

Discourse Competence as an Essential Variable in Developing Grade 11 English First Additional Language Learners' Writing Skills

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Abstract

Discourse competence, which entails the interrelatedness of concepts in sentences in spoken and written language, is essential in the development of learners' receptive and productive English skills. Learners with excellent discourse competency skills can better grasp spoken and written texts on a local and global level. The main objective of this paper was to investigate the impact of discourse competence in grade 11 English First Additional Language (EFAL) learners' writing skills. Halliday and Hassan's Model of Evaluation framework, which advocates that the primary means of linking texts in discourse is through lexical cohesion, underpinned this study. This paper adopted an interpretivist paradigm. A qualitative approach was employed and a case study design was used to gather data from 40 purposely selected grade 11 learners. Document analysis was used. Findings indicated that (i) restricted knowledge of lexicon, (ii) inadequate knowledge about reiteration and collocation, and (iii) insufficient knowledge about appropriate use of cohesive and coherent devices, were among the established reasons for learners' writing deficiencies. This paper recommends that essay writing skills can best be achieved through the implementation of the proposed recent language teaching methods such as the Text-based Approach, which uses texts to teach language structures and writing skills. The Department of Education should monitor the development of writing skills from the learners' earliest years of schooling.

Keywords: essay writing, lexical cohesion, writing deficiencies, cohesive devices, coherent devices

1. Introduction

Focus of this paper is on the development of learners' discourse competency skills to achieve good writing skills. Writing is an important skill for language productivity (Luizinho, 2020), and is considered a difficult skill, where learners face impediments such as limited vocabulary, semantic prosody, and coherence. Research stipulates that sixty percent of all South African learners do not meet writing standards (Aud, et al., 2012). Similarly, the Department of Education (2019) states that teaching of creative writing and language construction is a major challenge as there are various aspects to look at when teaching English First Additional Language (EFAL) writing skills. These include sentence construction, spelling, subject-verb agreement, prepositions, tenses, and all aspects of grammar (ibid.). Van Schalkwyk (2008) claims that learners from non-English backgrounds face writing difficulties when learning a second language, which affects their performance academically.

A person with strong writing abilities can reach a much wider audience than they might through spoken or phone communication since they can do it with ease and clarity. The four language skills of hearing, speaking, reading, and writing, upon which all formal assessment depends, are simultaneously developed and interrelated in modern language education pedagogies such as the Text-based Approach (TBA) and Communicative Language education (CLT). In this regard, the use of authentic texts (Richards & Rodgers, 2017) provides a solid foundation for a sound development of the learners' discourse competence, sociolinguistic competence, strategic competence, and linguistic competence (Canale & Swain, 1980; Mede, 2015; Gani, 2017; Pan, 2021). However, Pan (ibid.) articulates that the traditional methods of language teaching employed during the Grammar Translation Method (GTM) overemphasized vocabulary and grammar while emphasizing mastery of linguistic ability. The GTM, which focused on isolated sentences during language teaching, undermined the creation of coherent texts. In this paper, the authors argue that discourse competence, when mastered by EFAL learners, could eliminate the writing deficiencies experienced by learners, and, thus, contribute to improved academic performance.

Discourse competence entails an understanding of how utterances are put together to form meaningful conversation (Nordquist, 2020). It refers to the interrelatedness of concepts in sentences in spoken and written language. Celce (1995) expounds discourse competence as the fundamental competence that incorporates other competences in communication, including lexical and grammatical competences. When evaluating the coherence of a text, grammatical cohesion refers to how grammatical characteristics are braided together across sentence boundaries (Zhao, 2017). However, grammatical cohesion is based on structural content and in the agreement between the subject and the verb. The primary goal of grammatical cohesion is to achieve concord in a sentence. Similarly, discourse competency is the capacity to articulate and recognize coherent and cohesive texts in an oral or written form, according to Bachman (1990). Discourse competence can

be measured through appropriate use of lexical items, and cohesive and coherent devices, which account for good speaking and writing skills. Examples of cohesive devices include correct use of, for example, reference, substitution, conjunction, and deixis.

