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Causes of Poor Argumentative English Essay Writing at Lesotho Secondary Education

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Abstract

Lesotho uses English as a medium of instruction throughout all levels of education except in grades 1, 2 and 3 in all government schools. This language situation imposes challenges to learners of English as a second language (ESL). This becomes more evident at Junior Certificate (JC) level where English is taken as a passing subject. A number of reports from the Examinations Council of Lesotho (ECOL) endorse that the problem of English Language is still apparent at Lesotho General Certificate of Secondary Education (LGCSE). This is observed where most reports stipulate that English essay writing; especially argumentative essay writing is not satisfactorily performed at LGCSE. The literature in this area, however, appears to be limited. This study, therefore, investigated causes of poor English argumentative essay writing at LGCSE. Grounded on the Attribution Theory of Success and Failure by Weiner 1972, the study followed a qualitative approach in which a case of three high schools in Leribe district was employed. Data was collected from the sample drawn from grade 11 learners and their English Language teachers using a test, questionnaires and a focus group discussion with teachers. The findings revealed, among others, that most learners fail to perform English argumentative essay writing well due to failure to argue their points convincingly. Additionally, the study discovered that some learners fail to use

language accurately, fail to observe instructions and sometimes are not knowledgeable on the subject matter. The study then recommended, among others, field trips and regular exercises on English argumentative essay writing.

Keywords: *Poor argumentative essay, English essay writing, Secondary education, Argument, Attribution Theory of Success and Failure*

Introduction

English Language is used as a medium of instruction in many countries of the world. Sharifian (2009) adds that it is an international language. It is in the former British colony countries such as India, the Philippines, and Ghana where the language assumed the role of a second language and a medium of instruction in education (Munduku, Nyawara & Kosgey, 2017). Zanda (2021) complements that even in countries like Paraguay, Mali, Boliva and Ivory Coast which were never colonised by Britain, English is still used as an international language. This marks the importance of English globally. Lesotho, as a former British protectorate, has also adopted English as a second official language (Laitin, 1977). This is endorsed in the Language Bill of Lesotho (USA International Business Publications, 2009). It is further noted by Khati and Khati (2009) that English is also given an added advantage of being a passing subject. This language situation imposes challenges to learners and teachers of English as a second language (ESL) in Lesotho (Yong, Mei & Chee, 2015). This becomes more observable at Junior Certificate (JC) level where learners who fail English Language do not pass the JC examinations and English argumentative essay writing forms part of learners' assessment at this level (ECOL, 2016). It is, therefore, important to ensure that English as a subject is well taught at all levels, especially the skills of writing. Writing skills need to be more emphasised because it is where learner's ability to write is assessed. Scott (1996) warns that this becomes more challenging in situations where English is taught as the second language especially in essay writing. Learners are assessed on different types of English essay writing with argumentative essay inclusive (ECOL, 2012 & ECOL, 2014).

It is essential to teach argumentative essay writing because it develops critical thinking in learners. It can build open, critical and analytic future citizens of the country who may not accept whatever is tabled before their eyes. It entails critical skills that help learners think critically over decisions they make on any issue. To validate this notion, Zheng, Meng

and Zhou (2017) assert that China perceives argumentative essay writing as a core objective of tertiary education. In various countries, studies were conducted to find out how learners can be helped to perform argumentative essay writing better. For example, WeiZhu (2001) and Hirose (2003) conducted their qualitative studies on the difficulties brought up by the use of second language in argumentative essay writing in Canada and Japan respectively. Anthony and Zulkifli (2013) also conducted a qualitative study on the use of prepositions of time 'on' and 'at' in the argumentative essays of Form D and Form E Malaysian secondary learners. In her qualitative study, Hammer (2017) in Australia, maintains that though argumentative essay writing is a popular form of university assessment, learners still struggle to meet key intended learning outcomes. In response to this situation, Jangarun et al. (2016) carried out a study on differences and similarities in the use of discourse connectors in English argumentative essays of American undergraduate students. Their qualitative study intended to show the importance of conjunctions in argumentative essay writing. Amandla and Christine (2017) also investigated a related qualitative study on the use of evidence to support and develop arguments from high schools to the universities in Spain, all in the name of addressing the challenges students face in the teaching and learning of English argumentative essay writing.

