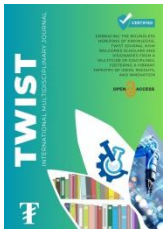
DOI 10.5281/twist.10049652#577
CC BY NC SA
TWIST, 2026, Vol. 21, Issue 1, pp. 285-296

TWIST

Journal homepage: www.twistjournal.net



Exploring Teaching Approaches Suitable for Teaching Grade 4 Essay Writing

Towards Bridging the Learner Articulation Gap During Phase Transition

Ezekiel Chauke
School of Teacher Education, College of Education (CEDU),
Department of Language Education, Arts and Culture,
University of South Africa, South Africa

Khashane Stephen Malatji*
Department of Curriculum Studies, School of Education, Faculty of Humanities,
University of Limpopo, Sovenga, South Africa
[**Corresponding author*]

Abstract
The purpose of the study was to explore the teaching approaches that are suitable for teaching Grade 4 learners' English First Additional Language essay writing to bridge the learner articulation gap during the transition from Grade 3 to Grade 4. A qualitative approach was followed with a Case study research design. The research paradigm used in this study was the interpretive paradigm. Purposive sampling was used to select 9 English First Additional Language (EFAL) teachers in 3 primary schools at Malamulele Central Circuit in the Vhembe District of the Limpopo Province. Data was collected through document analysis, focus group interviews, and lesson observation. Kolb's theory of transformation of experience into effective learning, aligned with the interpretative paradigm, was used in this study. The study found that EFAL learners are unable to write essays that are academically acceptable in terms of the standard that is stipulated in the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) document. Such an articulation gap results in a difficult transition from the foundation to the intermediate phase, which contributes to a high failure rate in Grade 4. The study concluded and recommended that the curriculum during transitioning from the foundation to intermediate phase (Grade 4) should be revised, and the Language of Teaching and Learning (LoTL) in the Foundation Phase should be English.

Keywords
articulation gap, essay, environment, experiential learning

BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION

The articulation gap between grades, phases, or secondary and universities prevents students from writing essays that are academically accepted, and this is a concern to researchers. International researchers argue that several students are admitted to institutions of higher learning, such as Universities and Colleges, while they are not ready to meet the demands of the college writing courses (Park, 2006:17). This view is supported by Bulgivah, Mahbub and Nugraheni (2021:62), who recorded that "writing also becomes the most difficult skill, particularly in English Education, which through complex processes that engages several competencies. Also, students at the tertiary level experienced various obstacles in their processes of writing," Mukhari and Mathipa (2017:219), who, after marking over a thousand assignments from first-year university students, established the following articulation gap in students' English essay writing:

- The writing of the question in the words in which it was given; students should do this to avoid misreading the question and losing marks because each aspect of the answer is allocated a specific mark.
- An introduction: the introduction should be written because it provides a preview of the content that is to be addressed in the body of the essay, and there is a specific mark allocated to it.
- Headings and sub-headings should be written because ideas are discussed under them and have specific marks allocated to them as well.

- A conclusion: the role of the conclusion is to sum up salient matters that are deemed to be the core of the subject matter, and it has its own mark allocated to it;
- References/bibliography; The role of references/bibliography is to present proof to the reader that the learner has consulted a variety of sources before constructing the essay and it has a mark allocation to it. This approach trains learners to make use of literature or the right way to become future scholars, and
- Table of contents; the table of contents gives reference to the reader where to find different sections of the work and has a mark allocation as well. A table of contents is also one way of introducing learners to the skill of becoming future scholars (Mukhari & Mathipa, 2017; 2019).

The aspects/concepts that are enunciated by Mukhari and Mathipa above are the cornerstones and the building blocks of a good essay, for they constitute the core (elements) skills in creative writing that are of the essence in essay writing. They are the key elements in constructing an essay of a standard that is academically acceptable.

The challenge of the articulation gap between universities and Secondary or high schools is prevalent in many universities globally and is a concern of many scholars. The concern of the articulation gap necessitated studies to be conducted in this field. For example, in Georgia, Burkhalter (2000) conducted a study that aimed to investigate the pathways of bridging the gap between high school and college composition and to improve communication between high school teachers and university teachers. The findings of the study revealed a need for the teaching of writing as a process, rather than as a one-time effort, and as a product having distinct parts. In addition, a need for in-depth questions, which deal with higher-level thinking skills, such as analysis, interpretation, and evaluation, is also pertinent. Lastly, the teaching of literature and writing together, rather than as separate entities, was identified as a need (Burkhalter, 2000, p. 113).

A similar study was conducted on closing the gap in the use of English courses in Nigerian tertiary institutions through English for specific purposes (Nnamdi-Eruchalu & Akaruese, 2017). The findings revealed that the aim of the written and spoken English of most of the undergraduates in Nigerian universities is far from being achieved. The use of the English course is not satisfactorily effective because the students do not perceive the course material as having been designed to meet their immediate academic and professional needs, and not just a continuation of the general English language they were taught in the primary and secondary schools. To conclude, it is proposed that the faculty-based ESP courses in the second segment of the course be incorporated to motivate the students to acquire the level of proficiency that is necessary for optimal success in their academic and professional lives.

In South Africa, the study by Malatji and Singh (2018), on implications of the articulation gap between Geography learners in Secondary Schools and University, which aimed at investigating the challenges experienced by Geography students in their first year of study, the results of the study revealed that Geography students entered university without proper preparation. As a result, they could not cope with their first year of study. In addition, Malatji and Singh (2018) were of the view that teachers who taught Geography in secondary schools were not sufficiently trained to teach Geography, and this resulted in them engaging in surface learning as opposed to deep learning.