The grammatical and lexical connections that hold a text together are known as cohesion. According to Dass and Rinqest (2017), lexical coherence is a lexical connection made between different parts of the essay. Semantic links of meaning that take place in the text are related to the cohesion principle (Opara, 2016). Likewise, lexical cohesion is the effect of coherence brought about by the choice of terminology and is the greatest resource learners have at their disposal for creating cohesion in essays. Rademeyer (2017) posits that lexical cohesion arises from semantic relationships between words.

Lexical cohesion in essay writing is determined by reiteration and collocation of words in a text. Both markers become the most direct forms of lexical cohesion errors committed by EFAL learners. Glowka (2015) states that reiteration relations, which result from synonymy, near-synonymy, antonymy, and super-ordinate in an essay, are a type of repetition of lexical items. With this effect, an example of reiteration is extracted from the essay writing presented by Naketsane (2019) in the following sentence:

“The ducks were in a row. They’ve been dragged, kicked, shot, and used to beat Zizo over the head.”

Although the verbs employed in the previous sentence have slightly different context-specific meanings, they all refer to a harsh activity. According to Lin (2016), who studied writing in English as a Second Language in Pakistan, lexical cohesiveness is attained by lexicon choice. These verbs show the writer’s ability in the careful selection of vocabulary, and how their interrelatedness emphasise the action through the choice of words. Strong writing abilities include a vigilant choice of lexicon capable of producing coherent and cohesive texts.

Collocation, on the other hand, is defined as a coherent connection in which a relationship depends on the occurrence of things in the same lexical environment rather than on a systematic semantic tie (Thornbury, 2017). Collocation is effected largely through length and breadth variations in the lexicon used. Farooqui (2016) stipulates that different definitions of collocation refer to a textual phenomenon in which particular lexical elements link sentences in an essay. The connections between sentences’ contents influence how an essay is to be interpreted. Below is an example of collocation as shown in the sentence derived from Adeyemi (2017):

“The student is faced with a lot of challenges in order to discover himself”

In the sentence above, collocation is shown by phrases like *‘is faced with’*, *‘a lot of’*, and *‘in order to’*. Furthermore, the phrase *‘face a challenge’* illustrates words that occur together to convey meaning. Therefore, learners need to be familiar with collocations in order to achieve lexical cohesion. Knowledge of collocations is part of vocabulary learning. Learning complete phrases rather than single words improves vocabulary learning. Learners need a wide vocabulary, which is perhaps “the single most important factor enabling a person to communicate well in an additional language” (Department of Education, 2011).

Coherence refers to the appropriate use of all kinds of devices to connect a text and unify it with the readers’ background knowledge as a prerequisite to decode a text. The proposed guidelines by the DoE (2011) to be followed during the writing process include the prewriting stage, which entails brainstorming using mind maps, and identification of the main ideas on the proposed piece of writing. The next stage is drafting, followed by revising, editing, proof reading and presenting. During paragraph writing, learners achieve coherence by structuring their sentences logically through the use of conjunctions as logical cohesive devices, whereas logical connectors like pronouns, repetition of words, synonyms, and antonyms, and creating a cohesive paragraph with links that hold it together and give it meaning, achieve coherence in written composition. Thus, discourse competency is important in the development of learners’ receptive and productive English abilities (Pan, 2021).

First Additional Language essay writing skills have been a focus in both national and international research. A study conducted by Haung (2016) in Indonesia stipulates that in essay writing, a lexical item may be closely related to another word, hyponym, or its variations in order to emphasize one idea here while underscoring another elsewhere. For the purpose of good essay writing, learners need to have the capability to achieve lexical cohesion. Excellent writing is at the heart of EFAL Curriculum. In a study conducted by Zhang (2016) in Egypt, in which she investigated lexical cohesion on English Second Language writing, it was revealed that Egyptian students’ understanding of lexical coherence in English essay writing is poor. Also, a study of Ghana English Newspaper (GEN) text discovered that lexical cohesion caused more errors and the distortion of meaning in the newspaper texts of ESL students than grammatical cohesion (Ahmed, 2015).

