressed that teachers complain and indicate that developing the learners' ability to write is a major challenge.

The competence in essay writing enables secondary school learners to perform well in their academic programmes as English is the subject of instruction there. That is, secondary school learning requires proficiency in essay writing for learners to achieve outstanding academic grades. Learning to master writing skills has many challenges to South African learners, especially among secondary language learners. The structure, style, and organisation of the English language differ from those of other languages (Ajagbe & Lazarus, 2020).

Mhlongo, Pillay, and Maphalala (2018) pointed out that learners are insufficiently provided time to write essays in class. Teachers administer essay writing tasks once a term as it forms part of the learners' continuous assessment activities. Learners also indicated that teachers do not provide immediate feedback and that feedback is never discussed with them in class. As a result, learners face challenges to write

essays. Consequently, they lose interest to develop their essay writing skills. They perceive essay writing as a major challenge that poses difficulties for them to achieve their goals. Makgai (2015) revealed that the Grade 11 learners have challenges when it comes to essay writing. They write incoherent introduction and do illogical paragraphing, which confuses the reader.

Cekiso et al. (2016) proved that essay writing challenges are not only faced by secondary school learners but also the university ones. It is evident in their study that South African learners experience problems with coherence in their EFAL essays. Learners have problems with writing an introduction, developing coherent paragraphs, and writing a conclusion. Moses and Mohamad (2019) found that the quality of the first-year writing at the North-West University (Mafikeng Campus) was inadequate and incoherent.

Cekiso et al. (2016) explored challenges that first-year learners experience in relation to coherence in writing EFAL essays. They also found that learners experience challenges related to writing an introduction, a thesis statement, topic sentences, supporting sentences, and conclusion.

Pather and Chetty (2016) argued that South Africa's poor learner performance at school level continuous due to the lack of quality language teachers, textbooks, and enough time spent on tasks, especially in disadvantaged schools. Similarly, Nnamani et al. (2019) argued that the challenges learners encounter in essay writing could be traced to the poor teaching methods applied by teachers in EFAL classes. Teachers still use the traditional way of teaching, which does not activate the learners' eagerness to learn and actively participate in lessons.

Nnamani et al. (2019) added that the traditional method of teaching writing does not provide learners with much assistance, thus blame the method used as part of the reasons for the learners' poor performance in essay writing. They further showed that the traditional method emphasises more on the organisation of ideas than the ideas themselves. It is concerned about the learners' product and focuses more on their ability to memorise and apply grammatical rules than discovering ideas and creating meanings. This study was necessary as it explored the essay writing challenges faced by the Grade 11 EFAL learners.

Despite numerous studies on essay writing skills, learners still face challenges in writing that limit them from achieving their educational goals. It was crucial, therefore, for this study to explore Grade 11 EFAL learners' essay writing skills, focusing on the essay's coherence, cohesion, and structure. In doing so, the study examined papers written by the participants as recommended in the study conducted by Alfaqiri (2018). Alostath (2019) collected data based on the teachers' responses. However, this study included both teachers and learners' perspectives to obtain in-depth information about the learners' writing challenges. Collecting data relied on the participants answering the open-ended questions.

Pablo and Lasaten (2018) used a random sampling technique to pick their participants. Their findings revealed that the overall quality of the learners' essays ranged from fair to poor. Their findings indicated generalisation. This study adopted the purposive sampling technique to acquire more data from the participants that suited this study's needs. The study did not generalise as the participants were learners who faced challenges in essay writing. The study allowed the researcher to understand the depth of the challenges learners face in essay writing.

## **2.4 CONCLUSION**

This chapter discussed the essay writing challenges experienced by EFAL learners. It is evident that learners struggle to organise ideas to write comprehensible essays. Thus, the chapter outlined the importance of essay writing skills. The essay writing is a crucial skill that is necessary at both secondary and tertiary levels. Therefore, teachers need to effectively assist learners to improve their essay writing skills to successfully achieve their academic goals. This chapter also described how learners could develop writing skills through Vygotsky's social constructivism theory. The theory shows how learners could learn a language through social interaction with the teacher or a more knowledgeable peer.

## **CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **3.1 INTRODUCTION**

In chapter two, the researcher reviewed literature concerning this study. This chapter discusses the research methodology utilised in this study about the Grade 11 EFAL learners' challenges in essay writing. The qualitative research methodology adopted in this study is described in detail, as well as the research design, population and sampling, data collection, and data analysis.

### **3.2 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

Research methodology refers to the systematic way to find a solution to the research problem (Webb & Welsh, 2019). It does not only consist of methods used by researchers but includes the research design, with its foundations, assumptions, limitations, and characteristic procedures, and outcomes (Webb & Welsh, 2019). In this study, the researcher adopted the qualitative research methodology.

The qualitative research methodology was informed by the constructivist philosophy that assumes that reality is an interactive and shared social experience, which is interpreted by individuals (Ngozwana, 2018). This methodology was relevant to this study as it provided support to the researcher to understand the nature and complexity of the essay writing challenges experienced by learners in class.

The qualitative research methodology, which is inductive in nature, is open-ended, in-depth, and naturalistic. In other words, the researcher studied the participants, explored meanings and insights in an EFAL classroom (a natural setting) (Mohajan, 2018; Levitt et al., 2017). The researcher actively interacted with the participants (teachers and learners) during the data collection process. The qualitative methodology allowed the researcher to adopt certain data collection methods such as observation, semi-structured interviews, document analysis (learners' essays), and data analysis techniques. The advantages of using this methodology are that it enabled the researcher to provide a detailed perspective of a few participants, the participants' voices are heard, and their context understood. The study is based on the participants' views, not the researcher's.

Qualitative research methodology helped the researcher to focus on the personal, subjective, and experiential knowledge basis and practice because it is humanistic in nature. The methodology was relevant to this study because it is holistic. It sought to situate the meaning of behaviours and ways of doing issues in context. The qualitative researchers constantly try to make sense of what they perceive and hear in specific contexts (for example, in an EFAL classroom). Their approach to understanding what is going on is more often to explain rather than to describe. The researcher adopted the qualitative methodology to gather data on the participants' experiences. The data gathered is interpreted and depends much on the researcher's theoretical presuppositions and background.

This research methodology allowed the research to adopt the interpretivist paradigm, data collection methods to gather, and analyse data. These components helped the researcher to have a meaningful interaction with the participants and gather data based on their essay writing skill experiences. The researcher now understands the participants' lived experiences, and hence accurately explained the findings.

### **3.3 RESEARCH PARADIGM**

The research paradigm is a guide for scientific communities determining crucial problems or issues for its members to address and define suitable theories or explanations, methods, and techniques to solve the research problem (O'Donoghue, 2007). It is a term derived from the history of science, where it was used to describe a cluster of beliefs and commands that for scientists in a particular discipline, influence what must be studied, how research must be conducted, and how the findings must be interpreted (Bryman, 2012). According to Walliman (2001), the paradigm is a term used to show the overall effect of the acceptance of a particular general theoretical approach, often expressed as a law or theory, and the influence it has on the researchers' view of the world. It is referred by Yadav (2021) as the umbrella term that encompasses the researcher's epistemological, ontological, and methodological premises. Thus, qualitative researchers adopt highly abstract principles, which combine beliefs about ontology, epistemology, and methodology. These beliefs direct how the researcher perceives issues and acts upon them.

There are various paradigms adopted by researchers in different studies. Each paradigm is based on various assumptions about epistemology, which is the study of how knowledge is created and accepted as accurate and about the purpose of research (O'Donoghue, 2007). As such, this study adopted an interpretivism paradigm that assumes that knowledge is constructed by mutual negotiation, and it is specific to the problem being investigated. This paradigm emphasises social interaction as the basis of knowledge (O'Donoghue, 2007). Bryman (2012) affirmed that interpretivism is an epistemological position that requires the social researcher to understand the subjective meaning of social action. During social interaction, instead of researchers trying to generalise the base of understanding for the entire population, researchers tend to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon and its complexity in its unique context. The value of data collected provides researchers with better insights for further action later (Pham, 2018). The interpretivism approach emphasises that an effort has to be made to socially interact with participants to understand and interpret what they think or the meaning they make of the context or problem being investigated (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). Thus, the researcher socially interacted with the participants to understand how they perceive their world. The researcher interacted with EFAL learners to understand the challenges they experience in essay writing.

In addition, qualitative approach is compatible with the interpretivism research paradigm because it is interpretive and naturalistic. The study's main thrust relies on the participants' views of the phenomenon being studied (Mohajan, 2018). An interpretivism paradigm helped the researcher to comprehend the learners' essay writing challenges through their subjective views and interpretations. Thus, the interpretivism paradigm's central endeavour is to understand the subjective world of human experience from the insider's point of view (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017).

### **3.4 RESEARCH DESIGN**

Research design is the conceptual structure within which the research is conducted. It constitutes the guide for the collection, measurement, and analysis of data. In other words, it consists of an outline of the steps the researcher follows from writing

the hypothesis and its operational implications to the last step of data analysis (Kothari, 2004). Marczyk, DeMatteo, and Festinger (2005) defined it as the plan used to examine the problem of interest.

This study used the phenomenological case study research design to explore essay writing challenges experienced by learners. The design focuses on the individual or group's lived experiences to describe the nature of a particular phenomenon (Hameed, 2020). The phenomenology is a theoretical point of view that recommends the study to direct experiences gathered from interactions, and one which views behaviour as determined by the phenomenon of experience rather than by external, objective, and physically explained reality (English & English, 1958 in Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2000). The researcher adopted this research design to comprehend the learners and teachers' experiences. Learners interpreted their experiences in essay writing, and teachers interpreted their experiences in teaching essay writing. This was crucial as the researcher described the challenges faced by learners in writing essays from the teachers and learners' lived experiences.

In line with the phenomenological case study research design, this study adopted the qualitative research approach. The qualitative research approach is a form of social research, which stresses the importance of the participants' interpretations and constructions of meaning based on their experiences to understand social reality from their real-life experiences (Mohajan, 2018). This approach allowed the researcher to socially interact with the participants to grasp the challenges they experience in teaching and learning.

### **3.5 POPULATION AND SAMPLING**

#### **3.5.1 Population**

Population means all individuals the researcher is interested to study (Marczyk, DeMatteo, & Festinger, 2005). It is the universe of units from where the sample is selected (Bryman, 2012). This study's population was the selected school and its entire Grade 11 EFAL learners and teachers in the Limpopo Province's, Capricorn



North District, Maleboho Central Circuit. There are five clusters and sixteen circuits in the Capricorn North District. Maleboho Central Circuit comprises of thirty-nine schools, with eleven secondary and twenty-eight primary schools. Thus, the selected research site is a small secondary school situated in a deep rural area. It comprises of 172 learners and five teachers. The research population comprised of twenty-seven Grade 11 learners.

### **3.5.2 Sampling**

Sampling refers to the process of examining a part of the population to acquire information about that entire population. It must be a true representation of the population characteristics without any bias so that it results in valid and reliable conclusions (Kothari, 2004). Walliman (2001) defined a sample as a selected number of units in a population.

This study's sample was purposively selected. Purposive sampling is a form of non-probability sampling in which the researcher strategically samples the participants, considering that those sampled are relevant to answer the research questions (Bryman, 2012). This sampling method was relevant here as it allowed the researcher to intentionally select the research participants to optimise data sources to answer the research questions (Johnson, Adkins, & Chauvin, 2020). In this study, the research questions were best answered by the participants who experienced essay teaching and writing challenges.

This implies that the sampling technique assisted the researcher to sample the satisfactory case that is aligned to the study's specific needs. Johnson, Adkins, and Chauvin (2020) affirmed that in qualitative research, the focus is on making sense of the lived or observed phenomenon in a specific context with specifically selected individuals, rather than trying to generalise from the sample to the population. Creswell (2012) confirmed that purposive sampling enables the researcher to choose suitable participants that would help to understand the phenomenon. It develops a detailed understanding that provides crucial information and assists the researcher and others to learn about the phenomenon.

The qualitative researchers believe that they can grasp sufficient data that is relevant and useful to achieve the research purpose from certain participants than others.

The homogenous purposive sampling was used because it is a form of purposive sampling, which allows the researcher to sample the participants who share similar traits and can generate the data appropriate to answer the research questions (Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2016). Elmusharaf (2016) described it as the process of selecting a small homogeneous group of subjects for examination and analysis, and understand and describe a particular group in depth. Thus, the population comprised of one secondary school where the explored problem was identified. Grade 11 learners who experienced challenges to write coherent and cohesive essays and their EFAL teacher made up this population of the study.

The essay writing test of fifty marks was administered to 27 Grade 11 learners. The test scripts were marked, converted to percentage and arranged according to levels. The levels conformed to the CAPS document that various achievement levels and their corresponding percentage bands must be used to report the learners' marks (DBE, 2011). The bottom six learners (0-29 percent) were purposefully selected as the satisfactory case to participate in the study. The researcher selected these participants based on their suitability for the purpose of the study. Their essays showed the severity of the challenge to writing coherence and cohesion essays. Their essays embodied many errors, which revealed their challenges to write comprehensible essays. The six participants were a fair representation of all learners in Grade 11. The chosen number was manageable, and it helped avoid data overload. It also assisted the researcher to generate the data that helped to answer the research questions.