In Lesotho too, Lebona (2019) employed a qualitative approach to investigate causes of improper tense shifts in English essay writing at LGCSE using three high schools in Maseru district. In his study, he discovered factors that cause improper tense shifts in English essay writing at LGCSE. Mpoi (2014) also conducted her qualitative study on the factors that influence learners to commit errors in English Language acquisition. In her study, she showed causes of errors in spelling and its impact on the learner's work. This may imply that grammatical errors may have a direct impact on English essay writing at LGCSE inclusive of argumentative essay writing. On the other hand, Tlali (2021) too investigated the influence of culture on animal colours in English descriptive essay writing at LGCSE. He discovered that, among others, lexical variations and social practices and beliefs have a direct influence on how learners describe animal colours in English descriptive essay writing. This may suggest that social practices and beliefs may also have an influence on English argumentative essay writing.

Thobi (2020) also investigated subject-verb agreement errors by ESL learners in composition writing in three selected high schools in Botha-Bothe district. His study revealed mother tongue interference and non-

English speaking environments as sources of subject-verb agreement errors among ESL learners. These and other studies seem to focus on the language aspects pertaining to English argumentative essay writing even though there can be other non-language aspects impacting on the essay. It is, therefore, important to critically investigate causes of poor English argumentative essay writing at LGCSE. The main research question for this study, therefore, is ‘what are the causes of poor English argumentative essay writing at LGCSE?’ Subsidiary research questions are (a) What challenges do teachers face in the teaching and learning of English argumentative essay writing at LGCSE? (b) What challenges do learners face in the teaching and learning of English argumentative essay writing at LGCSE?

Statement of the problem

As shown in the introduction, a number of research studies have been conducted in various ESL countries on different language aspects pertaining to argumentative essay writing. The studies revealed that most learners find it challenging to write argumentatively. Regardless of all efforts to find out why learners fail to perform well in English argumentative essay writing, to date, English argumentative essay writing still appears challenging to ESL learners. This is affirmed by ECOL (2015) which reveals that learners at LGCSE who choose to write on English argumentative topics do not perform well. Drawing from the existing literature and one of the researchers’ fifteen years of experience teaching English Language, the problem seemingly continues to exist as echoed by ECOL (2019). However, in the absence of research on what specifically causes the challenge, it is important to emphatically investigate the causes of poor argumentative English essay writing at Lesotho secondary education, a level that serves as a transition to tertiary education.

Review of literature on possible challenges faced by teachers and learners in the teaching and learning of English argumentative essay writing

Possible challenges faced by learners and teachers in the teaching and learning of English argumentative essay writing seem to centre on attitudes and culture.

An old teacher might have good experience, but may not be as active and creative as a young 'fresh' teacher. This ideology is supported by Buskirk (2019). This suggests that the old teacher might use certain old teaching methods that might bore learners in today's teaching and learning of English argumentative essay writing. When they get bored, they may develop negative attitude towards the concept of argumentative essay writing because learners are motivated by teachers as their role models. They look and examine how teachers interact with concepts in the teaching and learning process. Teachers are, therefore, expected to portray positive attitudes towards what they teach. Marroquin (2018) and Richards-Gustafson (2022) concur that learners who are taught by a teacher who has negative attitude towards English argumentative essay writing are likely to develop negative attitude towards such writing. Olson and Mitchell (1975) insist that attitude may be acquired through reinforcement mechanisms. They point out that if learners get a positive reward in their learning, they are likely to develop interest in what they learn.