Gibbons (2019), in his study, discovered that essay writing is the most challenging of all the language skills to master since it is a nuanced and sophisticated endeavour. Because so many elements, including grammar, spelling, content, cohesion, lexicon, and sentence arrangement to produce a unified paragraph, must be mastered, the new English Language Curriculum has caused a great deal of stress among EFAL learners in South Africa. A case study conducted by Ndlovu (2019) on challenges experienced by ESL learners in Kwazulu-Natal, when writing essays, discovered that in a climate of high expectations, the mantra “all learners can learn” is challenged by practical writing skills and lexicon application. In this inquiry, the authors are of the opinion that learners’ writing deficiencies could be eliminated through explicit instruction of cohesive and coherence markers to create unified texts.

2. Literature Review

A literature review is a procedure for locating, analysing, and summarizing a corpus of completed work generated by scholars, researchers, and practitioners that is systematic, explicit, and repeatable (Booth & Sutton, 2012). A thoroughly researched and effectively presented

literature review significantly contributes to comprehending the research problem and aids in placing the study's findings in the context of history (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014).

The skills that become the focus of writing include how to come up with ideas, organize the text coherently, incorporate discourse markers and rhetorical conventions properly and cohesively, revise the text to obtain the explicit meaning, edit for appropriate grammar, and produce a final product (Lai, 2016). Rollinson (2015) suggests that writing is a process of reasoning where the writer has to make decisions about lexical choices, structural options and potential knowledge and concept organization. As the writer is interested in preparing and promoting the written debate, they are often purpose- and goal-guided. As a result, the writer needs to carefully pick and organize lexical items and sentences such that different semantic, syntactic, and contextual linkages can be used to achieve lexical cohesion and coherence. As a result, writing is thought to be a challenging task that requires connections at many different levels, including grammar, vocabulary, and organization (Zhou, 2017).

In essay writing, the research on lexical cohesion is most often contrasted with grammatical cohesion as both of them are important texture components. In Libya, Patton (2014) examined the relationship between lexical and grammatical cohesion, claiming that while essays are grammatically coherent, they are not always lexically cohesive. Her findings show that although the EFAL learners' essays displayed grammatical coherence; they not only lacked lexical variety, but also lacked sufficient support for the claim or inductive inferences (Banister, 2014). Meurer's cohesion analysis, however, revealed that the concepts of collocation and reiteration are strongly related. He claims that in essays, the correlational lack between lexical items was very high (Meurer, 2013). The relationship between lexical reiteration and lexical collocation in essay writing, thus, appears to be a complex issue when considering these two competing viewpoints.

In a study conducted by Pan (2021), in which he explored the relationship between cohesiveness and coherence and how students' discourse competence can be improved in reading, it was revealed that students with strong discourse competence can comprehend spoken and written texts more effectively. Additionally, it was revealed that students can create more coherent discourse to advance their speaking and writing skills. Pan (ibid) also proposed ways by which discourse competence can be achieved. Brainstorming in EFAL classrooms has been found a robust predictor of discourse competence (DoE, 2011; Clark, 2020; Pan, 2021). Structured and in-depth brainstorming activities facilitate vocabulary development. Additionally, key words and lexical fields could be identified. Also, teachers should discuss the structure of the text and identify relationships among paragraphs. Furthermore, logical relationships through the identification of lexical cohesive devices are essential in the production of cohesive and coherent texts. Teaching coherence at sentence level accounts for the production of well-written texts.