To ensure that those learners were not stigmatised, the researcher included two learners who achieved between 30 and 50 percent in the interview process. The researcher interviewed eight learners but analysed data from those who performed between 0 and 29 percent. The Grade 11 EFAL teacher was interviewed, and one of her writing lessons observed as well. The said teacher participated because she was the only EFAL teacher in Grade 11.

### **3.6 DATA COLLECTION**

Data collection refers to the process of identifying and selecting participants for a study, getting their permission to investigate them, and collecting information by asking them questions using various techniques (Creswell, 2012). Creswell indicated that researchers collect data to learn from the study's participants and develop protocols (forms), for recording data as the study proceeds. These protocols introduce broad questions for the participants to provide answers to questions (Creswell, 2012). According to Parveen and Showkat (2017), data collection is the process of carefully gathering the desirable information, with least alteration, so that the analysis provides answers that are credible and logical. The goal is to capture quality evidence that then translates to rich data analysis and allows the building of a substantial and credible answer to research questions (Kabir, 2016).

The most crucial step in the process of data collection is to obtain accurate data from participants using different methods. In this study, the three methods of data collection were adopted, namely the semi-structured interview, document analysis, and observation. Before data were collected, participants were given consent forms to sign. The forms informed them of their rights to voluntarily participate and to withdraw from the study without any form of punishment. The researcher intended to collect primary or original data (Kothari, 2004). The use of the semi-structured interview, document analysis, and observation allowed the researcher to have face-to-face interactions with his participants.

### **3.6.1 Document analysis**

Document analysis refers to the systematic procedure for reviewing or evaluating documents, which might be both in print and electronic. It is the researcher's review of written materials (Busetto, Wick, & Gumbinger, 2020). Documents contain texts and images recorded without the researchers' intervention. It is an approach to documents that highlight the role of the researcher in the construction of the meaning of and in texts. It emphasises on allowing categories to emerge out of data and on acknowledging the importance for comprehending the meaning of the context in which an item being analysed, and the categories derived from it appeared (Bryman, 2012). This strategy allowed the researcher to analyse the learners' written essays. The method was applied by giving learners an essay writing test. The essay type

was an argumentative one titled; 'Education is key to success.' Their scripts were marked, and the researcher analysed them. Marking enabled the researcher to identify the challenges learners experience in writing coherent and cohesion essays.

### **3.6.2 Semi-structured interviews**

The semi-structured interview refers to a context in which the interviewer has planned a list of questions that are in the general form of an interview guide but can vary in sequence. The interviewer is usually free to probe further if responses reveal hidden information or are not clear (Bryman, 2012). It is an exchange of conversation with an informal character to achieve a certain goal (Busetto, Wick, & Gumbinger, 2020). In addition, a qualitative interview involves the researcher asking one or more participants general and open-ended questions, and records their answers. Recorded responses are then transcribed into words for analysis (Creswell, 2012). An interview must be thoroughly planned beforehand and standardised so that the researcher asks questions in the same manner. The collected data and forms must be limited to the requirements of the research questions and the related research design (Marczyk, DeMatteo, & Festinger, 2005). In this study, the teacher and learners were interviewed using the semi-structured interviews. The semi-structured interviews are characterised by open-ended questions and the use of an interview guide in which the broad areas of interest are defined (Busetto et al., 2020).

The researcher used this method of data collection to acquire primary data and offered the participants the opportunity to express their views freely. It gave the researcher an opportunity to ask follow-up questions where necessary. Doing so helped obtain rich data to understand and interpret their perceptions on the learning of essay writing skills. Audio recording was used during the interview to support the researcher's notes to ensure that the interviews were captured in detail. Doing so allowed for the accurate transcription before detailed analysis could be done. The transcription process is described by Creswell (2012) as the process of translating audiotape recording into text data. It enabled the researcher to convert the participants' views from spoken to written data. Their views and ideas could be accurately identified in the study.

The interviews were conducted face-to-face and individually. The researcher interviewed the Grade 11 EFAL teacher to get an insight of how learners are taught,

assessed, and how the teaching and learning process affects their essay writing skills. The researcher interviewed eight learners. The six learners are those who obtained level 1 (0-29%) and two who obtained level 4 (50-59%). The two learners were interviewed to ensure that those who obtained level 1 were not stigmatised. The learners were interviewed in English but the researcher explained the questions in their first language (Sepedi HL). This helped learners to understand the questions, and hence express themselves effectively.

### **3.6.3 Observations**

An observation is the process of gathering open-ended first-hand information by observing people and places in the research site (Creswell, 2012). It is an effective tool that enables the researcher to understand the situation that is being observed (Cohen et al., 2000). In this study, the purpose of the classroom observation was to investigate the teaching methods used by the teacher, the teacher-learner interaction, and how learners collaborated in writing activities. It was also to evaluate how often learners are given writing activities. The classroom observation involved assessing mediation tools and resources used to teach essay writing such as the use of CAPS document as it emphasises the application of the writing steps and how teachers and learners interact during writing lessons. The researcher was a non-participant observer. The non-participant observation method was adopted to enable the researcher to visit an EFAL class and record notes without being involved in the teaching and learning process.

The researcher observed the Grade 11 EFAL teacher and used the observation schedule to record his observations. This enabled the researcher to do an in-depth analysis of the teaching methods, and how they facilitated the Grade 11 learners' creativity and imagination in writing. The lesson took approximately 60 minutes. The teacher arranged a table for the researcher in front and this enabled the latter to observe the teacher's interaction with learners. The observation did not in any way disrupt the regular class activities. The researcher did not directly interact with the participants.

## **3.7 DATA ANALYSIS**

Data analysis includes drawing conclusions about the collected data, representing, and summarising data in tables, figures, and pictures, and outlining the conclusions in words to provide answers to the research questions (Creswell, 2012). The researcher combined the information and made a summary of the findings in a meaningful manner. She was guided by certain techniques relevant to the specific data. The study adopted two methods of data analysis, namely the thematic data and content analyses. The thematic data analysis was used for the interview data, while the content analysis was used for both the document and observation data. The interview, observation, and documents provided different sets of data, and hence their data could not be appropriately analysed using the same technique.

### **3.7.1 Thematic analysis**

The thematic data analysis refers to the method of analysing data to understand the experiences, thoughts, or behaviours across data sets (Kiger & Varpio, 2020). It assumes that the recorded texts are data. The researcher develops codes during close examination of the texts as important themes emerge inductively from the texts (Neuendorf, 2018). The thematic data analysis was adopted to analyse data collected from interviews and observations. It is a method that entails examining a data set to identify, analyse, and report repeated patterns (Kiger & Varpio, 2020). The researcher followed the thematic data analysis to analyse data as outlined by Castleberry and Nolen (2018). Phase one was data compiling. Here, the researcher familiarised himself with data. He transcribed the interview data into written form, read and re-read the data, and took notes of the initial ideas. The second phase disassembled data to generate initial codes. I coded interesting features of the data in a systematic way across the entire data sets and, collected and combined data relevant to each code. The researcher organised the information in a clear and meaningful manner. He searched for themes. I collated codes into potential themes, and gathered all data relevant to each potential theme.

The third phase interpreted data. That is, themes were reviewed and checked whether they worked in relation to the coded extracts (phase 1) and the entire data

set (phase 2), and then summary of the analysis was made. The researcher defined and named themes. She engaged in an ongoing data analysis to refine the specifics of each theme. The overall story of the analysis was expressed to generate clear definitions and names for each theme. The fourth phase concluded the whole process. That is, the researcher analysed data, extracted select examples, finalised the analysis of the selected extracts, and related the analysis to the research questions. Thereafter, a scholarly report of the analysis was produced.

The analysis of the interview data provided an opportunity to understand how the teacher taught and assessed learners and the learners' essay writing skills potential more widely. The researcher identified recurring patterns in the data. She identified common themes that emerged in the transcribed data, analysed them, and made a summary of the findings. The researcher focused on the semantic themes. That is, she coded and reported on explicitly stated ideas, concepts, meanings, and experiences. A code is a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and or evocative attribute to a portion of the language-based or visual data (Saldana, 2016). Codes allowed the responses to be put into a limited number of categories, considering that the categories were appropriate to the research problem.

The data-coding and theme development were approached inductively, where the content itself guided the development analysis (Braun, Clarke, & Weate, 2016). Creswell (2012) explained that the inductive way means that the researcher moves from data transcription to general codes and themes. The initial analysis consisted of data subdivisions but the final goal generated a much more consolidated picture. This allowed the researcher to summarise, highlight key features, and interpreted a wide range of data sets.

### **3.7.2 Content analysis**

Content analysis refers to the systematic reduction of the content to identify themes and then extract the meaningful data interpretations (Roller, 2019). The study used the content analysis to analyse the learners' essays and observation notes. This method was appropriate to this study as the researcher aimed to engage in some

degree of interpretation to arrive at the data's meaning. According to Schreier (2012), data does not speak for itself, it does not have a specific meaning but meaning is constructed. Meaning is what the receivers attribute to the words they hear or read to the images they see. The construction of meaning is a complex process the recipients bring to their perception of the material with individual background. These include their prior knowledge of the topic, the situation in which they encounter it, and their feelings at the time, among others (Schreier, 2012).

#### **a) Analysis of essay scripts**

The learners' essays were collected for analysis. The researcher processed data collected from the learners' essay scripts into themes based on valid inference and interpretation. She examined the learners' essay writing scripts, coded the emerging themes, and drew conclusions from the coded data. The following aspects were checked in the learners' essays; the coherent (logical arrangement of ideas in the introduction, body, and conclusion), and cohesion (use of vocabulary and grammatical structures to make connections, and the flow of ideas in sentences and paragraphs), which makes the reader understands the essay's main points and its structure (introductory paragraph, body paragraphs, and concluding paragraph) were checked. Learners were expected to approach the essay as a process. They were expected to follow the steps in essay writing.

#### **a) Analysis of observation data**

Content analysis was also used to analyse observational data. The researcher analysed the field notes and arranged them into specific themes. The field notes are texts (words) recorded by the researcher during an observation in a qualitative study (Creswell, 2012). This method of data analysis gave the researcher the opportunity to grasp and outline what took place during the lesson. This included issues the participants might not have mentioned during the interviews such as the lack of skills to teach essay writing as a process rather than a product. This method assisted the researcher to move beyond the perception based to grasp personal knowledge.

### **3.8 CONCLUSION**



This chapter focused on the qualitative research methodology used to do this study. The aspects aligned to this methodology such as the paradigm, method, design, population, sampling, and the data analysis methods were discussed. The chapter described how data collected about the learners' challenges to write coherent and cohesion essays were analysed using two methods of data analysis. It outlined how the study's findings reflected the participants' perspectives, not the researcher's biasness. The next chapter is about data analysis and interpretation.

## **CHAPTER FOUR: DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS**

### **4.1 INTRODUCTION**

The previous chapter detailed the research methods adopted in this study. This chapter presents and analyses qualitative data about the essay writing challenges experienced by Grade 11 EFAL learners in Maleboho Circuit. The data were analysed using the thematic and content analysis techniques. The chapter starts by outlining the school profile where data were collected. The researcher decided to outline the school's profile to give an insight of where the participants were based.

## 4.2 PROFILES

### 4.2.1 School profile

The selected Secondary School is a public school located in a rural area in Maleboho Circuit, Capricorn North District. It is based in a community where most people are unemployed and old people are illiterate. The school comprises of five teachers including the principal. There are three language teachers and one of them teaches the Grade 11 EFAL classes. These teachers are overloaded with work, including teaching subjects, which they did not specialise in. The school has 152 Sepedi speaking learners.

### 4.2.2 Teacher participant's profile

**Table 4.1:** Teacher's biographic information.

<b>Teacher participant</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Teaching Experience in 2022</b>	<b>Qualification</b>	<b>Subject(s) taught</b>
Teacher 1	26	9 Months	Bachelor of Education (SPF)	English FAL Geography Life Orientation

The teacher was requested to participant in this study because she is the only one who teaches Grade 11 EFAL at the school. The teacher specialised in English and Geography but she also teaches Life Orientation. This shows that the teacher is overloaded with work, and she is allocated subjects which she did not specialise in at

university. The teacher is a novice who still needs training on how to teach EFAL classes.

#### 4.2.3 Learner participant profiles

**Table 4.2:** The learners' biographic information.

<b>Learner code</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Age</b>
Participant one	Male	17
Participant two	Male	19
Participant three	Female	17
Participant four	Female	17
Participant five	Female	17
Participant six	Male	16

The study had six learners coded as participant L1-6. Learners were sex balanced because there were three boys and three girls. They all spoke Sepedi as their home language. The participants were between 16 and 17 years, except for one who was 19 years old.

#### 4.3 DATA PRESENTATION

The interview data, documents analysis, and observation were analysed using two methods as discussed in chapter three. The learners' interviews were recorded. The recorded interviews were transcribed. Few transcripts were sampled to avoid data saturation. The researcher identified themes that emerged from the interview data and presented them in tables. The themes were arranged as follows: essay writing challenges, errors in essay writing, causes, frequency of essay writing activities, feedback on written essay tasks, teaching of essay writing, and the teaching strategies.

