

Teachers' and Learners' Experiences of Learners' Writing in English First Additional Language

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Abstract : There is an international concern to develop children's literacy skills. In many parts of the world, the need to become fluent in a second language is essential for gaining meaningful access to education, the labour market and broader social functioning. In spite of these efforts, the problem still continues. The level of English language proficiency is far from satisfactory and these goals are unattainable by others. The issue is more complex in South Africa as learners are immersed in a second language (L2) curriculum. South Africa is a prime example of a country facing the dilemma of how to effectively equip a majority of its population with English as a second language or first additional language (FAL). Given the multilingual nature of South Africa with eleven official languages, and the position and power of English, the study investigates teachers' and learners' experiences on isiXhosa and Afrikaans background learners' writing in English First Additional Language (EFAL). Moreover, possible causes of writing difficulties and teacher's practices for writing are explored. The theoretical and conceptual framework for the study is provided by studies on constructivist theories and sociocultural theories. In exploring these issues, a qualitative approach through semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis were adopted. This data is analysed by critical discourse analysis (CDA). The study identified a weak correlation between teachers' beliefs and their actual teaching practices. Although the teachers believe that writing is as important as listening, speaking, reading, grammar and vocabulary, and that it needs regular practice, the data reveal that they fail to put their beliefs into practice. Moreover, the data revealed that learners were disturbed by their home language because when they do not know a word they would write either the isiXhosa or the Afrikaans equivalent. Code-switching seems to have instilled a sense of "dependence on translations" where some learners would not even try to answer English questions but would wait for the teacher to translate the questions into isiXhosa or Afrikaans before they could attempt to give answers. The findings of the study show a marked improvement in the writing performance of learners who used the process approach in writing. These findings demonstrate the need for assisting teachers to shift away from focusing only on learners' performance (testing and grading) towards a stronger emphasis on the process of writing. The study concludes that the process approach to writing could enable teachers to focus on the various parts of the writing process which can give more freedom to learners to experiment their language proficiency. It would require that teachers develop a deeper understanding of the process/genre approaches to teaching writing advocated by CAPS. All in all, the study shows that both learners and teachers face numerous challenges relating to writing. This means that more work still needs to be done in this area. The present study argues that teachers teaching EFAL learners should approach writing as a critical and core aspect of learners' education. Learners should be exposed to intensive writing activities throughout their school years.

Keywords : constructivism, English second language, language of learning and teaching, writing

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