Zhou (2017) contends that cohesion is thought to be improved through the explicit teaching of unified devices in EFAL essays. Hinkiel (2014) also notes that because all of these characteristics are necessary for non-native speakers to generate cohesive and coherent academic papers; hence, teachers must seek to expand students' usable lexical and grammatical repertoires. Therefore, the difference between good and poor essays takes into account connective links and reiteration, and systematic grammatical and lexical cohesion training is effective in enhancing the learners' capacity to use them properly (Zhou, 2017).

A distressing fact is that EFAL learners misinterpret the topic they are writing about because they do not have the skills, semantic prosody, and vocabulary to craft their essay (Nomlomo & Vuzo, 2019). However, Goge (2019) identifies content-related misunderstandings as a possible problem in EFAL essay writing. This implies that if learners have a low level of proficiency in English, their knowledge of English lexicon is most likely limited, and, as a result, their understanding of the topic to write about will be limited. The misinterpretation of the topic is a reality that is identified in the study of Polish students by Guillamon-Suesta and Renau (2015), who determined that both content and language teachers believed that lack of awareness of lexical items in EFAL learners, and the low proficiency level of both the learners and the teachers may lead to misrepresentation of the topic.

Even though EFAL students have been studying English for years, writing in a second language is nevertheless said to present certain difficulties. Particularly, some students find it difficult to understand and successfully use the essay prose rules and features, which leads to ambiguous and baffling essays with an inappropriate structure or essays that wrongly depict the subject. (Hinkiel, 2014). Other discourse level effects for EFAL writers include poor topic continuation, a lack of examples, a small vocabulary, and an incorrect or sparse use of coherent devices to achieve lexical cohesion (Meisuo, 2010).

In some ways, writing effectively hinges upon having an adequate lexicon. According to Mather (2019), lexical cohesiveness, a trait of text in which specific lexical factors link sentences, has a tendency to break up the essay. Hill (2015) goes on to claim that an essay's lexical cohesion is determined by the cohesive effect the lexicon choice produces. A student, however, does not have the luxury of studying the context in which lexical elements are employed while writing an essay because he is constructing the context. Hence, essay is effected largely through length and breadth variations in the lexicon used.

This study is underpinned by Halliday and Hassan's (1976) Model of Evaluation because of its suitability in the process of language learning. As the name suggests, lexical coherence is cohesion that results from the use of a vocabulary. Lexical reiteration is a strategy used in Halliday and Hassan's framework to create cohesiveness in the text by repeating lexical items that are visible at the text's surface. To put it another way, lexical coherence serves as the main tool for tying texts together in speech. Two key lexical cohesion subclasses are described by Halliday and Hassan (1976): reiteration and collocation.

Halliday and Hassan's discourse analysis method has established the taxonomy of coherent devices, which, according to Gordhan (2017),

are the primary text-creation instruments in the language system. Cohesion research has exploded since its release in English in 1976. Several cohesion studies have been conducted in written discourse regarding the functions of cohesive elements in essay writing. While some academics believe that cohesive devices have little bearing on writing quality, others believe it is important to use the concept of continuity when writing essays. In several of these research studies, cohesion and coherence have also been considered as they are well-known to be linked to essay writing.

Halliday and Hassan's paradigm is associated with the acquisition learning hypothesis, the monitor hypothesis, the hypothesis of the natural order, the input hypothesis, and the hypothesis of the affective filter are the five independent hypotheses that make up Krashen's (1985) monitor model. Predictor variables and mediating variables consist of one of these hypotheses. In this regard, these models recognise the writing skill and its impact which extends to academic performance.

3. Methodological Design

Approach

According to Bourke (2014), a research approach is a guideline under which a decision must be made about the method of data collection. Furthermore, focus of qualitative research is on actual situations and unmanipulative contexts. A case study, according to Adeyemi (2017), is a practical investigation that closely examines a topic under research. The case study is one of the more common qualitative designs (McInnes, Peter & Bonney, 2017).