The Council on Higher Education (2009) has described the articulation gap as a discontinuity in the transition from one educational phase to the next educational phase. In the context of the current study, articulation gap refers to a discontinuity or misalignment of learning requirements that are prescribed for the Foundation and Intermediate Phases of English First Additional Language (EFAL) learners in essay writing, which should prepare them to cope with the required competencies of the Intermediate Phase. According to DoE (cited by Fisher & Scott 2011:13), the articulation gap has been identified by the South African Department of Higher Education as a critical systemic fault affecting the educational progression to and through higher education. The Foundation Phase in this study is the phase from which the learners were transferred to the Intermediate Phase. The learners in this phase are taught in Xitsonga and when they exit the Foundation Phase and transition to Intermediate Phase, they are expected to use English as a language of teaching and learning, hence this could be a contributing factor to the Grade 6 learners to fail to write EFAL essays that are academically accepted as stipulated in the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS). This study, therefore, focused on both Foundation and Intermediate Phases, specifically grades 3 and 6. The reason for choosing the mentioned grades is that they are exit grades for each phase. The learners in grade 3 exit the grade underprepared to cope with the competencies that are required in the Intermediate Phase. Hence, they struggle to compose essays in English.

For this study, articulation gap refers to the lack of essential knowledge or preparation and skill (aligned with the content that should be taught in the next Phase) that a learner should have learned in the previous phase. Preparation enables learners to cope with the demands of the content or subject matter that is taught in the next phase. In this study, the task that the Grade 4 EFAL learners should be able to effectively perform is the writing of essays in English using the standards or competencies as stipulated in the Intermediate Phase CAPS document.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of undertaking this study was to explore the teaching approaches that are suitable for teaching Grade 4 essay writing to bridge the gap between Grades 3 and 4 during the foundation phase transition to the Intermediate phase.

RESEARCH QUESTION

What are the teaching approaches that are used to bridge the articulation gap between grade 3 and grade 4 in English FAL essay writing?

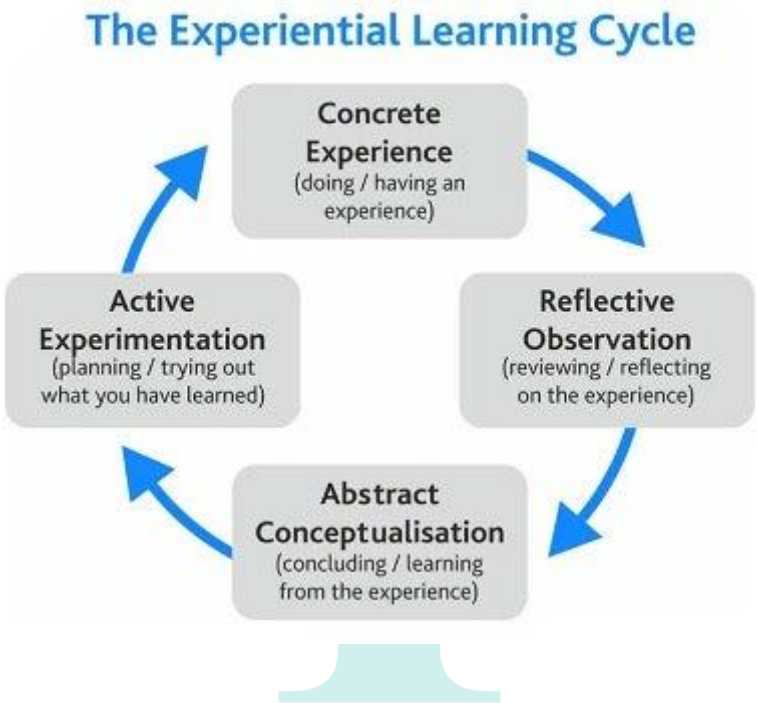
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is located within the theoretical framework as proposed by Kolb's (1974) experiential learning cycles. The theory explains that concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation form a four-stage process (or cycle) transformed into effective learning. Applying the experiential learning cycles (Brascia, 2021) maximizes students' learning. It views learning as an integrated process with each stage being mutually supportive of and feeding into the next stage. Based on the above, the theory of Kolb is relevant for this study because it combines a four-stage learning cycle with four learning styles and provides a foundation for learning and development by describing the ideal process of where knowledge is created through experiences.

According to Malatji and Singh (2017:97), effective learning only occurs when a learner can execute all stages of the model. Since People with the diverging style prefer to work in groups, to listen with an open mind, and to receive personal feedback (Malatji & Singh, 2017), the learners can work together in groups by discussing and sharing ideas to produce a given task

Application of Kolb's Theory in the intermediate phase

This theory uses the concept of the experiential learning cycle as shown in the diagram below:



Concrete Experience

In this stage, the teacher identifies what s/he wants the learners to learn. In this context, the teacher prepares the Grade 4 learners to write an essay by first letting them think of how they were taught to write the essay in the foundation phase (Grade 3). The learners brainstorm and use the brainstormed ideas to discuss how they were taught. The learners can be provided with the essays they wrote in the previous Grade and compare them with an essay they are expected to produce in Grade 4 to see the difference. This should be done to activate the learners' prior knowledge, which is gained through experience (Abdelaal, 2014). The prior knowledge cannot be overlooked, as according to Khasipe (2017), it has a strong impact on the composition of an essay, because it connects what the learners already know to what they are learning. In this regard, the comparison of the essays the teacher provided to the learners serves as the starting point of teaching essay writing.

Reflective Observation

As learners are able to look at things from different perspectives and prefer to watch rather than do, inclining to gather information and use their imagination to solve problems and that they are best at viewing concrete situations from several different viewpoints (Malatji & Singh, 2017), which Kolb calls 'diverging' because these people perform better in situations that require idea generation, for example, brainstorming. Minor (2021) noted that learners who are visually literate can create meaning from images, which in turn improves their writing proficiency and critical thinking skills. By integrating visual literacy into classrooms, we help students learn to collaborate with visual texts such as pictures, posters, and book covers, which have been recommended as the most effective approaches to teaching essay writing. In this approach, teachers support the learners in analysing the texts. The role of the teacher is to facilitate the lesson. This can be done by asking them questions that guide them to their understanding of the subject content. In this context, the teacher provides the learners with visual texts that relate to the topic they are going to write about. The generated ideas are used to write a draft essay.

Abstract conceptualization

At this stage, the learners require good, clear explanations rather than practical opportunities. Learners need to be introduced to key concepts that would eventually assist them in excelling at understanding a wide range of information and organizing it in a clear, logical format. In the context of essay writing, the Grade 4 learners are introduced to some key aspects/concepts such as:

The given question in the words in which it was written; they should do this to avoid misreading the question and losing marks, because each aspect of the answer is allocated a specific mark.