Individual's attitudes do not exist or develop in a vacuum, the group's interaction can have a direct impact towards formation of attitudes (Thomas, 1980) as cited by Rakhoba (2000). This implies that learners can influence one another towards English argumentative essay writing. It is reasonable, therefore, to conclude that attitudes originate from a group. A learner studying English argumentative essay writing amongst highly motivated learners is likely to develop interest in the concept studied. The opposite happens in a situation whereby a learner studies amongst learners with less motivation towards the concept. Judy (2010) also states that learners often have a negative attitude towards learning Mathematics. He further points that teachers can, however, take steps to reverse this situation. They should provide or create opportunities for learners to develop personal connections to Mathematics so that they value the knowledge acquired. This indicates that English Language teachers need to make learners aware of their strengths in learning English argumentative essay writing since this may develop their interest in learning how to write such an essay. However, this will depend on the teacher's ability to motivate his or her learners. The teacher's attitude plays a major role in the teaching and learning of English argumentative essay writing because learners who are taught by a teacher who holds negative attitudes towards teaching and learning of argumentative essay writing are likely to fail English essay writing.

Culture shapes the nation (Kieran, 2015). Basotho, as part of their culture, do not allow children to argue with adults. This, on one hand, hinders learners from developing critical skills needed in writing an argumentative essay. It also creates submissive learners who accept whatever they are told even when they should not. It makes learners who cannot air their opinions or feelings about something. This behaviour negatively impacts the way learners perceive the teaching and learning of argumentative essay writing. Wyrick (2017) again postulates that history has shown that placement of immoral books and essay topics in schools, is part of an insidious plot to weaken the moral fiber of the youth. Some argumentative topics appear to be against good morals for youth such as, *'Euthanasia should be legalised. Do you agree or disagree?'* This topic does not advocate for good morals. Learners who are highly religious may feel reluctant to attempt it and this may create negative attitude towards argumentative topics. It is further emphasised by Mueller (2008) that for learners to write a convincing argumentative essay, they need to possess critical skills in order to argue their points strongly. It is, therefore, advisable to allow learners to develop their critical skills as early as possible. Parents should not stop children from asking questions on what they do not comprehend.

Theoretical Framework

The Attribution Theory of Success and Failure (ATSF) helped researchers code all causes of poor English argumentative essay writing into four pre-determined themes of the theory namely, ability, effort, task difficulty and luck (Weiner, 1972). According to the theory, ability emanates within the learner; it is stable but can change. This feature informed researchers to study all causes that relate to ability. All causes coded under ability, therefore, originate from the learners; they are influenced by what learners do. They are found to be stable but can change. Only causes that emanated from learners and could change were then coded under ability. The theory, therefore, enabled researchers group causes related to ability. That is, causes of poor argumentative English essay writing that are stable though can change. The theory helped researchers to study any positive or negative change that the learner may reflect towards English argumentative essay writing which may then result to change in his or her performance. According to the theory, effort refers to all activities that learners do in their learning and it is internal and unstable (Weiner, 1972). In this category, all causes of

poor English argumentative essay writing at LGCSE were coded into ability, effort, task-difficulty and luck. This predetermined theme of the theory helped researchers understand learners’ activities that may impact on the argumentative essay writing at LGCSE. As per the theory, these are the activities that relate to learners’ activities that cause them to perform better or poorly in English argumentative essay writing. According to Weiner (1972), such activities originate within the learners and can change anytime. All activities that relate to effort in the teaching and learning of English argumentative essay writing at LGCSE, were then placed under this category for further analysis in terms of their originality, stability and controllability. The theory explains that task difficulty appears to be external and stable (Weiner, 1972). It describes that if the task is difficult, it cannot change to suit the understanding of the learner. It is through the help of this theory that researchers were able to identify and code all causes of poor English argumentative essay writing that relate to the difficulty of the question. All causes coded under this category explain that they relate to the difficulty of the task learners need to perform in English argumentative essay writing. All causes that influenced learners find an English argumentative essay writing difficult to carry out, were coded under this category. Lastly, Weiner talks about luck or chance. The theory suggests that luck is external, unstable and cannot change (Weiner, 1972). If a learner is lucky, no one can change that. However, such situations are very unstable. No student is lucky all the time. The theory then allowed researchers to code all causes of poor English argumentative essay writing at LGCSE that may happen by chance or luck. The theory further helped researchers analyse their originality and capability to change. Weiner connects these causes for failure or success to the causal dimensions of the theory namely, locus of control, stability of causality and controllability of causality to form table 1 below.