Population and sampling

Bless and Higson-Smith (2017) describe sampling as a technical accounting technique used to justify data collection techniques, and to fairly choose the fewest possible subjects, objects, and occurrences from the actual population. Thus, the research sample was drawn from the population of Grade 11 learners and teachers from O.R Tambo Inland District High School. Bless and Higson-Smith (2017) further says that by analyzing a portion of the overall group, it is also possible to draw specific conclusions. Purposeful sampling, as described by McInnes et al. (2017), is the process of choosing samples that are complete and suitable for analysis and contain the data required for the study. Information-rich instances are those that can teach a lot about subjects that are essential to the goal of the study (Ndlovu, 2019). Purposive sampling works best when it chooses examples with a wealth of material for in-depth examination in relation to the major topics under investigation.

Research instruments

The data collection instrument used in this inquiry was document analysis. Learners' written essays were analysed through content analysis. Documents are described by LeCompte and Preissle (2013) as artefacts materials such as writing, which tell researchers about the inner nature of everyday events and can explain unusual and extraordinary events in human life. In other words, papers are pre-written text that have not been produced by the researcher but by participants (Ndlovu, 2019). They are readily available, free and contain information that would require considerable time and effort for a researcher to collect data (Malah, 2015). In this regard, the researcher interpreted and evaluated Grade 11 EFAL learners' essays to collect information on lexical cohesion in essay writing.

Data collection procedures

Document analysis was used to gather information from 40 purposely selected learners. Two essays, titled 'Choices' and 'Changing your mind-set', selected from the Eastern Cape, 2020 Grade 11 trial examinations, were given to learners. Learners were given 1 hour to write a two page essay. Out of 40 learners who participated in this study, 31 chose the first essay while 9 chose the latter.

4. Findings and Discussion

In this section, the authors present the findings in the following themes:

Restricted knowledge of lexicon

Learners' writings suggests a weak anomaly, with poor grammar, spelling, phrase construction, tenses, and vocabulary as a few examples, among others. Because most of the linkages were essentially repetitions, the learners' limited word choice was the main issue with their usage of lexical coherence in their compositions. Consequently, some learners used vocabulary from their home language. Learners appeared to overuse the lexical items that were focal on the essay's topic. This use suggests that some students had a limited lexical knowledge. The usage of collocations provided a remedy for the repetitive nature of texts since it seemed that these lexical items added to the message's continuity and developed the lexical repertoire.

When this happens, learners' ideas lose effectiveness, resulting in awkward expressions and poor overall language use. Cumming (2014) argues that there is no danger in thinking in one's mother tongue. To improve writing skills, one has to understand what is written because to respond to a topic, one has to understand it first. In this study, the researcher argues that thinking in one's mother tongue could be detrimental to writing skills because grammatical constructions of the first language are different from those of the second language. Some of the learners' responses below show direct translation from the home language. The response below revealed that learners displayed lack of comprehension skills and resorted to direct translation from their home language.

Some of your mindset can be dom and kill them with Drugs and Alcohol. (Participant 17)

Always avoid negative impacts they will take you nowhere. (Participant 24)

In the responses above, Participant 17 uses the word 'dom' from their home language which means 'foolish'. Furthermore, the response above shows the improper application of punctuation marks. The learner shows a deficit in the identification of common nouns and proper nouns. The words 'drugs' and 'alcohol', as common nouns, should not have been capitalised. Also, Participant 24 directly translates from their home language to show that the use of drugs and alcohol does not have positive benefits because of their destructive effect. Direct translation spoils good writing skills. When learners do not have appropriate words to use in the target language, they translate from their home language. Participant 24 also translates from their home language to suggest that drugs prohibit progress.