Data collected from documents and observation were analysed using the content analysis technique. The researcher identified errors on the learners' essays and themes identified during observation and presented them in tables. Since two methods were used to analyse data, the researcher decided to arrange data into segments. The said segments are;

- Data segment A: Teacher's lesson observation.
- Data segment B: Learners' essays.
- Data segment C: Teacher's interview.
- Data segment D: Learners' interviews.

#### 4.3.1 Data segment A: Lesson observation

**Table 4.3:** Data from lesson observed.

<b>Observation schedule</b>	
<b>Idea</b>	<b>Classroom reflection</b>
Choosing a topic	The teacher used a projector to display a picture that showed diverse types of essays, explained them, and asked learners to produce examples of topics for each type of an essay. Most learners gave examples of the narrative essay. She then informed learners that she would use a familiar topic like COVID-19 as an example.
Brainstorming	The teacher played a video from YouTube that explained the pre-writing stage. She paused and wrote the topic on the chalkboard. She asked learners to discuss in pairs the ideas that should be included on the mind map. Learners were given four minutes to discuss and thereafter shared as a class. The teacher wrote some of the ideas on the chalkboard to show learners how to write a mind map.
Drafting	She played the video, then paused and explained that with drafting, learners should pick the best ideas, form sentences, let the essay flow, be specific, use details and elaborate. Learners

	took notes.
Revising	The teacher played the video, paused, and explained that learners should organise their ideas, rearrange, subtract some information, and add what is missing. She emphasised that revising is the stage where they should make their writing good and count the number of words used to ensure that they were not less than 250 or more than 300 words. Learners took notes.
Editing and proofreading	She played the video and explained that learners should read their drafts, check errors such as capitalisation, punctuation, spelling, and grammar, and make sure their essays made sense. Learners took notes.
Presenting	She explained that at this stage, learners should make sure that their essays were neat and presentable. She gave them a question paper, asked them to choose a topic and write an essay following the instructions on the question paper.

#### 4.3.1.1 Choosing a topic

The writing process approach is a learner-centred approach in which the learners' needs, expectations, goals, learning styles, skills, and knowledge are considered (Durga & Rao, 2018). It is crucial that learners are assisted in choosing the topic so that they could successfully follow the writing process to write coherent and cohesive essays. When guiding learners to write an essay, teachers should lead and advise them on how to choose the suitable topic, make them write designs, drafts, revise, and edit their work. If the topics given are not challenging, the writing becomes worse and uninteresting (Elsulukiyyah & Aisyah, 2019). Hasanuddin and Basalama (2020) maintained that teachers should guide learners when choosing a topic because a good essay is produced by learners who comprehend the topic. However, teachers hardly guide learners here. During the lesson observation, for example, the teacher said,

Here is a topic, discuss in pairs the ideas that should be included on the mind map. I want you to share ideas and learn how to plan.

It is evident from the observation above that teachers lack the skill to assist learners to choose topics that would allow them to write coherent and cohesive essays. The teacher chose the topic for learners and instructed them to discuss and share ideas. In such cases, learners face challenges as they are not motivated to write essays. The findings are supported by Hasanuddin and Basalama (2020) as they affirmed that most learners find it difficult to decide on a topic for their essays because teachers fail to assist them to do so.

Again, Hasanuddin and Basalama (2020) revealed that learners face challenges to get the essay topic because they do not have any information about essay topics. They have difficulties to think of the first idea. The above point was observed from the teacher's lesson. Learners were not given an opportunity to choose a topic in which they can relate to, thus it was challenging for others to brainstorm the ideas of the topic. This shows that learners need guidance from teachers on how to choose familiar topics because their failure to choose a topic leads to their failure to brainstorm and follow the writing process steps.

#### **4.3.1.2 Brainstorming**

Brainstorming activates prior knowledge, creates ideas, increase motivation, and stimulates thinking abilities (Rashtchi & Porkar, 2020). Brainstorming is a pre-writing activity that facilitates the process of generating ideas and helps organise the learners' thoughts to get involved in writing. The researcher's observation shows that brainstorming is important in the learners' essay writing journey.

During the lesson observation, the teacher encouraged learners to brainstorm in pairs. It was evident that brainstorming helped them to share ideas and learn from one another. Learners were able to effectively brainstorm ideas, which helped them to understand the topic. Concurrently, Rashtchi and Porkar (2020) declared that employing brainstorming, teachers encourage learners to reflect on the topic and help them access several ideas.

Again numerous researchers, Rashtchi and Porkar (2020); Helen, Paul, and Hellen (2020); Nugraha and Indihadi (2019) stated that teachers who address the learners' complaints about the lack of ideas in writing use brainstorming to provoke their thoughts and encourage them to get started. That was how the teacher in the study got learners to plan their essay. The teacher effectively encouraged learners to work

together to share ideas about the topic. This is also supported by the theory adopted in this study which emphasises learning through interaction in the classroom. However, despite the advantages attributed above, Rashtchi and Porkar (2020) mentioned the brainstorming's disadvantages as the fear of being judged, feeling the pressure of following a particular line of thinking, and losing motivation to work in groups could inhibit learners. But, Ibnian (2011) believed that the use of the brainstorming technique enables learners to generate ideas, exchange opinions, and crystallise new thoughts about the raised topics, and positively affect their performance.

Brainstorming is part of the problem solving strategy, which entails the generation of innovative ideas without judgment. It is the development of the learners' state of mind to solve problems by the free association of several ideas (Rababah & Rababah, 2019). Brainstorming has a positive effect on developing the learners' creative writing skills in terms of content and organisation, mechanics of writing, language use, and creative thinking abilities (fluency, flexibility, originality, and elaboration). It motivates learners to get involved in the learning process and express themselves freely (Ibnian, 2011).

Furthermore, Ibnian (2011) highlighted the importance of the pre-writing stage, stating that most teachers usually ask their learners to write a short composition on a certain topic without giving adequate support apart from the meaning of a few related words. Thus, learners who are not given the opportunity to generate ideas about the given topic usually face difficulties in writing comprehensive and logical sentences. It is important for teachers to give learners the necessary support during brainstorming and writing of the mind map. The CAPS document states that learners should brainstorm ideas for the topic using mind maps (DBE, 2011).

#### **4.3.1.3 Drafting**

Writing is incredibly challenging to teach since it is considered the most complex and difficult skill to learn, and hence frustrating to teach (Asari & Maruf, 2022). This implies that learners encounter challenges to write because they are not effectively taught how to do so. Teachers have problems to teach essay writing due to the learners' low motivation to write (Asari & Maruf, 2022). Teachers should teach

learners how to draft essays with the former doing so in pairs or groups (Rababah & Rababah, 2019).

Observation revealed that learners are given explanations on how to draft their essays without actually drafting the essays themselves. During the lesson, the teacher did not instruct learners to draft essays. Learners were only engaged in brainstorming. This made them struggle to write coherent and cohesion essays. In line with the above observations, Asari and Maruf (2022) stated that learners get stuck when they want to write their ideas down. They are confused about how to organise and develop ideas in essay writing because they are not offered an opportunity to do so in class. Thus, writing becomes a difficult skill to learn (Hasanuddin & Basalama, 2020).

It is evident that to write a good essay, learners need to master all the writing processes, the grammatical rules, and their immediacy to writing. However, the study reveals that some of the writing steps were not practised in the classroom. Therefore, teachers should be critical and creative in teaching this skill because learners become confused (Hasanuddin & Basalama, 2020). The skill needs the teacher's effort to face the situation and ensure that learners follow the writing process.

#### **4.3.1.4 Revising**

This stage entails the exchange of drafts, where learners read their peers' work. When learners are readers, they become aware that a writer generates something that could be read by someone else. As such, learners could make improvements on their drafts (Rababah & Rababah, 2019).

However, the lesson observation revealed that teachers do not give learners an opportunity to revise or engage in peer assessment. The teacher focused on some aspects of the processes of writing and neglected others.

Similarly, O'Neill and Gravois (2017) affirm that learners frequently struggle, particularly when doing substantive revisions. They underestimate the importance of revision and might even resist making changes to their first drafts. This makes it challenging for teachers to teach writing because learners shy away from fully engaging with the writing process, especially revising their drafts. As such,



Elsulukiyyah and Aisyah (2019) declare that learners should transcribe their writing ideas. They also should make sure that their writing is connected and relevant, and the paragraphs they make should be transactional and coherent. Learners should pay attention to the mechanics, diction, and sentence structure.

But, it is the teacher's duty, therefore, to guide learners to reach their desired goals. It is their duty to conscientise learners to understand that revision is essential to proficient writing. O'Neill and Gravois (2017) declared that from a classroom teaching experience, one of the key benefits of repeated practice is prompting learners to see their writing in a new light during each revision in order to continually work to strengthen it. For that reason, teachers should engage learners in more writing practices in class to help them improve their writing skills.

#### **4.3.1.5 Editing and proofreading**

This involves the editing process where drafts are returned to the writers and improvements are made according to peer feedback (Rababah & Rababah, 2019). It is the stage where surface-level issues such as spelling and grammatical errors are corrected (Ito et al., 2019).

However, it was evident from the lesson observation that the teacher did not offer learners an opportunity to edit and proofread their work in class. Elsulukiyyah and Aisyah (2019) stated that bad writing comes from the failure to make coherent, connected, and relevant paragraphs. It is thus crucial for a teacher to engage learners in peer assessment for them to learn how to edit and proofread their work. This would help them to improve their writing skills. Ito et al. (2019) argued that inexperienced, non-native speakers are in a difficult situation when it comes to grammatical or spelling errors. That is, their sentences lack fluidity, have an awkward style, contain collocation errors, or have missing words. These mistakes could be mitigated when learners are offered an opportunity to edit and proofread their texts.

#### **4.3.1.6 Presenting**

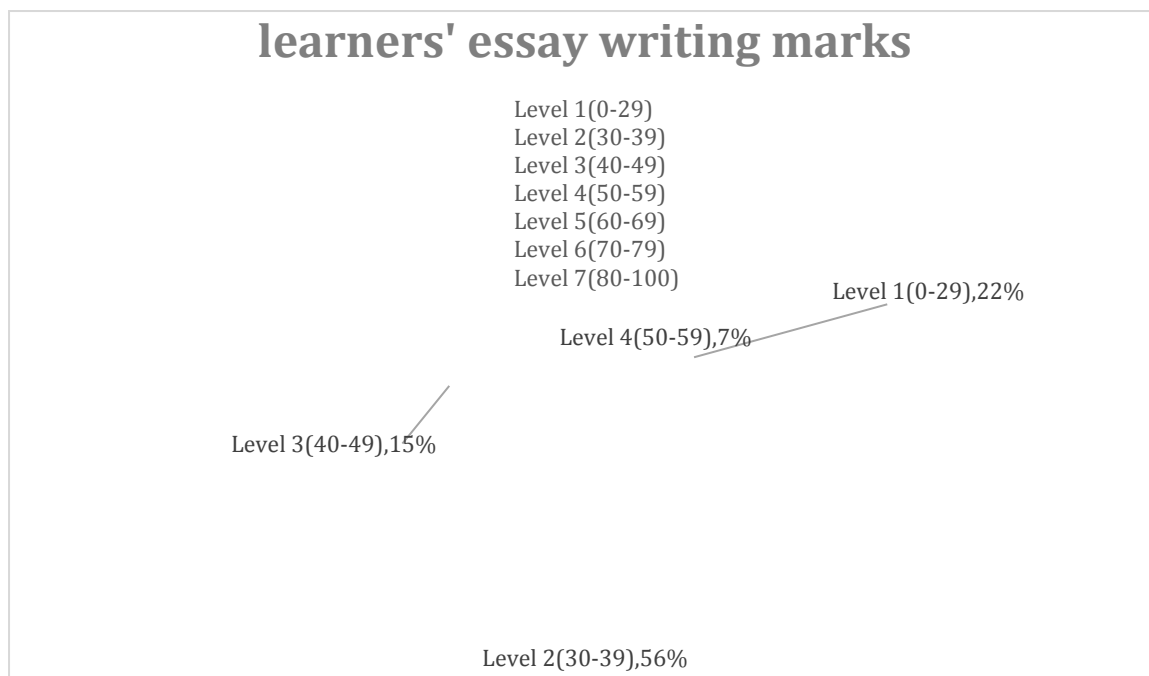
The writing process stresses writing activities, which move learners from the generation of ideas, drafting and editing of work to presenting the finished text (Durga & Rao, 2018). The presentation stage is the stage where learners prepare the final draft with necessary changes, and it is evaluated by the teachers providing

feedback (Durga & Rao, 2018). It is the stage where learners should produce an error-free essay (Mailula & Ngoepe, 2022).

In this study, the classroom observations indicated that learners did not follow all the writing processes. Learners enjoyed the video but they were not taught writing as a practical activity during that lesson. This is a concern because learners were not encouraged to practice writing. In line with the above, Bulqiyah et al. (2021) pointed out that to overcome the essay writing problems, all the aspects of essay writing should be attended to by both the EFAL learners and their teachers. This is because the process of writing teaches learners how to write with coherence, an appropriate grammar structure, and an acceptable spelling regime (Durga & Rao, 2018). Thus, teachers should take learners through all the writing processes in class and give them more activities to help them to improve.