Table 1: Weiner’s attribution theory of failure and success

Reasons for failure or success	Locus of control	Stability of causality	Controllability of causality
Ability	Internal	Stable	Can change
Effort	Internal	Unstable	Can change
Task difficulty	External	Stable	Cannot change
Luck or chance	External	Unstable	Cannot change

(Weiner, 1972)

The results for each research question (causes for failure or success) were then coded under ability, effort, task difficulty or luck and then analysed, interpreted and discussed in terms of locus of control, stability and controllability of causality in order to study their originality and ability to change as per Table 1 above (Weiner, 1972). Locus of control examines the originality of the cause. That is, whether it originates within or outside the learner and if it can change or not. This feature then helped researchers observe all causes of poor English argumentative essay writing that emanate within the learners and whether can change or not.

Objective and significance of the study

Below are the research objectives of the study. The study intends:

1. To explore challenges that teachers face in the teaching and learning of English argumentative essay writing at LGCSE.
2. To study challenges that learners face in the teaching and learning of English argumentative essay writing at LGCSE.

Asten (1997) explains that significance of the study refers to how the study can benefit different individuals and/or groups. Thus, this study intends to benefit teachers, learners and textbook writers. According to Behrman and Stacey (1997), research exposes teachers to various pedagogies in their teaching. This implies that recommendations from this study will help teachers with different pedagogies for improving their learners' functional understanding of English argumentative essay writing. The study will also help teachers know how learners feel about the teaching and learning of English argumentative essay at secondary level. This will in turn help teachers plan towards addressing any challenges and motivations faced in the teaching and learning of English argumentative essay. Furthermore, teachers will be abreast with challenges faced by other teachers and how such can be resolved. It is Gillies, Ashman and Terwel's (2007) assertion that research in education aids teachers towards solutions for particular problems arising in their classrooms.

Learners who will have access to the study also stand to benefit. They will be equipped with knowledge on how they can overcome challenges faced in the teaching and learning of English argumentative essay writing at LGCSE and thus, improve their performance in English Language.

The textbook writers are also likely to benefit from the findings of this study. They will be informed on the existing gaps in the literature on English argumentative essay writing at LGCSE. They may then write not only to fill the gap but also to address the challenges faced in the teaching and learning of argumentative English essay writing at this level.

Research methodology

This study adopted a qualitative research design of a multiple case study. Maree (2016) defines qualitative research design as an interdisciplinary setting involving different perspectives and practices for generating knowledge. The study, therefore, bonded its philosophical foundation with the interpretive paradigm and epistemological understanding which are used to obtain an understanding of the world from individual perspective (Kaiser & Presmeg, 2019). The paradigms helped researchers understand the phenomenon under investigation from different perspectives.

Grade 11 learners in all high schools in Leribe and teachers who teach English Language at grade 11 formed the population for this study. They constituted the right population because grade 11 learners and their English Language teachers are directly involved in the teaching and learning of English argumentative essay writing at the completion stage of LGCSE. They were, therefore, regarded as knowledgeable participants. For purposes of sampling, the study employed convenient sampling technique in selecting three schools in Leribe. According to Maree (2016), convenience sampling lacks clear sampling strategies; it is used in situations where population elements are selected based on the fact that they are easily and conveniently available. The schools in Leribe district were chosen because they were convenient to access for data collection. They were, therefore, chosen due to their proximity. It was also cheaper and faster for researchers to travel within the Leribe district for data collection. Morgan (2016) comments that it is essential to consider time and funds prior to conducting a research. The study was, therefore, restricted to Leribe district due to available funds and time allocated for this study. Grade 11 learners were used because they are at the final stage of LGCSE; they are then regarded as the most experience learners at LGCSE. Only the chosen learners wrote English Language Paper 1 test and a nested sampling of which only fifteen (15) scripts were selected for marking from each school to make a total of forty-five (45) learners' scripts. Nested sample is a sample that is drawn from another

sample (Maree, 2016). All learners who were marked and their English Language teachers were given a questionnaire to answer while all teachers also assembled for a focus group to elicit more responses on the causes of poor English argumentative essay writing at LGCSE.