On the other hand, certain lexical items, especially linked to collocation, were used. Phrases, verbs, nouns, and prepositions were involved in the incorrect use of collocations. Such errors in essays may have erupted from the decontextualized learning of English. This was demonstrated by the learners' difficulties using prepositions correctly, such as using "deprive of" instead of "deprive from." In his study, Coffi (2017) hypothesized that EFAL learners had difficulties using a range of lexical terms when writing essays. In other instances, students employed lexical terms that are not found in the dictionary by prefixing the word, for example, "stressful" to create the word "unstressful." The other misuse of lexical items involved creating an adjective form from a noun; the noun "mindset" does not have the adjective form. Exposure to various kinds of texts might compensate for the deficiencies in vocabulary knowledge, and lead to improved essay writing skills.

Reiteration and collocation in essay writing

Collocation is important for the growth of vocabulary. Collocations are crucial for the naturalization of one's speech and writing, hence it is crucial to learn them. Collocations also increase the expressive potential of students. Predictability is another benefit of learning and utilizing collocations. Words function as a component of a lexical system rather than as autonomous, interchangeable pieces of the lexicon. Because of this, it is essential for everybody who uses English to expand their vocabulary as well as understand word collocation and the limitations on word choice when they interact with other words (Du Plessis et al., 2015). The realm of collocation has to do with the meaning relation between lexical items. Therefore, it becomes an error if learners inappropriately pair or arrange such co-occurring lexical items in a text. It has been observed that most EFAL learners in this study commit collocation errors in their essay writing.

Collocations help language learners gain knowledge of native speakers' language chunks and enhance their speaking and writing abilities (Hatami, 2015). The lexical cohesion collocation category items conform to the specific domain of meaning; a cohesive force is generated by the lexical items that exist between the phenomenon, place, behaviour, and participant. Therefore, numerous lexical items are discovered in writings that establish a semantic link. University, learning, and university graduate are some of the words L-13 uses that are related to education. Use of these words revealed the learner's ability to link related words, and, thus, a wide vocabulary knowledge.

Insufficient knowledge about appropriate use of cohesive and coherent devices

Ummah (2018) contends that grammar is important since it allows you to apply the right techniques to convey your words to your audience effectively. Reading extensively, both inside and outside of school, is the best strategy to introduce grammar to students and expand their vocabulary (DoE, 2011). Additionally, it is important to teach vocabulary and grammar both in and out of context (DoE, 2018). Grammar is defined by Lai (2016) as guidelines that illustrate how terms can be organized in any dialect to design coherent sentences. Contemplating about the texts written by students, it is clear that they are not familiar with grammar norms. The majority of participants' writings demonstrated a lack of understanding of linguistic forms and language conventions. Participant 22 wrote:-

Failure depend on once attitude towards the concept of life

The response above suggests that tenses are a true struggle for learners. These findings are consistent with Ngulube's (2015) study, who discovered that second language learners absorb a target language's language constructs but deem it difficult to put them into just an understandable document. This response also shows inadequate subject and verb agreement knowledge. The noun 'Failure' above is singular and should be followed by a singular verb with the third person singular marker '-s'. Syntactically, the sentence is correct because it follows the normal structure of sentence formation, but grammatically incorrect as it lacks grammatical coherence.

Spelling is, however, a valuable skill as it makes the essay easier to follow. Nazarane's (2019) findings revealed that spelling mistakes are among the challenges faced by EFAL learners. As per CAPS EFAL curriculum for Grades 10 to 12, simple spelling rules for learners should have been taught in junior grades. Participant 22 above reveals a deficiency in spelling when he uses the word 'once' instead of 'one's'. Consequently, meaning is distorted when words are misspelt. Reading English newspapers and magazines might facilitate vocabulary development, and upgraded spelling. The learner would be ideally equipped to think and write in English after his vocabulary has advanced. Ankucic (2019) has shown that there is a strong relationship between correct spelling and reading abilities. In a study conducted by Cooke, Slee and Young (2008), it was revealed that very little time, less than 4%, of the reading instructional practice is dedicated to teaching spelling. Simonsen and Gunter (2001), cited in Reed (2012), contend that in ESL classrooms, spelling is overlooked because much emphasis is put on the improvement of reading and writing skills. Simultaneous development of reading, spelling and writing skills will yield good results if instructional practices focus on explicit vocabulary instruction. Teaching spelling to learners increases vocabulary knowledge.