#### **4.3.2 Data segment B: Learners' essays**

An essay of fifty marks titled, "Education is key to success" was administered to twenty-seven learners. The scripts were marked, converted to one 100% and arranged in levels as stipulated in the National Curriculum Statements, Grade R-12 (DBE, 2013). Levels are ranged from level 1 to 7. That is, Level 1: 0-29% (Not Achieved); Level 2: 30-39% (Elementary Achieved); Level 3: 40-49% (Adequate Achievement); Level 4: 50-59% (Moderate Achievement); Level 5: 60-69% (Substantial Achievement); Level 6: 70-79% (Meritorious Achievement) and Level 7: 80-100% (Outstanding Achievement). The pie-chart below presents the learners' marks.



**Figure 4.1:** Learners' marks.

The chart shows that six learners were in level 1 (0-29), fifteen learners were in level 2 (30-39), four learners were in level 3 (40-49), and two learners were in level 4 (50-59). There are no learners who achieved levels 5 to 7. This indicates the severity of the challenges experienced by Grade 11 learners in writing coherent and cohesion essays. The six learners' scripts in level 1 (0-29) were analysed. The researcher used content analysis where codes were recorded. Table 4.4 shows codes generated from the data (common errors appeared in the learners' essays).

**Table 4.4:** Codes from the learners' essays.

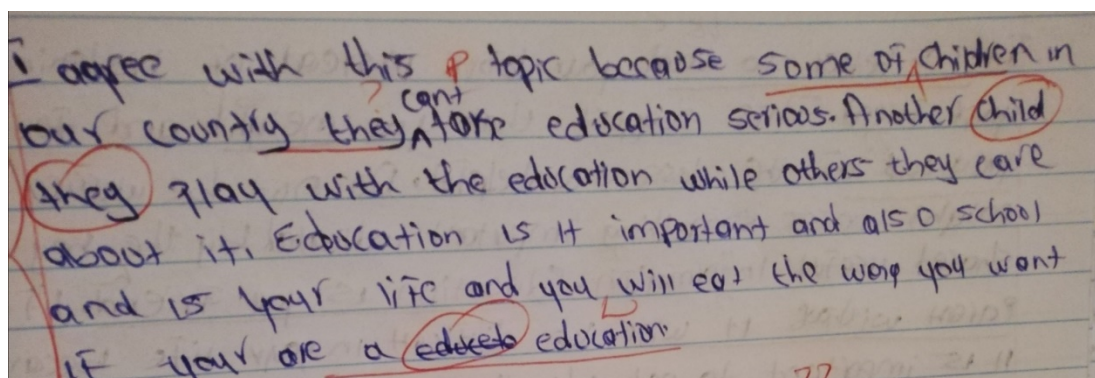
Participant	Raw data	codes
Participant six	"...strategies that need to implement when..."	<b>Omission</b>
	"...Knowledge and you be able..."	
Participant two	"I agree with topic"	
	"...know how read and write..."	
	"Education in life is needed because it make so	

	much...”	
Participant five	“...they are suffered because...” “...and more people having a money because of...”	<b>Tenses</b>
Participant six	“Many people go to school and listening what the...”	
Participant four	“...that you meight and..”	<b>Misspelling</b>
Participant five	“...when you archive...” “...your to succuss at life...”	
Participant two	“...over our contry...”	
Participant three	“...you will be Greatfu later...”	
Participant five	“Other people they...”	<b>Concord</b>
Participant four	“Another child they...”	
Participant five	“...a good live without education.”	<b>Vocabulary</b>
Participant four	“...in our lifes.”	
Participant two	“Education can make you to leave a better life...”	
Participant five	“...proud of your-self...”	<b>Punctuatio n</b>
Participant four	“...they cant...”	
Participant three	“Those who Get an education...”	
Participant one	“The success from education which will include, Childhood era, Pretty life, Job opportunities, Meeting new people and success of life”	

Table 4.4 shows the errors learners committed in their essays. The essays lacked cohesion and coherence. Learners omitted words in their sentences, and used incorrect tenses, misspelt words, had difficulties with concord whereby the subject did not agree with the verb. They also made punctuation errors and showed lack of vocabulary. Similarly, Bulgayah et al. (2021) noted that learners had problems with generating ideas and that affected their essays' coherence. Ariyanti and Fitriana (2017) indicated that cohesion and coherence are related and function to make the flow of ideas sensible and readable as well as having sentences and paragraphs connected to each other. Learners must, therefore, intertwine cohesion and coherence to create comprehensible essays.

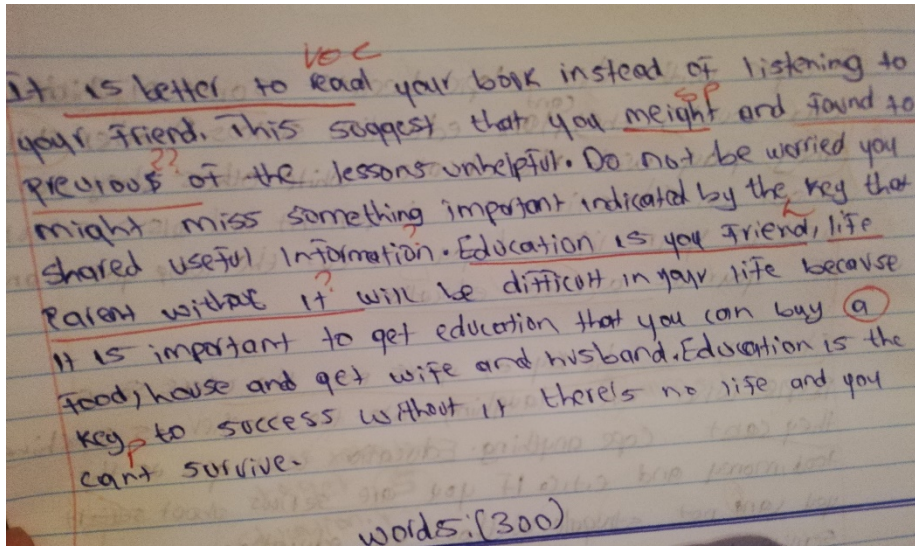
Unfortunately, in this study, learners struggled to write coherent and cohesive essays. Their sentences and paragraphs comprised of many cohesive errors that affected the meaning and development of ideas. Pablo and Lasaten (2018); Mustika and Adnan (2019); Akram et al. (2020) support the above findings as they stated that learners write essays that have ineffective introduction, weak support systems, and poor conclusion.

Ariyanti and Fitriana (2017) revealed that learners have difficulties with coherence. Their biggest problem was on paragraphing, especially the introductory part. Their ideas in all paragraphs were not connected to each other. This was evident on the learners' scripts attached hereunder. Below is a learner's introductory paragraph. The introduction lacks striking points that grasp the reader's attention. Its errors hinder the flow of ideas.



**FIGURE 4.2:** Sample of the learner's introductory paragraph.

The learner's script below shows a concluding paragraph that contains some cohesive errors that affects the paragraph's coherence. It does not summarise and tie up the essay (DBE, 2018). It clearly indicates that learners have difficulties with the essay's coherence and cohesion as discussed in chapter two.



**FIGURE 4.3:** Sample of the learner's concluding paragraph.

### 4.3.3 Data Segment C: Teacher's interview

The Grade 11 EFAL teacher was interviewed using the semi-structured interview. The aim was to understand the teacher's essay teaching methods. The data were analysed using the thematic data analysis where the themes that emerged were similar to the research questions in chapter one. The themes are as follows:

#### 4.3.3.1 Learners' essay writing challenges

Writing has always been difficult and challenging for EFAL learners because the writing process includes various issues such as the generation and organisation of ideas, drafting, revising, and editing (Khatter, 2019).

Teacher P1 indicated that,

I have observed that learners struggle with the essay structure, grammar, and use of relevant information that supports the topic. Some also struggle with sentence construction, and they make a lot of punctuation mistakes.

The results show that learners lack adequate skills to write meaningful essays. Learners could not use relevant information to support the topic, and hence lacked vocabulary. The challenges faced by learners as stated by the teacher are similar to what other researchers raised in chapter two. Mailula and Ngoepe (2022) found that learners encounter challenges in vocabulary, select wrong topics, and wrongly paragraph their work. Ozfidan and Mitchell (2020) found that learners struggle with grammatical forms. Similarly, Ahmed (2019) found that the challenges that learners face in writing essays include incorrect use of grammar, first language interference, limited vocabulary, punctuation marks, and word order. Fareed, Ashraf, and Bilal (2016) revealed that learners face challenges with vocabulary, writing anxiety, lack of ideas, and weak structural organisation. Thus, it could be concluded that learners encounter challenges with vocabulary, grammar, punctuation, and organisational structure. These challenges should be mitigated before learners reach Grade 12 where they would be expected to express their ideas in more skilful manner to qualify for the National Senior Certificate with relevant requirements to enter university.

#### **4.3.3.2 Errors committed in essay writing**

Writing in English as a foreign language is more challenging to learners, thus errors in writing are unavoidable (Khatter, 2019). Learners usually commit more errors that affect the comprehensibility of their essays. The participant said the following to indicate errors committed by her learners when writing essays.

Teacher P1 noted that,

These learners commit grammatical errors, spelling mistakes, and use poor homophones. Some of them write long sentences without punctuating them and sometimes their essays are not written in the right sequence. I get confused when I read their essays.

The results suggest that the EFAL learners write essays with a lot of grammar, spellings, and punctuation errors. Learners also struggle to write essays in the correct sequence of ideas. The above findings are similar to Katter (2019)'s findings that shows that the most frequent types of errors made by learners are punctuation errors, followed by spelling errors, preposition errors, article errors, wrong verb tense, and wrong word form, respectively. Again, Uba and Souidi (2020) revealed

that the learners' essays have a lot of errors in spelling and grammar. It can be concluded, therefore, that the most common errors that appear in their essays are grammatical and spelling errors. The results are consistent with Ahmed's (2019) observation that the majority of learners commit errors in grammar. Learners encounter challenges to use the suitable tenses. Secondly, learners have a challenge of punctuation, word order, spelling, prepositions, and connection of ideas that affect the essay's comprehensibility.

#### **4.3.3.3 Challenges in essay writing and their causes**

There are factors that influence the way learners write. Some of them are the lack of writing and reading practice, lack of generating ideas, and low motivation (Uba & Souidi, 2020). Khatter (2019) argued that learners experience difficulties to select proper vocabulary and, to produce and develop ideas about specific topics because teachers focus on teaching them appropriate grammatical structures. Ahmed (2019) argued that the most common difficulties occur due to coherence, and the absence of vocabulary, idea expansion, organisation, and the use of unsuitable vocabulary. In agreement with Ahmed, teacher participant provided the following response when asked about the causes of the learners' challenges.

Teacher P1 responded thus,

Poor planning in writing. They cannot use the parts of speech appropriately and their failure to organise the ideas or events sequentially.

It is evident that learners face challenges to write coherent and cohesive essays due to the lack of grammar rules and organisation of ideas to produce a comprehensible essay. Imelda, Cahyono, and Astuti (2019) maintained that learners experience dilemma in mastering writing due to the lack of knowledge in grammatical features and vocabulary items, and low motivation. They further argued that learners also face challenges due to the strain in writing that is caused by the ineffective and outdated teaching strategies. Khatter (2019) argued that the sources of errors committed by learners in writing are ignorance of grammatical and punctuation rules, lack of memorisation of words, lack of adequate vocabulary, and lack of writing practice in and outside the classroom. Fareed et al. (2016) stated that learners face challenges that are influenced by numerous factors including untrained teachers,



ineffective teaching methods and examination system, lack of reading and writing practices, large classes, low motivation, and lack of ideas.

#### **4.3.3.4 Frequency of essay writing activities**

EFAL essay writing and errors made are inextricably linked, therefore, learners should practice essay writing repeatedly to eradicate errors in their essays (Mailula & Ngoepe, 2022). Unfortunately, teachers do not give learners enough practical work to equip them with essay writing skills.

Teacher P1 acknowledged that,

Once in a term learners are assessed on essay writing abilities guided by the annual teaching plan and the programme of assessment.

The results imply that the teacher sticks to the annual teaching plan and programme of assessment when giving learners writing activities. This implies that learners are not given enough practical activities in class, thus they face challenges to write. However, it is the teacher's responsibility to ensure that they teach and assess learners' essay writing skills. This is because the envisaged essay writing experience brings rural EFAL learners' knowledge of grammar rules and their application thereof under scrutiny (Mailula & Ngoepe, 2022). If learners are given an essay writing activity once a term, they would not master the essay writing skills to become competent and confident writers.

#### **4.3.3.5 Feedback on essay writing tasks**

Essay writing feedback is when a teacher or peers edit one's work and highlight key issues where one needs to revise. Botarleanu et al. (2018) highlighted that providing individual feedback to learners on their essay writing is essential for their development. Latifi et al. (2021) added that peer feedback is one of the promising educational strategies to improve the learners' essay writing and learning.

Peer feedback could improve the learners' writing quality, knowledge gained, and the learners' attitude towards essay writing (Latifi et al., 2021; Noroozi & Hatami, 2019; Huisman, 2018). Although the above researchers confirm the effectiveness of peer feedback, the teacher participant did not provide her learners with peer feedback. When she was asked whether she gives learners feedback, her response was,

Three days after the task was given to learners.