- An introduction: it should be written because its role is to indicate what issues are to be discussed, and it has a specific mark allocated to it.
- Headings and sub-headings; each of them should be present in an answer because each one discusses an idea and has a specific mark allocated to it as well.
- A conclusion: its role is to round up the salient matters that are not to be forgotten, and it has its own mark allocated to it.
- References/bibliography; its role is to prove that the learner has read relevant sources before constructing the essay, and it has a mark allocation to it. This approach teaches learners the right way to become future scholars and
- A table of contents indicates where to find the different aspects of the essay and has a mark allocation as well. A table of contents is also one way of introducing learners to the skill of becoming future scholars (Mukhari & Mathipa, 2017, p. 219).

Active Experimentation

This is the stage where the learners are attracted to new challenges and experiences and can solve problems and make decisions by finding solutions to questions and problems. The learning style in this stage is 'hands-on.' The learners reflect on their experience learning. In other words, reflective observation and active observation help the learners to transform their experiences into knowledge. In this context, the Grade 4 learners use insight gained from the previous learning cycles through group discussions and key concepts (see abstract conceptualization) that the teacher introduced to them to produce an essay that is acceptable or complies with the competencies of the Grade. In line with Kolb's cycle of learning, the learners use insights gained from discussions with their fellow learners to write the essay as a process starting from prewriting, drafting, revising, editing, and proofreading. A discussion of how essay writing can be taught to learners using different stages of process writing will be discussed under process writing.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Qualitative research was used for this study because it "involves an interpretative and naturalistic approach to the world' (Mertens, 2010, p. 255). An interpretive paradigm was used with a Case study design. Neuman (2011) argues that the interpretive approach in qualitative research analyses social actions in their natural setting, through direct and detailed observation, to understand and interpret how people create meaning in their social world. Data was collected through document analysis, focus group interviews with the teachers, and lesson observations. The sample of this study consisted of eighteen (18) teachers from three primary schools of the Malamulele Central circuit. Purposive sampling was used to select teachers who taught grades 3 and 4 for more than five years. Data was analysed through a thematic approach.

Data Presentation

The participants responded to the interview questions below, which are accompanied by their verbatim responses**.**

Question: How, according to the CAPS document, should essay writing be taught to the Intermediate Phase learners?

Using mind maps to divide paragraphs

In response to the above question, all FGs, like in theme 2, where the question: "How, according to the CAPS document should essay writing be taught to the Foundation Phase learners?" was asked, the response in this theme to the question: *"How according to the CAPS document should essay writing be taught to the intermediate phase learners?"* Teaching essay writing as a process was not mentioned. **FG1 responded to the question as follows:**

> *"Grade 4 learners write essays in frames, while Grade 5 learners are expected to write 3 paragraphs, and Grade 6 learners write 5 paragraphs. The learners use mind maps to divide the paragraphs that they write.*

FG2 supports FG1 by responding to the same question as follows:

> *"Like in Grade 3, essay writing is taught to Grade 4 learners using frames. In Grade 5, the learners write essays using the skills of writing that they acquired in the Foundation Phase, but the learners who struggle to write essays continue to use frames. In Grade 6, learners select appropriate information from visual text like charts, tables, and diagrams, and write two to three paragraphs."*

Question: What language is used to teach essay writing in the Foundation Phase?
Since the language is important for learning and teaching, the LoTL should be developed from the Foundation Phase to allow learners in the Intermediate Phase to use it effectively, especially when writing essays in the English language. What followed was the sub-theme that emerged from the FGs' responses, and below were the FGs' responses to the above question.

Xitsonga as LoTL in the Foundation phase
FG1 *"English, but we translate the sentences to Xitsonga for the learners to understand"*
FG2: *"English but Foundation phase learners do not write essays"*
FG3: "*English"*
Looking at the FGs' responses above, all the FGs mentioned English as the LoTL used in the Foundation Phase. However, only FG1 mentioned that Translanguaging was used to teach essay writing in the Foundation Phase.

English as LoTL in the Intermediate Phase

Question: In which language are essay-writing skills taught in the Intermediate Phase?
FG1: *"English"*
FG2*: English*
FG3: *English*

Lack of English vocabulary
Accumulation of English vocabulary is important for learners learning to write in a second language because it contributes to the learners' learning to compose an essay that is academically acceptable. Moreover, without the English vocabulary, it is difficult and even impossible to begin composing an essay. This sub-theme was mentioned in theme 2, and it was repeated by FG1 in sub-theme 4.4.1.9. In response to the question: *In which way do you think EFAL can be a barrier to composing an English essay?* All FGs agreed that EFAL language was a barrier to writing an essay, and their responses to the above questions were as follows:
FG1: *"If the learners lack English vocabulary"*
FG2: *"When EFAL learners have not acquired enough vocabulary, they will find it hard to compose an essay*
FD3: *"If they do not have the skills and necessary vocabulary to write an essay."*
Looking at the responses above, all FGs agree that a lack of English vocabulary is a barrier to writing an EFAL essay.

Disjuncture in LoTL
LoTL in the Foundation Phase is Xitsonga, while in the Intermediate Phase, the LoTL is English. The discontinuity of a language contributed to learners' difficulty in understanding the subject content, let alone composing an academically acceptable essay in a language in which the learner is a novice. Regarding the source of the challenges that prevent learners from writing an essay that is academically acceptable, **FG1** responded to the question as follows:

> "*Language acquisition age is less than 7 years. The learners have a language barrier; as a result, they find it difficult to construct a sentence that makes sense. Furthermore, the learners lack basic skills of essay writing, such as writing a paragraph and punctuation skills".*

Writing a paragraph using correct linking words and correct punctuation marks requires an understanding of the language.
FG2 responded to the same question as follows:

> *"The source of the challenges that prevent learners from writing an essay that is academically accepted is a lack of English exposure as early as the foundation phase. This results in poor construction of a meaningful sentence. Doing all subjects in Xitsonga delays the learners in acquiring the vocabulary that they will need to write essays in the next grades."*

FG2, in their response to the question above, agreed with FG1 that the language barrier prevented the learners from writing an academically acceptable essay.