Inappropriate use of cohesive devices contributed to the formation of incoherent essays. Some learners' essays displayed limited knowledge about certain linguistic aspects. Participant 18's statement below reveals this claim:-

You will regret choices that you have took

The response above shows that the learner has problems with the use of the past participle marker ‘-en’. As a result, the learner’s sentence is grammatically incorrect and lacks coherence. Also, learners indicated that they could not distinguish between the uses of the pronoun ‘you’ and the possessive pronoun ‘your’. Participant 23 wrote:

Set goals that will take you to you destination

The learner’s response above reveals difficulties with the handling of pronouns. The use of the incorrect possessive noun ‘you’ instead of ‘your’ before the noun ‘destination’ makes a grammatically incorrect sentence. In all likelihood, these fundamental skills were not learned in the earlier grades and presented themselves in Grade 11. These linguistic features are mastered through exposure to texts. Krashen (2002) posits that learning a language in a formal classroom setting is not always the ideal way to do it. However, this is how learners are taught a language in the learning system.

5. Recommendations

It would be worthwhile for all stakeholders in education to encourage learners in their respective areas of responsibility to write properly, by providing excessive study material, conducive place of study, and recognizing excellence. Educational policymakers, in the Ministry of Education, should ensure school administrators and teachers are offered workshops on influencing writing skills and developing monitoring tools to evaluate writing activities. These will help to motivate learners positively towards their study and writing skills needed in EFAL. Learners should be taught ways to grasp English easily; they should be taught skills that can cultivate good and effective essay writing skills.

Writing should not be regarded as an individual-oriented, inner-directed cognitive process, according to Webb (2016), but as an acquired discourse response. In this regard, efficient instruction should allow learners to engage in transactions with their texts and with others’ texts. One way to do this is through group work, in which writing assignments are undertaken in mixed groups of capable and slow learners. Learners learn how to write with a readable sensitivity and learn how to edit their work to be coherent.

6. Conclusions

Writing appears difficult because it interferes not only with the use of proper grammar or vocabulary, but also with understanding of how to structure a text and connect ideas to generate a coherent piece of writing. Learners, learning English FAL, are required to have writing skills to develop coherent and cohesive essays, particularly in high school education. The findings of this study have shown that essay writing skills are still a challenging factor in schools. Inadequate linguistic knowledge, particularly lexical cohesion, hinders successful EFAL essay writing. Writing is not considered a major skill in schools, as both learners and teachers experience difficulties in essay writing. Secondly, the introduction of Communicative Language Teaching and Text-based Approach has high demand on teachers to improve learners’ communicative competence. In Communicative Language Teaching, grammatical errors should be ignored (Richards, 2017). This has contributed to misspelling and grammatical errors being ignored in EFAL classrooms. Effective writing skills need learners who are competent in sentence construction skills, spelling, and correct grammar usage. A good piece of writing should be free of grammatical errors and employs lexical items appropriately.

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Olwethu Tyantsi has completed the Honours’ Degree at Walter Sisulu University. My experience as an English teacher prompted me to conduct research in essay writing skills, a very challenging aspect in students’ lives. I am an advocate of the Text-based Approach and Communicative Language Teaching proposed by the Department of Education (2011), as language teaching methods to be adopted in schools.

Nomasomi Matiso holds a Doctor of Education degree from Walter Sisulu University. I have a Master of Arts qualification in Linguistics, with Phonetics and Phonology, Morphology and Syntax, Semantics, and Grammar and Usage, as my specialisation areas. My research areas are English Second Language teaching and learning pedagogies.

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