The teacher marks the learners' essays and return their scripts within three days. She did not give practical activities in class and encouraged learners to engage in peer feedback. This is against the aim of the EFAL National Curriculum Statement, which states that it aims to produce learners that are able to work effectively as individuals and with others as members of a team (DBE, 2011). This indicates the importance of learners evaluating theirs and others' writing for improvement. Although peer feedback is considered the most effective to improve the learners' essay writing and enhance their knowledge, Fareed et al. (2016) stated that effective feedback from peers and teachers could play a vital role. However, feedback is not correctly recognised in this context. It is considered to be highlighting mistakes in writing without taking into consideration the learners' level, needs, and proficiency. Only trained teachers can do these responsibilities effectively and productively.

Bakla (2020) pointed out an important fact that is in line with this study's adopted sociocultural theory. The theory emphasises the shared construction of knowledge through interaction. That is, feedback is considered an essential scaffolding interaction between an expert and a novice, and allows for interaction within the learners' ZPD (Bakla, 2020). Noroozi, et al. (2018) criticised the way peer feedback is implemented in class. They are concerned about the quality of peer feedback because of the learners' limited knowledge, experience, and language ability. Therefore, teachers should teach learners grammar in context, and encourage them to read to improve their vocabulary and to practice writing so that they can successfully engage in peer feedback. Mailula and Ngoepe (2022) stated that if teachers were to tackle essay writing errors in line with the CAPS curriculum such as providing learners with immediate feedback, the prospects of successful self-correction would exponentially grow among the learners.

#### **4.3.3.6 The use of CAPS in lesson planning and classroom activities**

The teaching of writing in the FET phase includes teaching of essay and, longer and shorter transactional texts, which form EFAL paper three at the National Senior Certificate level. Therefore, the CAPS emphasises the teaching of essay writing as a process. It outlines the steps that should be followed such as planning, drafting, revising, editing, proofreading, and presenting. As such, it is the teacher's

responsibility to teach all aspects of essay writing to ensure that learners write comprehensible essays. Nonetheless, teachers do not consult the CAPS document when planning their lessons and writing activities.

Teacher P1 lamented thus,

No ma'am. I do not use it. I rely on the annual teaching plans.

The results indicate that teachers disregard the DBE's policy directives by implementing their preferred teaching plans instead of the prescribed ones. The annual teaching plan, however, only shows the topics that should be taught and when to cover the syllabus. On the other hand, the CAPS document contains all the necessary information that could assist the teacher to teach learners essay writing and the aspects that should be included in the lesson and writing activities. The use of CAPS document is crucial because it guides both the teacher and learners on how to write essays and assists both in working through the writing process (Mailula & Ngoepe, 2022).

#### **4.3.3.7 Frequency of teaching essay writing in class**

The writing skill is important to learners because it is the source of communication at school and in class, and a major factor in academic endeavours (Ahmed, 2019). Ahmed (2019) claimed that the process of writing is the most difficult skill to improve, thus it needs a lot of time and requires more attention. The teacher should teach learners by designing creative lesson activities that motivate them to engage in practical writing activities within and without the school. It is evident that teachers in small schools do not have sufficient time to teach essay writing to learners due to work overload and many workshops to attend. This is what the teacher highlighted when she was asked how often she teaches essay writing in the class.

Teacher P1 pointed out that,

Twice a week or twice every term. It depends on the workload because sometimes I have many workshops to attend so I do not have much time with my learners.

The results suggest that teachers do not teach essay writing more often. An explanation for this could be that teachers have too much on their schedules to regularly attend to their classes. Learners should be taught writing skills more often

for them to master the essay writing skills. Teachers should know the purpose of teaching writing. That is, to equip learners with writing techniques, which might include choice of topic, the development of paragraphs and, interesting and attractive style (Mailula & Ngoepe, 2022). Uba and Souidi (2020) recommended that teachers engage learners in critical thinking activities, including how to generate and organise ideas. They should teach more vocabulary to learners.

#### **4.3.3.8 Teaching strategies used to teach essay writing**

Writing is a process that requires motivation, training, and specific skills. It requires employing teaching strategies that could assure competence in EFAL writing (Khatler, 2019). Fareed et al. (2016) pointed out that teachers also fail to impart the effective writing skills and strategies to learners

Teacher P1 explained that,

I use videos and photos to teach essay writing to draw a picture of what the essay is all about...I download pictures on the internet and use a projector for learners to see. My learners understand better through visuals.

The results show that teachers use various innovative strategies to teach essay writing in class. Doing so motivates learners as they become attracted to videos and photos displayed by the teacher. Learners are mostly visual learners but these strategies are not sufficient enough to equip them with essay writing skills. It was also evident during lesson observation that the teacher used pictures and videos but lacked the skill to engage learners in her lesson delivery. Learners did not interact much throughout the writing process. The teacher should have used different teaching methods to help and motivate learners to write coherent and cohesive essays. Learners needed to master process writing, which would have assisted them to get used to brainstorming ideas before writing, drafting, editing, and proofreading. The writing process is emphasised in the curriculum policy statement. It stipulates that writing instruction should involve working through the writing process, which means following steps such as planning, drafting, revising, editing, proofreading, and presenting (DBE, 2011).

Ahmed (2019) stated that learners during essay writing, hesitate to write because they try to find the suitable vocabulary, they find it difficult to write essays without

errors in punctuation, and struggle with grammar. Khatter (2019) reasoned that EFAL teachers face challenges to teach writing in class because learners are becoming increasingly digital and visual.

#### **4.3.3.9 Ways to mitigate errors in coherent and cohesion essay writing**

The writing skill is important to learners as it helps them to meet their academic aspirations and post school requirements. Thus, it is crucial for learners to improve their writing skills. Teachers should motivate them to acquire proficient writing skills by providing instructional writing processes and writing rules such as grammar rules and writing practice (Durga & Rao, 2018). This is in line with what the teacher said during the interview. She indicated that,

Learners need extra classes for basics in EFAL such as sentence construction, part of speech and, past and present tenses.

The teacher realised the importance of teaching learners the EFAL basics, which would help them to construct meaningful sentences and paragraphs when they write their essays. She pointed out that learners need extra lessons, thus teachers should be available to teach learners and give them more writing activities. Fareed et al. (2016) suggested that teachers should increase their exposure to all four skills with specific emphasises on reading and writing. These researchers also emphasised the need for qualified, trained, and motivated teachers. Constructive feedback should be provided by the teachers to help learners. Criticism of their writings should be minimised, and writing competitions should be organised to motivate learners.

#### **4.3.4 Data segment D: learners' interviews**

The researcher interviewed eight learners as indicated in the previous chapter. The six learners are those who obtained level 1 (0-29%) and two learners who obtained level 4 (50-59%). The two who obtained level 4 were interviewed to ensure that those who obtained level 1 were not stigmatised. Thus, the researcher analysed data collected from the six learners because they were suitable for this study. Data were analysed using the thematic data analysis where the following themes emerged:

##### **4.3.4.1 Essay writing challenges**

Learners experience challenges to grasp English essay writing skills. Ariyanti and Fitriana (2017) argued that learners face challenges to write essays because it

requires an ability to assess good grammar, imagination and thought, explore major and supporting ideas, putting them together and, revising and then final editing. A study conducted in Pakistan revealed that learners have difficulties in organising their essays, creating coherence and uniting their writing (Jat, Jarah, chana, & Mirani, 2020). It is difficult for the reader to grasp the message in the learners' essays because the ideas are not connected. The essays lack coherence and cohesion. The participants highlighted the following as their essay writing challenges.

Participant L1 stated that,

We have different types of essays and I am used to the narrative one. I get confused when it comes to tenses to use. I sometimes write verbs in past tense.

Participant L2 gave her problems in this way,

My problem is language. I usually do not understand the topic and I do not know how to write my ideas coherently.

Participant L3 admitted thus,

I struggle to write using the ideas I wrote on the mind-map.

Participant L6 explained that,

The hardest part is editing and making ideas flow from one sentence to another.

The results suggest that learners have challenges with tenses and organisation of ideas in sentences and paragraphs. These affect the message conveyed in the essay. The consensus in reviewed studies was that the learners' essays lack coherence and cohesion. In addition, the connectives are often not used in their essays, no logical sequence, and it is difficult to follow the ideas conveyed (Pablo & Lasaten, 2018; Mustika & Adnan, 2019; Akram et al., 2020). It was also revealed in chapter two that learners make various mistakes in their essay writing. They lack the skill to organise information and conclude properly. Learners face challenges with paragraph writing, which weakens their writing (Akram et al. 2020; Shuvra & Roy, 2022). These challenges learners face need urgent attention.

#### **4.3.4.2 Errors committed in essay writing**

Learners commit many errors in their essays and this affects their essays' comprehensibility. It was during the lesson observed that learners committed errors such as spelling, concord, punctuation, omission, wrong tense use, and vocabulary. Sasi and Lai (2021) discovered that the highest problematic areas in the learners' essays were with tenses, parts of speech, prepositions, subject or verb agreements, and run-on sentences. The word omission was found to be the second highest problem, then spellings, capitalisation, wrong vocabulary, and use of unsuitable article, unnecessary words, and conjunctions.

Ali and Ramana (2018); Moses and Mohamad (2019) stated that vocabulary is the most crucial aspect of writing as it is a basic component of the successful writing skill and the fundamental element in constructing meaningful sentences. Good vocabulary allows learners to write coherent and cohesive essays that could grasp the reader's attention. A study conducted in Iraq found that learners encounter challenges in writing essays, that is, limited vocabulary and word order (Ahmed, 2019). This study also found that learners lack vocabulary. The learners' responses to this issue are next.

Participant L1 indicated that,

I usually do not know which word to use when I write. I use any word that I think is right but when I get my script back, I find that I used wrong words. Another problem is the use of wrong tenses.

Participant L2 observed that,

The problem is that when I write words like classroom, I separate it. I also repeat words in the same sentence and write incorrect spellings.

Participant L3 indicated that,

When I write, I include people as they or them. I have a problem of spelling words incorrectly.

Participant L4 acknowledged that,

I write wrong spellings and I get confused as to which words to use in my paragraphs. I end up cancelling a lot.

The results imply that learners struggle with vocabulary. They have limited vocabulary and it has a negative impact on their essay writing. Akhtar, Hassan, and Saidalyi (2020) confirmed that learners have inadequate diversity of vocabulary, weak sentence structure and, lack of coherent and essay development. Similarly, a study published in Canada found that 50% of the learners have challenges with vocabulary. Another study conducted in South Africa by Ndlovu (2019) found that learners have challenges to communicate their ideas in writing because of the lack of vocabulary and the absence of creativity. Ahea, Ahea and Rahman (2016) indicated that learners face major problems such as grammar, punctuation, and spelling problems. Similarly, Ariyanti and Fitriana (2017) found common errors in the learners' essays such as tenses, personal pronouns, word order, subject-verb agreement, articles, and sentence fragments. In addition, learners have a problem with omission of words in sentences but none of them mentioned it. This might indicate that they are not aware of it. Sharma (2021) found that most learners commit errors in omission at the sentence level and the highest frequency of errors at the word level were prepositions.

Learners also did not mention punctuation errors. Yet, their essays showed that they do commit errors in punctuation. Katter (2019) indicated that learners have punctuation problem as well as spelling, preposition, article, and use of wrong word form. Al-Ghabra and Najim (2019) confirmed that learners have problems to write coherent and cohesive essays because they commit errors in punctuation, capitalisation, formatting, and grammar.

#### **4.3.4.3 Causes of challenges in essay writing**

According to Khatler (2019), to produce a coherent, cohesive, and a well organised piece of writing is a challenge because it includes the rhetorical conventions of English texts such as the structure, organisation, lexis, and grammar that differ from those in other languages. Researchers stated that learners encounter challenges such as lack of vocabulary and exposure to books and other reading materials, which makes their essay writing skills weak (Moses & Mohamed, 2019; Misbah et al., 2017). Ariyanti and Fitriana (2017) showed that most learners are rarely engaged



with the interactive learning strategies and that affects their essay writing abilities. The learners' responses were given thus;

Participant L1 noted that,

We are not taught how to write essays. I sometimes struggle to arrange ideas in a mind map.

Participant L2 suggested that,

I get nervous when I write and most of the time I run out of ideas.

Participant L3 said that,

Not using some points I wrote on my mind map. I do not focus on one point in each paragraph.

Participant L4 explained that,

I think it is because we are not taught effectively in class.

Participant L5 opined thus,

We are not taught anything in class about writing essays. We do not practice writing on our own. The only time we write an essay is when we are given a task.

Participant L6 responded thus,

Not plotting the mind map first before I start my essay.

Learners maintained that they are not taught essay writing in class. The results imply that learners struggle to write coherent and cohesive essays because they are not aware of the writing process. That is, some learners do not plan before writing, while others struggle with planning and organisation of ideas. A study published in Indonesia reported that learners find it challenging to write coherent sentences and paragraphs. Those learners were aware of the processes in essay writing but they frequently ignored them and paid more attention to writing (Bulqiyah, Mahbub, & Nugraheni, 2021). Thus, teachers need to conscientise learners to regularly adopt all the steps in writing. For this reason, learners should follow the said steps to improve their essay writing skills. A South African study found that the learners' poor writing skills were mostly associated with the teachers' lack of knowledge of the effective

writing methods to constructively support the development of writing (Ngubane, Ntobela & Govender, 2020). Khatter (2019) affirmed that teachers face difficulties to teach essay writing because learners have become increasingly digital and visual learners. Al-Ghabra and Najim (2019) blamed teachers as they indicated that they show no effort and time to train their learners to overcome their essay writing challenges.