FG3 responded to the question as follows:

> *"The language of teaching and learning in the LoTL in the foundation phase is Xitsonga. The teaching in Xitsonga denies the learners an opportunity to acquire the English vocabulary they need to compose essays. This affects the intermediate phase learners negatively because at this level some learners still experience challenges in articulating sounds clearly, which even hinders them from spelling some words correctly."*

Like FG1 and FG2, FG3 agrees that language is the source of failure for learners to write an essay that is academically acceptable.

Considering the above, home language as LoTL in the Foundation Phase contributed to a learning barrier in writing essays in the Intermediate Phase. This was mentioned by FG3, who responded to the question as follows:

> *The teaching in Xitsonga denies the learners an opportunity to acquire the English vocabulary they need to compose essays. This affects the intermediate phase learners negatively because at this level some learners still experience challenges in articulating sounds clearly, which even hinders them from spelling some words correctly".*

Lack of baseline knowledge

It is important for the learners to have baseline knowledge of essay writing skills because the baseline knowledge helps the learners to connect the subject content of the Grade or Phase to which the learner is promoted. The teachers should assess whether the learners possess the baseline knowledge. The assessment provides guidance as to how the lesson should be approached. This also assists the teacher in detecting what support to provide to struggling learners on the specific aspect of the subject.

The researcher asked the question to find out the challenges that EFAL learners experienced in learning to write an essay. **FG2** responded to the question as follows*:*

> *"The EFAL has a challenge of writing correct spellings and the correct way of writing a paragraph."*

Incorrect spelling can mislead the reader by making them interpret the sentence incorrectly**.** The source of incorrect spelling in most cases was identified as incorrectly pronouncing words. For example, learners spelled bad, bird, and bed according to how they pronounced them**.** The following sentence, for example, could be interpreted as a person sleeping on a bird, whose leg is broken. "The bird on which I am sleeping is broken".

FG3 responded to the question as follows*:*

> *"The learners have a challenge of constructing a comprehensible English essay because they have poor language proficiency."*

Reflecting on the above responses, generally, the teachers' responses to the question indicated that the articulation gap between the Foundation and Intermediate Phases contributed to the Grade 6 learners' failure to write EFAL essays. The FGs mentioned that the learners in the Intermediate Phase had a challenge of writing essays in the English language because their language proficiency was poor. Lack of proficiency in the English Language resulted from the teaching of all subjects in the Foundation Phase in Xitsonga. The LoTL in the Foundation Phase denied the learners an opportunity to acquire the English vocabulary that was necessary for communication and writing of the essays. To add to the challenges that are experienced by learners in the Intermediate Phase, essay writing in the Foundation Phase was taught in Frames, which did not prepare the learners adequately to write an essay in the Intermediate Phase. In addition, the transition from 4 to 6 subjects created a challenge for the learners. First, the LoTL in the Intermediate Phase is English. In addition to English, which learners must adapt, there are two subjects, Natural Sciences and Technology and Human Sciences, which the learners did for the first time in the English language.

Question: Do the strategies you use to teach essay writing skills prepare learners to be future writers? Why/why not?

In response to the question above, FG1 and FG3 mentioned that the strategies they use to teach essay-writing skills do prepare learners to be future writers. In response to the question above, **FG1 responded as follows:**

> *"Yes, because the learners are given a chance to think about what they are going to write about in order for them to write what they know."*

FG3 responded to the same question as follows:

> *"Yes, because the brainstorming exercise that we engage the learners in prepares the learners to write, and they do helps the learners improve their writing skills".*

FG2 slightly agreed with their counterparts by responding as follows:

> "*The strategies do not help learners that much, for example, learners with vocabulary do write better essays, which means they will eventually become good writers, while learners who lack English vocabulary struggle a lot, and they may not be good writers in the future".*

Question: How do you engage the learners in essay writing activities?

Activation of the learners' prior knowledge

FG1 responded as follows:

> *"We talk about the story/topic as a class to establish the knowledge the learners already have about it. Then, identify the vocabulary to be used, and finally let the learners write an essay as a process".*

Using the teacher and learner guides to engage learners in essay writing

> *We guide them using the lesson plans that are provided to us by the Department of Education. The lesson plans (textbooks) that we use to teach essay writing have teacher guides and essay tasks that we use to engage the learners. The teacher guide has all the steps that a teacher should follow" (**FG2**).*

Generating essay writing ideas through brainstorming exercises

FG3 responded as follows

> *"We engage the learners in a brainstorming exercise so that they can generate ideas that they should use to write an essay. We then use the brainstormed ideas to guide them to write an essay. The learners practice essay writing guided by the teacher. We give them instructions on what to do and how to write an essay."*

Looking at the participants' responses above, the activities that the participants involved learners in teaching essay writing do not fully prepare learners to write an academically acceptable essay. FG2 relied on the lesson plans and teacher guides provided to them by the Department of Basic Education. FG3 engaged the learners in just two activities, namely, brainstorming exercises and using the brainstormed ideas to write an essay. **FG1** mentioned that *"We talk about the story/topic as a class to establish the knowledge the learners already have about it. Then identify the vocabulary to be used, and finally let the learners write an essay as a process,* while FG1 mentioned that they identify learners' prior knowledge and use the identified vocabulary to write the essay as a process.

Question: Which aspects of essay writing do you emphasize when teaching learners essay writing skills?

Emphasis on the flow of the message, punctuation, and spelling

FG1: "*We emphasise the flow of message, punctuation, and spelling."*

Emphasis on relevance to the text

FG2: *We emphasise relevance to the text".*

Emphasis on planning

FG3: *"We emphasize planning because it will be difficult for learners to write an essay if it is not planned".*

Looking at the above, the major challenges that the learners face in learning essay writing include inadequate content mastery, poor command of English, limited English language vocabulary, and inadequate teaching and learning time. All the challenges that were presented in this theme established and justified the need by the Department of Basic Education to revisit the Curriculum for the Foundation and Intermediate Phases and redesign the Curriculum so that it does not have loopholes.

DISCUSSIONS AND ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

The results and discussions were based on the following sub-themes: Using mind maps to divide paragraphs; use of visual texts; Xitsonga as LoTL in the Foundation phase; lack of necessary vocabulary; disjuncture in LoTL; lack of baseline knowledge; process writing approach; and emphasis on planning.