Results

Table 2 below presents the results for this study followed by their discussions. It was discovered that they are accountable for the poor performance of English argumentative essay writing at LGCSE as per learners' essays, questionnaires and interviews for learners and teachers respectively.

Table 2: Themes and sub-themes emanating from data

ABILITY	EFFORT	TASK DIFFICULTY	LUCK/CHANCE
-Poor language proficiency -Inability to argue points -Poor paragraph development	-Failure to observe instructions -Lack of concentration -Lack of information -Inadequate practice -Lack of teaching aids	-Inability to interpret the question	-Inadequate time -Emotions

Data coded under ability intertwined into poor language proficiency, inability to argue points and poor paragraph development. Language proficiency refers to ability to write and speak grammatical language while inability to argue points refers to failure to present one's points in a convincing manner. Points that are not well argued may not be convincing to the listeners or readers. Such points may not be convincing because they are not well organised while poor paragraph development refers to illogical arrangement of ideas in a paragraph.

Data collected under effort interlinked into failure to observe instructions, lack of concentration, lack of information, inadequate practice and lack of teaching aids. Failure to observe instructions means a situation where learners misinterpret the given instructions on English argumentative essay writing while lack of concentration refers to inability to read and understand the question on English argumentative essay writing. Lack of information refers to a situation where learners run short

of information or knowledge on English argumentative essay writing. Inadequate practice, on the other hand, denotes a situation where learners do not get satisfactory practice on English argumentative essay writing. Lastly, lack of teaching aids refers to few or absence of materials needed to carry out the teaching and learning of English argumentative essay writing.

Data under task difficulty interlinked into inability of learners to understand the demand of the question. It suggests that learners fail to understand the demand of the question. For example, learners narrated their different stories instead of arguing their points.

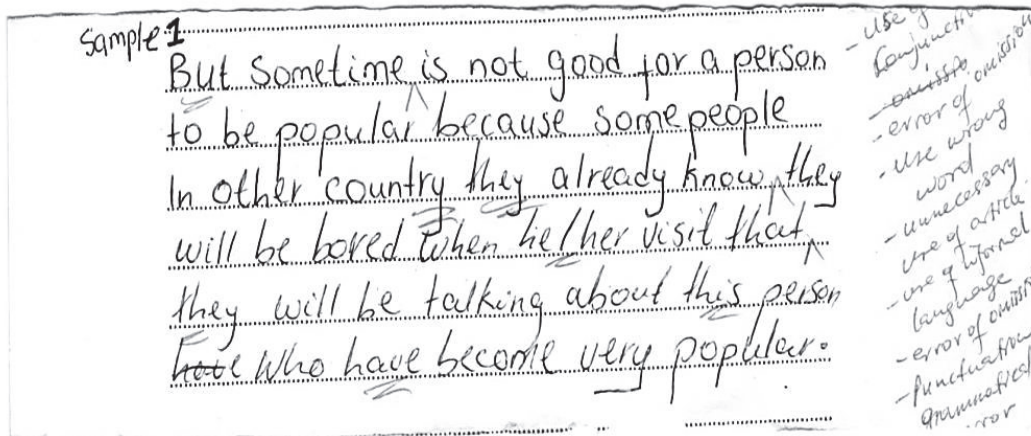
Data under Luck/chance thematised into inadequate time and emotions as shown in Table 2 above. Inadequate time refers to learners who failed to complete the given task within the set time for the test. Emotions refer to situations where learners were not able to control their feelings on the topic. Instead of arguing their different points, they narrated stories to air their feelings and experiences.