Venketsamy and Sibanda (2021) declared that teachers complain about insufficient support from knowledgeable people and appropriate teacher development and training. Thus, they face challenges to translate the curriculum into practice (Ngubane et al., 2020). The above argument shows that teachers need support and meaningful workshops on how to use necessary materials to teach essay writing.

#### **4.3.4.4 Frequency of essay writing activities**

The CAPS document states that in order for a learner to learn how to write well, one needs as much exposure to writing activities as possible (DBE, 2011). Writing is a huge effort in practice, paragraph organisation, language use, and mechanics because these aspects potentially influence the writing performance such as content and vocabulary. Elements on how to formulate ideas, develop, and analyse them before doing the essay writing as a final draft are also important (Ahea et al., 2016). Frequent writing practices across a variety of context and tasks enable learners to communicate functionally and creatively (DBE, 2018). However, limited time is devoted to writing, with 19% of teachers not giving learners opportunities to write texts in the classroom (Haland, Hoem, & Tigue, 2021). In this study, learners also confirmed that they are not frequently given essay writing activities. They were asked how often they were given essay writing activities. They highlighted the following;

Participant L1 stated that,

We are not given enough essay writing activities. Most of the time we just write formal tasks without given an activity to practice writing.

Participant L2 added that, "They do but after a long time".

Participant L3 indicated that, "They do give us but not often".

Participant L5 confirmed thus,

They do sometimes, but I do not know what might be happening at that time.

The results suggest that learners are given limited writing activities and they do not practice writing on their own. However, teachers are required to teach writing for learners to develop cognitive academic skills. Learners need knowledge to write different essay types, a wide vocabulary, a good control of English grammar, spelling and punctuation, and a critical understanding of the potential effects of their writing (DBE, 2011).

#### **4.3.4.5 Feedback on written essay tasks**

Feedback provision in the writing process is believed to be beneficial to learners' development of their writing skills. However, various feedback strategies might affect the learners' writing quality (Wahyuni, 2017). The DBE (2011) confirmed that learners should receive regular and timely feedback on their writing so that they know where and how to improve. Teachers must provide learners with high-quality feedback, which is at the heart of good assessment. It is stated that feedback must enable learners to get a sense of their strengths and weaknesses and an understanding of how to move forward. Thus, learners were asked how often they were given feedback and if the given feedback was satisfactory. Their responses were as follows;

Participant L1 acknowledged that,

They give us feedback after a written formal task. I am not satisfied with the feedback because they just show us our mistakes by using codes such as 'sp' for spelling error. They do not teach us.

Participant L2 claimed that,

They do give us feedback but not often. I am not satisfied with the way they give us feedback because it does not help me to improve. The teacher gives back our scripts but she does not teach us how to improve our essay writing.

Participant L6 noted that,

Immediately after our teacher is done marking and assessing our work. I am not satisfied with the feedback because she uses codes on our scripts, and she asks questions when she gives us our scripts instead of teaching us.

All learners acknowledged that they are given feedback but it is not satisfactory. It does not assist them to improve because the teacher does not teach them how to improve their essay writing skills. Siddiqui (2020) stressed that the key factor for learners to struggle to produce organised essays is because of surface level feedback from teachers. Angel and Garcia (2017) argued that in the EFAL class, teachers use a set of rubrics to assess the learners' essay writing. They use codes to indicate errors made by learners, instead of written feedback. Teachers make similar types of comments when they give learners feedback and are more concerned with language specific errors and problems. Consequently, learners fail to understand how they should improve to become good essay writers.

#### **4.3.4.6 Teaching of essay writing**

From Grades 10 to 12, it is crucial that teachers focus on building the learners' reading and writing skills, ensure that there is continued support for the development of vocabulary, sentence and paragraph construction, and grammar (DBE, 2011). However, the reality is that teachers do not effectively teach essay writing skills. They just prepare learners for essay writing tasks. This was supported by the learners' responses. The researcher asked if learners were effectively taught essay writing in their class. Learners responded as follows;

Participant L1 asserted that,

No, we are only taught English p1 and p2. P3 is not taught. We just wait to write tasks or examinations. They give us notes a day before we write.

Participant L4 also responded negatively,

No, because most learners do not know how to write an essay. They do not know the importance of and what makes a good essay.

Participant L5 reiterated that,

No, when it comes to essay writing, they totally do not teach us. They only prepare us when they indicate that we are writing p3 the following day. They only teach English p2 most of the times. They just come and talk about types of essays but throughout the year they do not teach us.

Participant L6 said,

Essay writing is only taught when we are close to writing English p3, which is not enough.

The results reveal that teachers do not teach essay writing. They only prepare learners for task writing. Ngubane (2018) observed that little writing practices take place in EFAL classes. Rajesh (2017) established that writing is not taught in schools as most teachers perceive it as a difficult skill to teach. Peter and Singaravelu (2021) averred that teachers are not motivated to write impressively, thus they lack the motivation to teach. Ariyanti and Fitriana (2017) revealed that teachers admitted that they lack creativity to teach writing. On the other hand, studies demonstrate that the learners' difficulties to learn vocabulary and their inconsistent to understand vocabulary are a challenge for teachers to teach essay writing (Moses & Mohamad, 2019; Amalia, Addullah, & Fatimah, 2021).

#### **4.3.4.7 Strategies to improve essay writing skills**

Al-Ghabra and Najim (2019) pointed out that teachers should encourage learners to do extracurricular on writing to improve their writing skills. The researcher asked learners what they think could be done to improve their essay writing skills. Their responses were as follows;

Participant L1 asserted that,

I want lessons where I would be taught all types of essays and develop the skills to write them all. The teacher must give us notes and explain the writing steps.

Participant L3 pointed out that,

Teachers should teach us everything about essays and give us essay writing activities to practice writing.

Participant L5 revealed that,

Our teachers must teach us essay writing, give us more activities, and not just give us notes when we are about to write formal essay tasks.

Participant L6 indicated that,

I believe peer teaching could assist as we are too playful when we are with our peers.

The results are to the effect that learners are left stranded hoping for action from their teachers who seem eager to destroy their future. Hajeid (2018) stated that peer correction helps learners achieve many goals such as to recognise content problems as well as organisation, development of ideas, and clarity of writing. The DBE (2018) added that peers must learn to edit one another's work as this form of interaction is a crucial part of the writing process, which advances the learners' awareness of the writing process. In other words, learners have more time to analyse their essays and assist each other to improve. Participants were of the opinion that they required to be taught by the teacher on how to write essays.

The DBE (2011) maintained that teachers must develop the learners' writing strategies so that they could become independent and lifelong writers. They must teach learners the writing process and language awareness, the basics of language, grammar, vocabulary, spelling, and punctuation. Learners must deal with these aspects of language in context. For example, teachers could make learners aware of the structure and features of an explanation (writing in the present and past tenses and casual connectives such as 'because' and 'so' might be used).

In addition, teachers must provide learners with additional reading and writing activities that stimulate their interests in class. Doing so would culminate in their love for reading and writing. This would improve their vocabulary as well as their essay writing skills. Teachers must continue using collaborative methods and encourage learners to share ideas to persuade them to actively engage in their activities to improve their writing skills. Ali and Ramana (2018) declared that to mitigate the challenges in essay writing, learners must use Dictionaries when they write tasks or assignments.

Venketsamy and Sibanda (2021) explored the strategies teachers use to develop writing skills among the EFAL learners, and recommended an in-depth knowledge, understanding, and implementation of the curriculum policy to mitigate the poor writing skills faced by learners. Teachers must be offered continuous support, effective guidance, and training on how to apply various approaches in teaching essay writing skills. Furthermore, teachers must evaluate their practices and

methods of teaching writing to assist learners to become better writers. Similarly, Alostath (2019) confirmed that to mitigate the learners' writing problems, most teachers preferred to apply both the process and product approaches in their teaching. They further provided learners with feedback and encouraged them to write more outside the classroom. Teachers could engage both these approaches in their classrooms and evaluate whether they could assist learners to improve their essay writing skills.

#### **4.4 CONCLUSION**

Data was collected using document analysis and the semi-structured interviews. The learners' essays were analysed separately using content analysis. The researcher examined the scripts, coded emerging themes, and drew conclusions from the coded data. The semi-structured interviews were transcribed, and themes that emerged from them were presented. The succeeding chapter summarises the main findings, significance of the findings and the study's contribution, provides recommendations, and illustrate the study's limitations, and then wraps this study up.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION**

### **5.1 INTRODUCTION**

This study explored essay writing challenges experienced by Grade 11 EFAL learners. The idea was to have an insight into the major features of the essay writing challenges learners face. That is, their causes and the learners' perspectives on how to improve their essay writing skills. The study focused on the learners' challenges to write coherent and cohesion essays. The proposed questions to be answered were:

1. What challenges do Grade 11 EFAL learners experience in essay writing?
2. What are the causes of Grade 11 EFAL learners' essay writing challenges?
3. How is essay writing taught in the English FAL classroom?
4. Which strategies can be employed to improve the learners' essay writing skills?

In chapter four, the study presented data according to coded themes, particularly the data collected about the learners' essay writing. This chapter provides the summary of the main findings, the significance of the findings, and the study's contribution to the DBE, its recommendations for future research, limitations, and conclusion.

## **5.2 SUMMARY OF THE STUDY'S MAIN FINDINGS**

The findings about the explored learners' essay writing challenges are presented according to the themes outlined below. The findings are as follows:

### **5.2.1 Essay writing challenges**

The findings on essay writing challenges experienced by the Grade 11 EFAL learners were explored through observations, learners' written essays, and the semi-structured interviews. Open-ended questions were asked. The study found that learners struggle to write coherent and cohesion essays. They write essays, which have ineffective introductions, weak idea support, and poor conclusions. The ideas in all paragraphs were not linked. Learners lacked the skill to use linking words, and their conclusions did not summarise the points presented in the essay.

It was evident from the learners' responses that they had difficulties in planning and editing their essays. The implication is that learners were not knowledgeable about



the writing process. The observations revealed that teachers did not engage learners in the writing process steps. Consequently, learners faced difficulties to write comprehensible essays. Learners struggled with EFAL as it was difficult for them to outline ideas in their essays. Their essays had errors that hindered the flow of ideas. They committed errors such as word omission, use of incorrect tenses, wrong spellings, and concord errors, punctuation errors, and lack of vocabulary.

Literature on essay writing challenges experienced by learners provided similar views to this study's above findings. That is, learners are challenged to write coherent and cohesion essays (Ahmed, 2019; Belkhir & Benyelles, 2017). Learners struggle to organise their essays to create coherence and unity in their writing. It was difficult to grasp the message conveyed in essays as ideas were not connected.

### **5.2.2 Errors committed in essay writing**

Learners had problems with rhetorical conventions such as organisation, lexical cohesion, and grammatical cohesion to write a coherent and cohesion essay. This study found that learners committed many errors in their essays. They wrote essays which contained many spelling, concord, and punctuation errors. Learners omitted words in their sentences and used incorrect tenses. As far as common errors committed by learners in essay writing were concerned, a significant number of studies found capitalisation errors, misuse of tenses, word order misplacement, prepositions and, article and spelling errors the most dominant (Qasem, 2020; Ahmed, 2019; Ratnaningsih & Azizah, 2019).

Learners lack diversity of vocabulary. They constructed weak sentences because they lacked vocabulary. To summarise the findings about errors committed by learners, Ahmed (2019) revealed that learners commit errors in unity and coherence, and that their written performance is characterised by ineffective organisation of ideas, and lack transitional markers. The learners' written paragraphs were characterised by inconsistency in tenses, word omissions, and wrong pronoun use.

### **5.2.3 Causes of challenges in essay writing and how essay writing is taught.**

The study found that the learners' essay writing challenges were caused by not effectively being taught essay writing. Learners were only prepared to write a formal task. They were rarely engaged with interactive learning strategies, and did not practice writing on their own. Learners lacked knowledge of process writing. Some of them did not plan before writing. Learners indicated that it was difficult to follow ideas as discussed on the mind-map. The observation showed that the teacher did not offer learners opportunities to draft, revise, edit, and proofread their essays.

The findings are in line with Ratnaningsih and Azizah's (2019) attribution that learners were not able to express their thoughts and feelings on paper. They lacked ideas to write essays. Learners assumed that they had a problem with the English language, and hence were anxious when they wrote it. Ratnaningsih and Azizah (2019) stressed that learners have attitudes towards writing and such attitude resulted with them avoiding writing. If they did, they did not try their best. Their writing contained many errors because they believed they did not have the skills needed to write good essays.

The study found that learners were not given activities frequently to practice paragraph organisation, language use, and mechanics. Thus, the challenges and errors committed in their essay writing. Learners had difficulties with vocabulary to formulate ideas and, develop and analyse them before writing the final draft. Belkhir and Benyelles (2017) asserted that learners experience challenges in both coherence and cohesion because of the lack of reading and low writing practices. Again, Talose, and Maguddayao (2018) postulated that learners are seldom exposed to writing practices, and hence their difficulties to write good essays.