Using mind maps to divide paragraphs

The study has revealed that using mind maps to subdivide paragraphs is an effective approach that helps learners to write essay paragraphs. To write paragraphs that logically flow requires planning. Pre-writing refers to the first stage of the writing process (Mogahed, 2013, p. 60), which is followed by drafting, revision, editing, and sharing (Samsudin, 2016, p. 89). Mogahed (2013) and Graham (2006) perceive planning as the production of content and organization of ideas. It was recommended that learners use ideas generated through brainstorming to write paragraphs. From the mind map, the learners should move counterclockwise, taking the first point as an introduction and the last point on the mind map to write a conclusion.

Use of visual texts

Visual texts such as posters, picture books, and pictures are used as a starting point for teaching essay writing. Visual text can benefit learners who have trouble imagining ideas. As with visual text, learners analyse the images and write an essay. According to Minor (2021), learners who are visually literate can create meaning from images, which in turn improves their writing proficiency and critical thinking skills. By integrating visual literacy into classrooms, we help students learn to collaborate with visual texts such as pictures, posters, and book covers, which have been recommended as the most effective approaches to teaching essay writing. In this approach, teachers support the learners in analysing the texts. The role of the teacher is to facilitate the lesson. This can be done by asking them questions that guide them to their understanding of the subject content. The study found that the misalignment between the Foundation Phase and Intermediate Phase curricula in essay-writing lessons contributes to the failure of the Grade 6 learners in writing essays that are academically accepted. Solati-Dehkordi and Salehi (2016: 141) record that "The difficulty stems from the fact

that generating and organizing ideas and then translating them into readable text is time-consuming and long-sought skills even for native speakers". As a result, teachers fail to engage the learners in the process of essay writing, such as planning/prewriting, drafting, revising, and editing. It was recommended that the Department of Basic Education consider revising the teaching time allocated to writing to allow sufficient time to teach essay writing, given that, as L2 learners, the teachers must assist learners by engaging them in activities that generate the ideas to use in writing EFAL essays. In addition, to assist learners effectively, the teachers teach essay writing in an integrated way, wherein certain aspects of language, such as reported speech and active and passive voice, or language structure and conventions, are incorporated.
Furthermore, the process-writing approach emphasizes that writing itself is a developmental process that creates self-discovery and meaning. The self-discovery is evident in that teachers give to the learners an opportunity to do several revisions on their essays that result in improved writing quality" (Othman & Mohamad, 2009), because the composing process requires much revision and rewriting of essay drafts. Unlike in the product approach to the teaching of writing, where the teachers engage learners in controlled writing activities, in which "learners would copy the provided sentences, and change them where necessary, or fill in the blanks" (Onazawa, 2010, p. 156), the teacher in the process approach guides students during the composing process.

Lack of English vocabulary

Lack of English vocabulary emerged as a learning barrier. Lack of vocabulary refers to an "ability to use a word properly and effectively in a foreign language" (Solati-Dehkordi & Salehi, 143). The lack of English vocabulary compels teachers to use Translanguaging to teach essay writing in a way that the learners understand. This was evident in lessons observed by the researcher, where instructions on how activities should be carried out were emphasized in Xitsonga, so that learners should understand what was expected of them. During a brainstorming exercise, teacher A2 in School A wrote a sentence in both Xitsonga and English to indicate how L2 production can be positively facilitated by L1 when the relevant unit or structure of both languages is the same.

Disjuncture in LoTL

The study revealed that the discontinuity in LoTL in the Foundation Phase was a learning barrier (Pretorius, 2014, p. 51). This is supported by Bronkhorst and Akkerman (2016), who recorded that discontinuity in LoTL has severe implications for students' learning and participation in school. In this context, the learners will find it difficult to understand the subject content taught in the new language (English), let alone writing an essay in the language, which they do not understand. The LoTL in the Foundation Phase should continue to be used in the next grades.

In the case of this study, the LoTL in the Foundation Phase is Xitsonga. It was recommended that the LoTL in the Foundation Phase should be English, as in the next grades, learners learn all the subjects except Xitsonga in English. The LoTL, if used from the Foundation Phase, could reduce the missing vocabulary challenges, as learners acquire the vocabulary, some of which could be relevant to the topics they are given to write EFAL essays. In addition, the challenges L2 learners face in grammatical accuracy, which include spelling, structure of sentences, use of different types of sentences, agreement between subject and verb, placement of modifiers, tense agreement and parallel construction and punctuation to master the writing skill as noted by Faroq (2012), could be reduced as learners become familiar with the English language for the classroom, by hearing from different teachers how certain words are used in sentences, and while studying and writing in the other subjects, they learn at the same time to spell words correctly.

Lack of baseline knowledge

The study has revealed that baseline knowledge helps learners relate the subject content or knowledge acquired in the previous Grade or Phase to the subject content of the next Grade or Phase. However, to achieve this, the teachers should first establish the learners' prior knowledge of what they intend to teach. It should be noted that there is no single learner who does not have prior knowledge because Vygotsky (1978) noted that children begin learning from the behaviours, attitudes, values, and skills of the people around them. In the composition of an essay, for example, the prior knowledge of a given topic can help in expanding the ideas the learners will use to compose the essay, but this can be possible if the learners see the connection between what they already know and what they are being taught. Abdelaal (2014) refers to prior knowledge or schemata as cognitive knowledge that is gained through experience and stored in long-term memory. The fact that the prior knowledge is stored in the long-term memory indicates that it does not have to be generated but is available for use. Prior knowledge plays a crucial role during teaching and learning because it establishes a connection between the knowledge that was already gained and what they are being taught.

Process writing approach

The process approach has been revealed as the approach that was used for essay writing. The teaching approach if applied well prepares learners to write an essay that is academically acceptable, because its emphasis is on (Silva & Matsuda, 2001) the teaching of writing, not as a product, but as a process, helping learners to discover their own voices, allowing learners to choose their own topics, providing teacher and peer feedback, encouraging pre-reading, drafting, revising, and editing (Onazawa, 2010, p. 157), and using learners' writing as the primary text of the course. This view is supported by Thinley (2013), who explains that in this writing approach, learners analyse a topic moving forward and backward, until a

writing piece is refined and finalized. Bayat (2014:1133) posits that process writing treats writing not as a completed product, but as a process, and the teacher acts as a guide.