Discussions

Poor language proficiency and inability to argue points

The study revealed poor language proficiency as a cause for learners' poor performance in English argumentative essay writing at LGCSE. This is where learners' use of wrong articles, tense, prepositions, words, punctuation marks, conjunctions, use of informal language, grammatical errors, error of omission, incorrect plural formation, unnecessary repetition and ambiguity were observed from their essays. According to ECOL (2014), these errors are regarded as cross errors and can negatively affect learners' performance. Inability to use the correct language may send a wrong message to the reader. To justify this, excerpt (a) chosen from learners' essays is used to validate the existence of this finding.

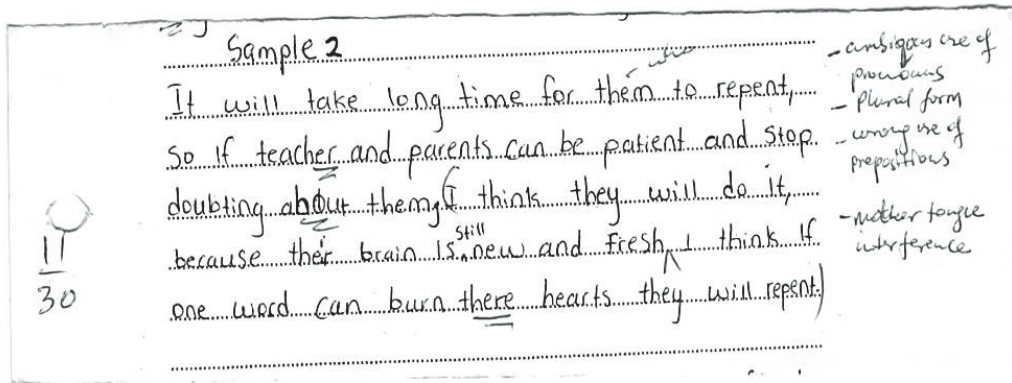
Excerpt (a)



The excerpt above shows wrong use of tense, punctuation marks, conjunctions, words, articles, and error of omission. This finding was also emphasised by all teachers in their focus group. They concurred that some learners often use language inappropriately in an attempt to write argumentatively and this may send the wrong message. According to the causal dimensions of ATSF, this cause is coded under ability as it originates within the learners. It is, therefore, internal and stable. However, it can change if learners put some efforts to improve their language usage. That is, if learners improve their language usage, their performance in English argumentative essay is likely to improve too.

The study further revealed that learners fail to take a definite stance in their arguments. This was observed where some learners were not able to support their points with evidence while others had no arguments established. Different teachers emphasised the reality of this finding from their focus group. Some teachers added that most of their learners already have fear towards English argumentative essay writing and this hinders their development as supports Judy (2010). The causal dimensions of ATSF classify this finding under ability, which denotes that it originates from the learner or it is internal. It is also stable and can change. Likewise, an excerpt (b) is used to authenticate this finding.

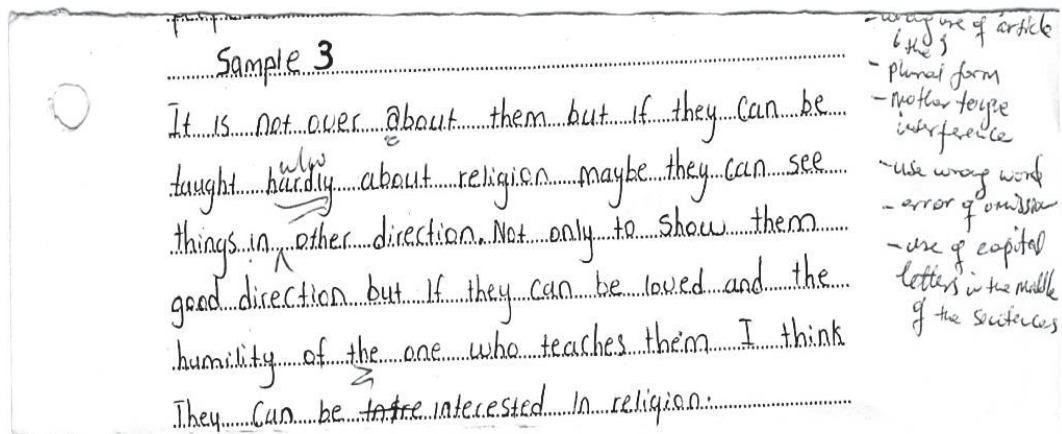
Excerpt (b)



This excerpt proves that some learners fail to argue their points due to ambiguity and mother tongue interference. Due to ambiguous statements and mother tongue interference, it can become difficult for the reader to understand learners' attempts to justify their points in English argumentative essay writing.