- Feedback on written essay tasks

Here, the study found that learners were given surface level feedback. Teachers used codes on the learners' scripts. There were no explanations to assist them to improve. Feedback was given after assessment but it did not satisfy learners because such feedback did not assist them to improve. Learners were challenged to understand what they should improve on to become good essay writers. This is also found in Akram et al. (2020)'s study, that reported that learners are provided with complicating feedback and it is challenging as they struggle to understand which part of essay writing they are lacking on.

- Teaching of essay writing

The study found that teachers focused on EFAL p1, which is language and EFAL p2 (literature). Teachers do not teach essay writing. Teachers prepared learners on types of essays when learners were about to write formal tasks. Researchers in the literature review also observed little writing practices in the EFAL classes (Ngubane 2018; Rajesh 2017; Ariyanti & Fitriana, 2017).

Concurrently, the findings of the study conducted by Salma (2019) revealed that teachers complain of having insufficient time to progressively teach and guide learners to improve their essay writing skills. Therefore, teachers ought to create time to successfully teach and assess learners.

#### **5.2.4 Strategies to improve essay writing skills**

The study found that learners required to be taught how to write an essay. It is crucial that teachers outline the writing process in class. Roza, Harya, and Cahyadi (2021) asserted that process writing is extremely helpful to improve the learners' writing skills if they are effectively taught. The study also found that learners had vocabulary challenge and they needed to be taught language awareness. The language basics such as grammar, vocabulary, spelling, and punctuation should not be taught in isolation but in context.

The study also found that learners preferred peer correction. They believed that it would assist them to recognise content problems, organisation, and development of ideas and clarity of writing, and to edit each other's work. These findings complements Roza et al.'s (2021) findings that integrating mind mapping and feedback is effective when done in group brainstorming. Doing so facilitates the learners' opportunity to share ideas and giving each other feedback.

### **5.3 STUDY'S RECOMMENDATIONS**

The study revealed the challenges faced by learners. Cohesive errors were found to affect their essays' coherence. It was also found that learners were not taught and assessed enough to become lifelong writers. Therefore, the study recommends that:

- Teachers should use process writing as stipulated in the CAPS policy document to lessen the challenges learners encounter in their essay writing. Teachers should use collaborative methods to encourage peer assessment. They should ensure that learners are given more practical writing activities.
- Curriculum advisors and the DBE's heads should ensure that teachers follow annual teaching plans and learners are assessed accordingly at school. They should also support teachers by training them on the modern methods of lesson delivery.
- The DBE should arrange an on-going training for teachers on the implementation of process writing and other strategies such as collaborative learning.
- It is also recommended that further research on EFAL focusing on the teachers' essay writing strategies be done. The researchers should use observation method to collect data. Teachers should also be interviewed to evaluate whether they use CAPS document or not. Their focus should be various schools to get more information from EFAL teachers.

#### **5.4 THE LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

This study's results are from the data collected from the EFAL Grade 11 learners. The study was limited to one school in Maleboho Circuit. The researcher interviewed eight learners. That is, those sampled represented the class. The study's results revealed that learners lack skills to write coherent and cohesion essays. Only one teacher was interviewed and one lesson was observed. This gave the researcher the idea to conclude that teachers lack skills to effectively teach process writing in class and they do not use the CAPS document to teach. Teachers rely more on the ATPs. As such, it is important that future research on teachers' essay writing strategies be done with many schools.

## **5.5 CONCLUSION**

This chapter summarised the findings and made recommendations based on the findings of the study. The study revealed that learners encounter many challenges in their essay writing endeavour. Such challenges include the lack of vocabulary, sentence, and paragraph construction. Learners also committed many errors such as spelling, punctuation, and grammatical mistakes. The challenges learners faced limited their ability to write coherent and cohesion essays. The study also found that learners were not effectively taught essay writing and were poorly assessed. Therefore, the study generated numerous recommendations which would contribute to mitigating learners' essay writing challenges in the EFAL classroom.

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## **APPENDICES**

### **APPENDIX A: University Ethical Clearance letter**



**University of Limpopo**  
**Department of Research Administration and Development**  
Private Bag X1106, Sovenga, 0727, South Africa  
Tel: (015) 268 3935, Fax: (015) 268 2306, Email: anastasia.ngobe@ul.ac.za

**TURFLOOP RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE**  
**ETHICS CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE**

**MEETING:** 27 June 2022  
**PROJECT NUMBER:** TREC/156/2022: PG  
**PROJECT:**

**Title:** Exploration of Essay Writing Challenges experienced by Grade 11 English First Additional Language Learners in Maleboho Circuit, Limpopo Province.  
**Researcher:** RA Thaba  
**Supervisor:** Prof TW Molotja  
**Co-Supervisor/s:** N/A  
**School:** Education  
**Degree:** Master of Education in Language Education

**PROF D MAPOSA**  
**CHAIRPERSON: TURFLOOP RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE**

The Turfloop Research Ethics Committee (TREC) is registered with the National Health Research Ethics Council, Registration Number: REC-0310111-031

**Note:**

- i) This Ethics Clearance Certificate will be valid for one (1) year, as from the abovementioned date. Application for annual renewal (or annual review) need to be received by TREC one month before lapse of this period.
- ii) Should any departure be contemplated from the research procedure as approved, the researcher(s) must re-submit the protocol to the committee, together with the Application for Amendment form.
- iii) PLEASE QUOTE THE PROTOCOL NUMBER IN ALL ENQUIRIES.

*Finding solutions for Africa*

**APPENDIX B: Department of Basic Education permission letter**



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**DEPARTMENT OF  
EDUCATION**

Ref: 2/2/2 Enquiries: Makola MC Tel No: 015 290 9448 E-mail: [MakolaMC@edu.limpopo.gov.za](mailto:MakolaMC@edu.limpopo.gov.za)

Thaba Audrey  
P.O. Box 2065  
Polokwane  
0700

**RE: REQUEST TO CONDUCT RESEARCH**

- 
1. The above bears reference.
  2. The Department wishes to inform you that your request to conduct research has been approved. Topic of the research proposal reads as follows: **Exploration of essay writing challenges experienced by Grade 11 English first additional language learners in Maleboho circuit, Limpopo province.**
  3. The following conditions should be considered:
    - 3.1 The research should not have any financial implications for Limpopo Department of Education.
    - 3.2 Arrangements should be made with the Circuit Office and the School concerned
    - 3.3 The conduct of research should not in any how disrupt the academic programmes at the school(s)
    - 3.4 The research should not be conducted during the time of Examinations especially in the fourth term
    - 3.5 During the study, applicable research ethics should be adhered to; in particular the principle of voluntary participation (the people involved should be respected and treated with dignity)

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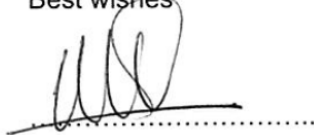
Cnr. 113 Biccard & 24 Excelsior Street, POLOKWANE, 0700, Private Bag X9489, POLOKWANE, 0700  
Tel: 015 290 7600, Fax: 015 297 6920/4220/4494

***The heartland of southern Africa - development is about people!***

3.6 Upon completion of the research, the researcher shall share the final product of the research with the Department.

- 4 Additionally, you are expected to produce this letter at School(s)/Office(s) where you intend to conduct your research as evidence that permission has been granted for access to the research site(s).
- 5 The Department appreciates the contribution that you wish to make and wishes you success in your investigation

Best wishes



**Mashaba KM**

**DDG: Corporate Management**

04/08/2022

**Date**



10/August /2022

To, Ms RA Thaba  
University of Limpopo  
Faculty of Humanities  
Private Bag X1106  
Sovenga  
0727

Dear RA Thaba

Permission to conduct research at [redacted] Secondary School.

You are hereby granted permission in respect of your research request of exploring essay writing challenges experienced by Grade 11 English First Additional Language Learners. Your initiative is appreciated. But consent should be sought by you as a researcher from parents and learners.

I wish you all the best in your research.

Yours Sincerely

The principal

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION  
[redacted] SEC-SCHOOL  
10 AUG 2022  
P.O. BOX 2185 SANWAHARWANA 0790  
PRINCIPAL   
LIMPOPO PROVINCE

**APPENDIX D: Teacher's consent form**

**RESEARCH TOPIC:** Exploring grade 11 English first additional language learners' essay writing skills.

The purpose is exploring grade 11 English first additional language learners' essay writing skills and identify effective remedial strategies to apply to improve their essay writing skills. The study will take a week to complete.

I, \_\_\_\_\_(Teacher) agree to take part in the research study with the knowledge that:

1. My role is voluntary.
2. I will not be compensated for participating.
3. I may decide to withdraw my participation at any time without penalty.
4. All information obtained will be confidential.
5. The regulations against covid-19 will be followed during participation in the study.
6. My name will not be used in any written reports about the study.
7. The researcher will be accessible in case clarifications are needed during and after the project.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Witness

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

Cell No: 0762916077

Email: [thaba.audrey@gmail.com](mailto:thaba.audrey@gmail.com)

**APPENDIX E: Parents' consent form**



**RESEARCH TOPIC:** Exploration of essay writing challenges experienced by grade 11 English First Additional Language learners in Maleboho Circuit, Limpopo Province.

The purpose is exploring grade 11 English first additional language learners' essay writing skills and identify effective remedial strategies to apply to improve their essay writing skills. The study will take a week to complete.

I, \_\_\_\_\_(Parent/guardian) grant permission to  
\_\_\_\_\_(The child) to take part in the research study with the knowledge that:

1. His/her role is voluntary.
2. He/she will not be compensated for participating.
3. He/she may decide to withdraw my participation at any time without penalty.
4. All information obtained will be confidential.
5. The regulations against covid-19 will be followed during participation in the study.
6. His/her name will not be used in any written reports about the study.
7. The researcher will be accessible in case clarifications are needed during and after the project.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Parent/guardian

\_\_\_\_\_  
Witness

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

Cell No: 0762916077

Email: [thaba.audrey@gmail.com](mailto:thaba.audrey@gmail.com)

**APPENDIX F: Learners' consent form**

**RESEARCH TOPIC:** Exploration of essay writing challenges experienced by grade 11 English First Additional Language learners in Maleboho Circuit, Limpopo Province.

The purpose is exploring grade 11 English first additional language learners' essay writing skills and identify effective remedial strategies to apply to improve their essay writing skills. The study will take a week to complete.

I, \_\_\_\_\_(Learner) agree to take part in the research study with the knowledge that:

- 8. My role is voluntary.
- 9. I will not be compensated for participating.
- 10. I may decide to withdraw my participation at any time without penalty.
- 11. All information obtained will be confidential.
- 12. The regulations against covid-19 will be followed during participation in the study.
- 13. My name will not be used in any written reports about the study.
- 14. The researcher will be accessible in case clarifications are needed during and after the project.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

Cell No: 0762916077

Email: [thaba.audrey@gmail.com](mailto:thaba.audrey@gmail.com)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Witness

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

**APPENDIX G: Teacher's interview schedule**

1. How often do you teach essay writing in your classroom?
2. How many times do you give essay writing activities to your learners and why?
3. What do you observe with your learners' essay writing?
4. What errors do learners commit in their essay writing?
5. What do you think are the causes of learners' challenges to write coherent and cohesion essay?
6. How can the errors in coherent and cohesion essay writing be overcome?
7. How often do you give learners feedback on their writing?
8. Do you use CAPS document when you plan your essay writing lesson and activities? Explain.
9. What teaching strategies do you use in teaching essay writing?
10. Are the strategies effective? Explain.