According to Samsudin (2016:88), the process writing "entails the provision of an assertive, supportive, and collaborative workshop setting within which students, with sufficient time and little intervention, can work through their composing processes." The teacher's role is only to facilitate students to develop workable strategies for "getting started by helping students to find topics, generate ideas and information, focus and plan structure and procedure for drafting and encouraging students to do multiple drafts, for revising, allowing students to add, delete, modify, and rearrange ideas, and for editing by attending to vocabulary, sentence structure, grammar, and mechanics" (Silva, 1990, p. 15).

The process writing approach to writing, depending on the writer's preferred way of approaching the writing process, "involves several steps" (Onazawa, 2010, p. 155). This is so because the concept of the process approach has now evolved in different ways in different places (Caudery,1995), hence according to Onazawa (2010, p. 153), it is not easy to introduce these techniques directly into ESL classes, because the process approach was originally developed for the L1 classroom. The approach to writing, as I indicated above, comprises a sequence of several steps, which the writer should follow. A typical sequence, according to Onazawa (2010), comprises three steps, namely: pre-writing, drafting, and revising. Some sequences use four steps, such as thinking, planning, writing, and editing (Onazawa, 2010, p. 155), while Caudery (1997) identifies the four stages of writing as pre-writing, drafting/composing, revising, and editing. Faraj (2015) identifies five steps: "prewriting, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing," while William and Mary (2015:2) identify six steps as follows: "Brainstorming, outline**,** rough draft**,** evaluation**,** final draft**,** and publishing".

Although these steps are different in numbers and phrases, they are all a "cyclical approach, rather than a single-shot approach (Onazawa, 2010), which means that learners are not expected to produce and submit complete and polished responses to their writing assignments without going through the identified steps of the writing process. This view is supported by Onazawa (2010) who states that, "the writing process is not necessarily a linear learning process, rather more of a recursive or spiralling process, as the learners move around these steps, sometimes going forward and retracing their steps". This view is supported by Samsudin (2016) who states that "Any time during this process of writing, students may go back to researching for information on the topic they have chosen, when they find they do not have enough information about it or selecting a new topic, if they realize they are not interested in their earlier chosen topic." To recapitulate, process writing is a more formal approach in which learners write a first draft, then revise and edit it to a final polished version (Graham & Sandmel, 2011, p. 397). Based on the above, the Foundation Phase learners could start composing essays in English from the onset, instead of delaying starting writing essay in English in the Intermediate Phase, to avoid the challenges regarding the struggle in English later on, like we have seen in the studies that have been conducted by Burkhalter (2000); Blackstone (2014); and Malatji and Singh (2018) could be minimized.

Orientation to the task

The study found that teachers orient learners to the task before they write it. Mellon (1989:2) states that, "if writing were a straightforward, expressive rather than strategic process, there would be little need for the adaptive search, rhetorical planning, linguistic manipulation, and problem diagnosis we observe in writers". From Mellon's view, the orientation of the learners to the topics that they must write about is crucial for the learners to begin writing their essays with less difficulty. The learners at this stage should be orientated to the essay, considering the learners' background, because the ability to write well is not a naturally acquired skill, but learned or culturally transmitted (Myles, 2002). To this end, Prince and Felder's (2006) inductive approach to learning could be used. Prince and Felder (2006:2) define inductive teaching and learning as an "umbrella term that encompasses a range of instructional methods, including inquiry learning, problem-based learning, project-based learning, case-based teaching, discovery learning, and just-in-time teaching". According to Jones, Holland and Oldmeadow (2009), the inductive method was developed on the premise that additional stimulation of student initiative would enhance the learning experience. The authors cite Tenenbaum et al. (2006) as having said that the basis for the inductive method is the intuitive theory, which involves a system of related concepts, together with a set of causal laws, structural constraints, or explanatory principles that guide inductive inference in a particular domain. Obeidat and Alomari (2020) note that in an inductive classroom, the teacher makes use of a strategy known as "noticing". Bilash (2009:1) postulates that the learners should be given the chance to derive the rule from the examples provided to them, so that they can notice a concept, a structure, or a rule, which they can hold in their short- or long-term memory.

As in inductive learning, "individuals actively construct and reconstruct their own reality in an effort to make sense of their experience" (Prince & Felder, 2006). The teachers should present the learners with a challenge of essay writing.

To teach the learners essay writing effectively, before a topic is taught, a series of lessons using any inductive method, the instructor should write learning objectives that define what the student should be able to do (explain, calculate, derive, design, model, critique...) when the instruction has been concluded. The objectives should guide the choice of focus problems, learning activities, and assessment (Prince & Felder, 2006).

Depending on the individual teacher, the orientation of the learners to essay writing could be in the form of brainstorming or word chains activities. The activities assist in getting the learners "to think" (Onazawa, 2010) about the words related to the topic. Al-Khatib (2012, cited in Al-magharwy, 2012) defined brainstorming as a group activity forum for general ideas. In this teaching activity, the teacher encourages the learners to think of the ideas that come to their

minds about the specific chosen topic (Silva & Matsuda, 2011). The learners write ideas or words, which will be used to tackle the writing task on the board, even if the words are not really related to the topic. This activity encourages the learners "to come up with thoughts and ideas that can, at first, seem a bit crazy. Some of these ideas can be crafted into original, creative solutions to a problem, while others can spark even more ideas" (AlMutairi, 2015). This activity should not be ignored when teaching essay writing, because it helps to get the learners unstuck by "jolting" them out of their normal ways of thinking, to get people unstuck by "jolting" them out of their normal ways of thinking ((AlMutairi, 2015).