## INTERVIEWS

### 1. How often do you teach writing in your classroom?

*Teacher one*

*Twice a week or twice in each and every term. It depends on the workload because sometimes you find that I have many workshops to attend so I do not have much time with my learners.*

### 2. How many times do you give essay writing activities to your learners and why?

*Teacher one*

*Once in a term, guided by the annual teaching plan and the programme of assessment.*

### 3. What do you observe with your learners' essay writing?

*Teacher one*

*Uhm...I have observed that learners struggle with the structure of an essay, grammar and use of relevant information that support the topic. Some also struggle with sentence construction, and they make a lot of punctuation mistakes.*

### 4. What errors do learners commit in their essay writing?

*Teacher one*

*Eish...these learners ma'am, they commit grammatical errors, spelling mistakes and poor use of homophones. Some of them write long sentences without punctuating them and sometimes their essays are not written in the right sequence the event took place. You can be confused when you read their essays.*

### 5. What do you think are the causes of learners' challenges to write coherent and cohesion essay?

*Teacher one*

*Poor planning in writing. They cannot use the parts of speech appropriately and failure to organise the ideas or events in sequence or order.*

**6. How can the errors in coherent and cohesion essay writing be overcome?**

*Teacher one*

*Learners need extra classes for basics of English FAL such as sentence construction, part of speech, past and present tenses.*

**7. How often do you give learners feedback on their writing?**

*Teacher one*

*Three days after the task has been given to learners.*

**8. Do you use CAPS document when you plan your essay writing lesson and activities? Explain.**

*Teacher one*

*No, ma'am, I do not use it. I rely on the annual teaching plans.*

**9. What teaching strategies do you use in teaching essay writing?**

*Teacher one*

*Uhm... I use videos and photos strategies to teach essay writing to draw a picture or what the essay is all about...like I download pictures on the internet and use a projector for learners to see. And is good because my learners understand better through visuals.*

**10. Are the strategies effective? Explain.**

*Teacher one*

*Yes, my learners understand better through visuals.*

## APPENDIX I: Teacher's lesson observations

<b>FIGURE 1: Observation schedule</b>	
<b>Idea</b>	<b>Classroom reflection</b>
Choosing a topic	The teacher used a projector to display a picture that shows diverse types of essays, explained them and asked learners to produce examples of topics for each type of an essay. Most learners gave example of narrative essay. She then informed learners that she is going to use a familiar topic like covid-19 as example for the day.
Brainstorming	The teacher played a video from YouTube that explained the prewriting stage. She paused and wrote the topic on the chalkboard. She asked learners to discuss in pairs the ideas that should be included on the mind map. Learners were given 4 minutes to discuss and after they shared with the class. The teacher wrote some of the ideas on the chalkboard to show learners how to write a mind map.
Drafting	She played the video, then paused and explained that with drafting, learners should pick the best ideas, form sentences, let the essay flow, be specific, use details and elaborate. Learners took notes.
Revising	The teacher played the video, paused, and explained that learners should organise their ideas, rearrange, subtract some information, add what is missing. She emphasised that revising is the stage where they should make their writing good and count number of words used to ensure that they are not less than 250 or more than 300 words. Learners took notes
Editing and proofreading	She played the video and explained that learners should read their drafts, check errors such as capitalisation, punctuation, spelling, grammar and make sure their essays make sense. Learners took notes
Presenting	She explained that with this stage learners should make sure that their essays are neat and presentable. She then gave them a question paper, asked them to choose a topic and write an essay,

	following the instructions on the question paper.
--	---

**APPENDIX J: Learner's essay**

Education is the important thing that would help us to have a good life. Education is the key to success this is the important to people to have a good future. You can't have a good <sup>life</sup> <sup>too</sup> live without an education. Education is the powerful <sup>SP</sup> weapon that can lead you to success.

Many people <sup>suffering</sup> <sup>t</sup> they are suffered because of the they don't go to the school. Because going to the school, when you <sup>achieve</sup> <sup>SP</sup> well you are going to get a job and have money to help <sup>your</sup> <sup>prod</sup> you family and this will help you to live a better life, because you have your own money.

Other people their life is <sup>so</sup> <sup>SP</sup> difficult because of no education, because they <sup>success</sup> <sup>SP</sup> nothing to their their life. This makes people to do bad things at their <sup>??</sup> environment to make money. Because they <sup>suffering</sup> <sup>A</sup> suffered at <sup>lives</sup> <sup>L</sup> they lives.

When you go to the school, <sup>P</sup> this is the best thing that you must do <sup>L</sup> at your life. Because education is the key to <sup>SP</sup> <sup>success</sup> <sup>P</sup> success. <sup>C</sup> It will make you to be a good person. And you will be proud of your-self because of what you are do doing in your life, and also your best friends will <sup>be</sup> have proud of your to <sup>SP</sup> <sup>success</sup> <sup>in</sup> success at <sup>A</sup> life.



Other people they <sup>succeed</sup> success, now they the good life, they have their own money, they doing things that they want, and their mothers go are proud with them and they are in happy family. Because everything is sorted

You must go to school to have a future and skills about many things. And success because this <sup>SP</sup> day's <sup>con</sup> jobs <sup>are</sup> is about the certificate of matris. To have a job is a good thing because that money you get will help you something that you will live a better life.

Education is the important thing <sup>in</sup> at our <sup>lives</sup> life to be in future and success. More people are Rich because of education. More people are in happy family because of education, and more people have a money because of an education. Education is the <sup>powerful</sup> SP powerful weapon that make people to be good person at their lives. So that life without education is not nothing because education is the key to success.

## APPENDIX K: Marking rubric

Criteria		Exceptional	Skilful	Moderate	Elementary	Inadequate
<b>CONTENT &amp; PLANNING</b> (Response and ideas) Organisation of ideas for planning; Awareness of purpose, audience and context  <b>30 MARKS</b>	Upper level	<b>28–30</b> -Outstanding/Striking response beyond normal expectations -Intelligent, thought-provoking and mature ideas -Exceptionally well organised and coherent (connected), including introduction, body and conclusion/ending	<b>22–24</b> -Very well-crafted response -Fully relevant and interesting ideas with evidence of maturity -Very well organised and coherent (connected), including introduction, body and conclusion/ending	<b>16–18</b> -Satisfactory response - Ideas are reasonably coherent and convincing -Reasonably organised and coherent, including introduction, body and conclusion/ending	<b>10–12</b> -Inconsistently coherent response -Unclear ideas and unoriginal -Little evidence of organisation and coherence	<b>4–6</b> -Totally irrelevant response -Confused and unfocused ideas -Vague and repetitive -Unorganised and incoherent
	Lower level	<b>25–27</b> -Excellent response but lacks the exceptionally striking qualities of the outstanding essay -Mature and intelligent ideas -Skilfully organised and coherent (connected), including introduction, body and conclusion/ending	<b>19–21</b> -Well-crafted response -Relevant and interesting ideas -Well organised and coherent (connected), including introduction, body and conclusion	<b>13–15</b> -Satisfactory response but some lapses in clarity -Ideas are fairly coherent and convincing -Some degree of organisation and coherence, including introduction, body and conclusion	<b>7–9</b> -Largely irrelevant response -Ideas tend to be disconnected and confusing -Hardly any evidence of organisation and coherence	<b>0–3</b> -No attempt to respond to the topic -Completely irrelevant and inappropriate -Unfocused and muddled

Criteria		Exceptional	Skilful	Moderate	Elementary	Inadequate
<b>LANGUAGE, STYLE &amp; EDITING</b> Tone, register, style, vocabulary appropriate to purpose/effect and context; Word choice; Language use and conventions, punctuation, grammar, spelling  <b>15 MARKS</b>	Upper level	<b>14–15</b> -Tone, register, style and vocabulary highly appropriate to purpose, audience and context -Language confident, exceptionally impressive -Compelling and rhetorically effective in tone -Virtually error-free in grammar and spelling -Very skilfully crafted	<b>11–12</b> -Tone, register, style and vocabulary very appropriate to purpose, audience and context -Language is effective and a consistently appropriate tone is used -Largely error-free in grammar and spelling -Very well crafted	<b>8–9</b> -Tone, register, style and vocabulary appropriate to purpose, audience and context -Appropriate use of language to convey meaning -Tone is appropriate -Rhetorical devices used to enhance content	<b>5–6</b> -Tone, register, style and vocabulary not appropriate to purpose, audience and context -Very basic use of language -Tone and diction are inappropriate -Very limited vocabulary	<b>0–3</b> -Language incomprehensible -Tone, register, style and vocabulary less appropriate to purpose, audience and context -Vocabulary limitations so extreme as to make comprehension impossible
	Lower level	<b>13</b> -Language excellent and rhetorically effective in tone -Virtually error-free in grammar and spelling -Skilfully crafted	<b>10</b> -Language engaging and generally effective -Appropriate and effective tone -Few errors in grammar and spelling -Well crafted	<b>7</b> -Adequate use of language with some inconsistencies -Tone generally appropriate and limited use of rhetorical devices	<b>4</b> -Inadequate use of language -Little or no variety in sentence -Exceptionally limited vocabulary	
<b>STRUCTURE</b> Features of text; Paragraph development and sentence construction  <b>5 MARKS</b>		<b>5</b> -Excellent development of topic -Exceptional detail -Sentences, paragraphs exceptionally well constructed	<b>4</b> -Logical development of details -Coherent -Sentences, paragraphs logical, varied	<b>3</b> -Relevant details developed -Sentences, paragraphs well constructed -Essay still makes some sense	<b>2</b> -Some valid points -Sentences and paragraphs faulty -Essay still makes sense	<b>0–1</b> -Necessary points lacking -Sentences and paragraphs faulty -Essay lacks sense
<b>MARK RANGE</b>		<b>43–50</b>	<b>33–40</b>	<b>23–30</b>	<b>13–20</b>	<b>0–10</b>

## APPENDIX L: Marking codes

Code	Descriptor
√	For approval
?	For puzzlement
l	For language error
t	For tense error
'	For omission error
O	Encircle the word/take it off
=	Paragraph the work
/	Divide the word
c	Capital letter/cap-capitalisation
p	For punctuation error
co	Concord/agr-no agreement between the subject and verb used.

sp	Spelling error
Ls	Long sentence distract the meaning.
amb	Ambiguity/unclear/double meaning.
log	Logic/points do not follow coherently.
prep	Have used the wrong preposition
pron	Have used wrong pronoun
rep	Repetition/do not repeat the same idea over and over.
exp	Expression wrongly used.
syn	Syntax error/surface constructed incorrectly.
voc	Vocabulary error/used the wrong word/could have used a better one.
art	Wrong article used
inc	Incomplete sentence, grammatically incorrect.
wo	Word order error/should rephrase the sentence.
Gen	Generalisation/writing two generally incorrect.
Intro	Introduction fail to capture the marker's attention.
conc	Conclusion fail to draw the threads of points written above.

## APPENDIX M: Learners' interview schedule

1. Do you think essay writing is taught enough in your classroom?

2. How often are you given essay writing activities?
3. What challenges do you have in writing coherent and cohesion essay?
4. What errors do you commit in your essay writing?
5. What do you think are the causes of your challenges to write coherent and cohesion essay?
6. How often are you given feedback on your essay writing? How is feedback given to you and are you satisfied with the feedback?
7. What do you think can be done to improve your essay writing skills?

## **APPENDIX N: Learners' transcripts**

### **1. Do you think essay writing is taught enough in your classroom?**

*Participant one*

*No, we are only taught English p1 and p2. P3 is not taught. We just wait to write tasks or exam. And they give us notes a day before we write.*

*Participant four*

*No, because most learners don't know how to write essay. They don't know the importance and what makes a good essay.*

*Participant five*

*No, when it comes to essay writing, they totally do not teach us. They only prepare us when they indicate that we are writing p3 the following day. They only teach English p2 most of the times. They just come and talk about types of essays, but throughout the year they do not teach us.*

*Participant six*

*Essay writing is only taught when we are close to write English p3 which is not enough.*

## **2. How often are you given essay writing activities?**

*Participant one*

*We are not given enough essay writing activities. Most of the time we just write formal tasks without given an activity to practice writing.*

*Participant two*

*They do but after a long time.*

*Participant three*

*They do give us but not often.*

*Participant five*

*They do sometimes, but I do not know what might be happening at that time.*

## **3. What challenges do you have in writing coherent and cohesion essay?**

*Participant one*

*Because we have different types of essays and I am used to narrative one, I get confused in which tense to use. I sometimes write all of them in past tense.*

*Participant two*

*Eish... my problem is language. I usually don't understand the topic and I don't know how to write my ideas down.*

*Participant three*

*I am struggling to write using the ideas I have written on a mind map.*

*Participant six*

*The hardest part is editing and making ideas to flow from one sentence to another.*

#### **4. What errors do you commit in your essay writing?**

*Participant one*

*I usually don't know which word to use when I write. I just use any word that I think is right but when I get my script back, I find that I used wrong words. And another problem is using wrong tenses.*

*Participant two*

*Problem is that when I write words like classroom so, I separate it. I also repeat words in the same sentence and write incorrect spelling.*

*Participant three*

*When I write for example, I might include people they or them. And I have a problem of spelling words incorrectly.*

*Participant four*

*I write wrong spellings and I get confused of which words to use in my paragraphs. Then I end up cancelling a lot.*

#### **5. What do you think are the causes of your challenges in writing coherent and cohesive essays?**

*Participant one*

*We are not taught how to write essays. And I sometimes struggle to arrange ideas in a mind map.*

*Participant two*

*I get nervous when I write and most of the time I run out of ideas.*

*Participant three*

*Not using some points, I wrote on my mind map. And I don't focus on one point in each paragraph.*

*Participant four*

*I think is because we are not taught.*

*Participant five*

*We are not taught, and we do not practice writing on our own. The only time we write an essay is when we are given a task.*

*Participant six*

*Not plotting the mind map first before I start my essay.*

**6. How often are you given feedback on your essay writing? How is feedback given to you? Are you satisfied with the feedback?**

*Participant one*

*They give us feedback after a written formal task. I am not satisfied with the feedback because they just show us our mistakes by use of codes such as 'sp' for spelling errors. They do not teach us.*

*Participant two*

*They do give us feedback but not often. I am not satisfied with the way they give us feedback because it does not help me to improve. The teacher gives back our scripts, but she does not teach us ways to improve our essays.*

*Participant six*

*Immediately after our teacher has done marking and assessing our work. And I am not satisfied with the feedback because she uses codes on our scripts, and she just asks questions when she gives us our scripts instead of teaching us.*

**7. What do you think can be done to improve your essay writing skills?**

*Participant one*

*I just want a lesson in which I will be taught all types of essays and develop the skills to write them all. The teacher must give us notes and explain the steps of writing essays.*

*Participant three*

*Teachers should teach us everything about essays and give us essay writing activities to practice writing.*

*Participant five*

*Our teachers must teach us essay writing, give us more activities, and not just give us notes when we are about to write formal essay tasks.*

*Participant six*

*I believe peer teaching can assist as we get to be free too much when we are with our peers.*