Planning the text/ Pre-writing

The study found that a text is planned before the learners write an essay. The planning or pre-writing refers to the first stage of the writing process" (Mogahed, 2013), which is followed by drafting, revision, editing, and sharing (Samsudin, 2016). Like Mogamed (2013), Graham (2006) perceives planning as the production of content and organization of ideas. This stage deals with coming up with ideas, whether they are relevant to the topic or not (Mogahed, 2013). "During this stage, the student explores and focuses on the purpose, audience, topic, and form that the writing task could take" (O'Mealia, 2011). Dawson (2017) adds that planning your essay allows you to write strategically, and having some basic knowledge means you can come up with your key points before deciding on an order. So, if structure is your weakness, always plan and clarify your ideas before you begin. The teachers and the learners discuss the criteria that would be used to assess their essays, the purpose, audience, and context, which determines the style of writing, and the new vocabulary that is suitable for the chosen topic is introduced (Samsudin, 2016). By doing so, the learners are being prepared to write their essay with less struggle, as they will know what is expected of them in this writing task. The knowledge of how their essay will be assessed serves as a checklist, which learners will use in every step of their essay writing to check if their essays comply with the criteria of assessment.

Teacher should guide the learners (Onazawa, 2010) to plan their essays using pre-writing activities that are based on the prior knowledge of the learners, because "very often subjects matter rely exclusively on their knowledge to produce a text" (Mellon, 1989). In the very beginning of the essay writing, the learners should be made aware of different types of textual organization (Swales, 1990; Raimes, 1991, 1998, cited in Myles, 2002). In this light, the learners should be provided with the different models of essays to look at and read for them to analyse structure, language features, and selected registers in the writing of the essay. At this stage, the learners should also discuss the purpose, audience, and context, which determine the style or register, and the criteria the teacher and learners will use to evaluate the essays.

In so doing, the learners' awareness regarding the way words, structures, and genres contribute to purposeful writing is raised (Myles, 2002). The teacher acts as a guide (Bayat, 2014, p. 1133), guiding the learners toward a conscious awareness of how the audience will interpret their work, and this makes learners write their essays with readiness (Kern, 2000). Thereafter, the learners "brainstorm" (AlMutairi, 2015) the topic using mind maps and discuss the criteria that will be used to evaluate their essays, which should then be followed by researching for relevant information for the chosen topic in a library. Then, the teachers engage the learners in brainstorming ideas for the topic, giving them an opportunity to research the topic (Samsudin, 2016) and select relevant information by identifying the main ideas and supporting details, because brainstorming provides the learners with a free and open environment that encourages everyone to participate (AlMutairi, 2015).

Revising, editing, and proofreading

The study found that a draft copy should go through revision, editing, and be proofread beforehand to produce a final copy that is academically acceptable. According to Wasoh (1999); Othman and Mohamad (2009), the revising, editing, and proofreading stages engage the learners in a number of revisions of their essays to improve their essays in terms of quality and organization of ideas. In these writing phases, teachers encourage the learners to read and evaluate their own written essays and each other's work (Simpson, 2013) for improvement using set criteria. Nieman, Swanepoel, and Venter (2019:200) suggest that the list of criteria should include sequencing of paragraphs, eliminating ambiguity, verbosity, and any offensive language; use of grammar, spelling, and punctuation correctly; preparing the final draft, including layout, like headings and fonts. The grammar should also be corrected to make the essay readable, but special focus should be given to the meaning and the purpose of the text. The teachers "intervene at all stages by providing their comments and suggestions" (Wasoh, 1999).

Reflection

The study found that an essay cannot be considered academically acceptable if there is no theory attached to it. Salima, Susulawati, and Hanif (2021), cited by Livingstone (2019), explained reflection as a process of connecting theory and practices through a continuous thought process. "Reflection occurs when students consciously consider, review, and evaluate their learning experiences" (Salima, Susulawati & Hanif, 2021) and "engages individuals in exploring their experiences to lead to new understandings and appreciations (Boud et al., 2005, cited in Salima, Susulawati & Hanif, 2021). Watton, Collings and Moon (2001) stated that reflective writing provides an opportunity for learners to gain further insights from their work through deeper reflection on their experiences, and through further consideration of other perspectives from people and theory. Accordingly, on completion of their writing, the learners should reflect on their writing, so that they can trace back all activities they went through during the writing process (Samsudin, 2016). The learners do this by asking themselves questions that answer how they approached their writing task and whether the

method that was used to write the task was a good method or not. They should also identify the activities that contributed to the success of the final product (Nieman, Swanepoel & Venter, 2012).

CONCLUSION

The study concluded that the articulation gap between the Foundation and the Intermediate Phases was the source of Grade 4 EFAL learners' failure to write essays that are academically acceptable in terms of the standard stipulated in the CAPS document. The teaching of essay writing through frames and learning to write and edit in learners' home language does not adequately prepare learners for the competencies as laid down in the CAPS document, as such, posed a challenge to Grade 4 learners, as they are expected to write an essay creatively, which they did not do in the previous grade. From the findings above, the study concluded that the Curriculum between the Foundation and Intermediate Phases should be revised, and the LoTL in the Foundation Phase should be English.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The study recommended that:

- Translanguaging should be used to teach EFAL essay writing in the Intermediate phase.
- English as LoTL should start from the Foundation Phase.
- Learners should be taught important skills of essay writing.
- The Curriculum between the Foundation and the Intermediate Phase should be revised in a way that bridges the gap.

REFERENCES

1. Abdullah, Y. L., & Yunus, M. (2019). The use of pictures in improving students' writing. *Modern journal of language teaching methods.* 9(4); 1 – 8.
2. Al-gharabally, M**. (**2015). The writing difficulties faced by learners and how to minimize them. *International journal of English language.* 21(2), 11-29.
3. Almutari, A.N.M. (2015). *The Effect of Using Brainstorming Strategy in Developing Creative Problem-Solving Skills among Male Students in Kuwait: A Field Study on Saud Al-Kharji School in Kuwait City.* Kuwait: Institute of Education Sciences
4. Bayat, N. (2014). The Effect of the Process Writing Approach on Writing Success and Anxiety *Educational Sciences Theory & Practice.* 14(3). 1133 - 1141
5. Bilash, O. (2009*). Improve your classroom practice through action research - Become a researcher of your own instruction in the Ihla Newsletter*. 1 - 15
6. Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3*(2), 77–101. https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa
7. Bronkhorst, L.H., & Akkerman, S. (2016). *At the boundary of school: Continuity and discontinuity in learning across contexts.* London: Sage.
8. Bulgivah, S, Mahbub, M., & Nugraheni, D.A. (2021). Investigating writing difficulties in essay writing: Tertiary students' perspectives. *English Language Teaching Educational Journal.* 4(1), 61–73.
9. Chin, C., & Osborne, J. (2008*).* Students' Questions: A Potential Resource for Teaching and Learning Science. *Studies in Science Education*, 44, 1–39.
10. Department of Basic Education. (2010). *Curriculum and assessment policy statement (CAPS*). Pretoria: Government Publication
11. Dul, J. & Hak, T. (2008). *Case Study Methodology in Business Research.* London: Taylor & Francis.
12. Ferris, D.R. (195). *Student Reactions to Teacher Response in Multiple-Draft Composition Classrooms.* Sacramento: California State University.
13. Fisher, G.G., & Scott, K. A. (2011). *Closing the skills and technology gap in South Africa: Background Paper 3: The role of higher education in closing the skills gap in South Africa*. Pretoria: Kagiso.
14. Graham, S., & Sandmel, K. (2011). The Process Writing Approach: A meta-analysis. *The Journal of Educational Research*. 104 (6): 396– 407.
15. Hollard, A.J.A., & Oldmeadow, W. (2009). *Inductive teaching method - An alternate method forsmall group learning.* London: Taylor & Francis Group
16. Hsieh, H. F., & Shannon, S. E. (2005). Three Approaches to Qualitative Content Analysis. Qualitative Health Research, 15, 1277–1288. *International Journal of Higher Education*, 9(2), 280–288.
17. Kaur, H.S.G. (2013). U*se of process writing to enhance students' abilities among year 5 pupils*. Malaisia: Universiti Teknologi Malasisa.
18. Khasipe, T.C. (2017). *Scaffolding 'reading for meaning' experiences for high school English language learners to improve performance*. Bloemfontein: University of the Free State: Bloemfontein learning environment.
19. Kolb, D.A. (1984). *Experimental Learning: Experience as a Source of Learning and Development*, Prentice Hall, Englewood Cliffs, NJ.
20. Leedy, P.D., & Ormrod, J.E. (2005). *Practical research- planning and design.* (8th Ed.) New York: Pearson Prentice

21. MalatjI, K.S., & Singh, R.J. (2018). Implications of the articulation gap between Geography learners in secondary schools and university, *Alternation*, 21(2018), 91-108
22. Mogahed, M. (2013*). Planning out pre-writing activities***.** Saudi Arabia: Mustaqbal University
23. Mukhari, S.S., & Mathipa, E.R. (2016). *The fault is not in students, but in the programmes that teaching open distance learning institutions provide: a case of adult basic education and training students.* Pretoria: Government Publication.
24. Nnamdi-Eruchalu, G.I., & Akaruese, C.U. (2017). *C*losing the Gap in the Use of English Course in Nigerian Tertiary Institutions through ESP. *Scientific Research Journal*, 5(7), 2201-2796
25. Obeidat, M.M., & Alomari, M A. (2020). The Effect of Inductive and Deductive Teaching on EFL Undergraduates' Achievement in Grammar at the Hashemite University in Jordan. *International Journal of Higher Education, 9(2), 280-288*
26. Onozawa, C. (2010). *A study of the process writing approach – a suggestion for an eclectic writing approach,* Pretoria: Kagiso.
27. Othman, S.B., & Mohamad F. (2009). *The Effects of Teacher Feedback on Multiple-Drafts Compositions in ESL Classrooms*. Malaysia: Universiti Teknologi MARA.
28. Pretorius, E.J. (2014). Supporting transition or playing catch-up in grade 4? Implications for standards in education and training. *Perspectives in education.* 32 (1); 51–76.
29. Prince, M.J., & Felder, R.M. (2006). Inductive Teaching and Learning Methods: Definitions, comparisons, and research bases. *Journal of Engineering Education*, 9(5), 123–138.
30. Sebolai, K. (2019). *Validating the performance standards set for language assessments of academic readiness: The case of Stellenbosch University*. Stellenbosch: Language Centre, Stellenbosch University http://dx.doi.org/10.5842/56-0-796
31. Silva, T. (1990). *Second language composition instruction: Developments, issues, and directions in ESL.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
32. Silva, T., & Matsuda, P.K. (2001). *Landmark Essays on ESL Writing*. Mahwah, NJ: Pergamon
33. Singh, G.K.S. (2014). *Use of process writing to enhance students' abilities among year 5 pupils*. London: Universiti Teknologi Malasisa.
34. Siyepu, S. (2013). The zone of proximal development in the learning of mathematics, *South African Journal of Education,* 33(2), 1-13.
35. Solati-dehkordi, S.A., & SalehI. H. (2016). Impact of explicit vocabulary instruction on writing achievement of upper-intermediate EFL learners. *international education studies*; vol. 9(4), 141-166.
36. Tenenbaum, J.B., Griffiths, T.L., & Kemp, C. (2006). *Theory-Based Bayesian Models of Inductive Learning and Reasoning. Trends in Cognitive Sciences*, 10(1), 309–318. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tics.2006.05.009
37. Thinley, P. (2013). *How does teaching of process writing approach (PA) help students with their writing?* JISTE, 17 (2). 70 - 80
38. Trochim, W.M. (2006). *Research methods knowledge base*, (2nd ed.) . Retrieved from http://www.socialresearchmethods.net/kb/ [Google Scholar]
39. Veerapan, V.A., Suan, L.W.H., & Sulaiman, T. (2011). The effect of scaffolding technique in journal writing among the second language learners. *Journal of language teaching and research,* 2(4), 934-940.
40. Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in Society: The Development of Higher Psychological Processes.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press
41. Watton, P., Collings, J., & Moon, J. (2001). *Reflective Writing*: *Guidance notes for students.* Exeter: University of Exeter
42. Yin, R.K. (2003). *Application of Case Study Research (2nd ed.).* Thousand Oaks: Sage.
43. Zhou, H. (2015). Approaches to language teaching and learning. *Journal of language teaching and research*, 6(1), 189–195.