Poor paragraph development

Poor paragraphing also emerged as a challenge to LGCSE learners. It was placed under ability. This finding was observed where some learners were not able to structure their paragraphs logically and coherently in their essays. Some paragraphs did not have topic sentences while others used wrong conjunctions. ECOL (2012) and Saranda (2008) suggest that learners' paragraphs must show unity and logic in order to convey the intended message. Some paragraphs were, therefore, not clear due to poor paragraphing. The causal dimensions of the theory then suggest that it is internal (originates from the learner), stable and can only change if some efforts are put in by learners. If learners improve on their ability to develop paragraphs, the challenge changes. An excerpt (c) below proves the existence of this finding.

Excerpt (c)

The paragraph above has no topic sentence hence difficult to understand.

Failure to observe instructions

The study discovered that some learners sometimes fail to pay attention to some instructions in the test. This discovery is supported by Connelly and Forsyth (2012) as well as ECOL (2014). Teachers in their questionnaires and focus group further proved the validity of this finding, they reported that some learners failed to write legibly while others did not write argumentatively. They narrated their different stories. The theory places the finding under effort as it relates to the efforts that learners need to exert in the teaching and learning of English argumentative essay writing. The finding is described as internal, it originates within the learner and it is unstable. It can change anytime depending on the steps that learners take to improve the situation. Once learners are able to interpret and understand the instructions, the cause or challenge changes.

Lack of concentration

The study further revealed that learners' loss of concentration in class is a trigger behind poor performance of English argumentative essay writing at LGCSE. This supports Buskirk (2019) philosophical understanding of a demotivated learner. It indicates that there are learners who lose concentration during the teaching and learning of English argumentative essay writing. Through the questionnaire, some learners claimed that they sometimes feel like sleeping during the teaching and learning of English

argumentative essay writing. This is consistent with what some teachers claimed during the discussion in their focus group. This finding implies that learners who lose concentration during the teaching and learning of English argumentative essay writing may miss some important information on how the essay must be structured hence perform poorly in English Language examination at LGCSE. As per the causal dimensions of ATSF, the finding is internal and unstable. It can change at any time due to the prevailing circumstances. Once learners pay attention to the teacher in class, the cause or challenge may change. That is, lack of concentration no longer becomes the cause for poor English argumentative essay writing at LGCSE.

Lack of information

The study further revealed lack of information as a cause for poor performance in English argumentative essay writing as supports Kiester (2013). This was observed where different teachers in the focus group pointed out that sometimes other learners show poor background information on the topic. That is, they lack required knowledge on the subject matter. Teachers claimed that poor background information lead to irrelevant supporting details and biasness in argumentative essay writing. Once learners are not sure of what they need to write; they are likely to write anything they think of. This was also observed in some learners' essays which did not acknowledge the two sides of the argument. The ATSF classifies this finding under effort while the causal dimensions of this theory describe it as internal because it originates from the learner. It is again unstable and can change if something is done to effect such change. For example, once learners provide well supported arguments, their performance is likely to change.

Inadequate practice

It was further discovered that teachers do not give learners adequate practice on English argumentative essay writing. This against Yates's (2011) understanding that practice makes perfect. Teachers complained that marking English argumentative essay is strenuous so they are not able to give learners enough practice. They claim that it is time consuming to mark an essay. Teachers emphasised that if learners are denied opportunity to practice, they may not know the areas they are weak at until they are faced with such areas in the examination and this

may lead to their poor performance. This became evident where some learners failed to show any argument in their essays. The finding is placed under effort as it pertains to what both learners and teachers can do to improve performance in English argumentative essay writing. The theory describes the cause as internal, unstable and can change.

Lack of teaching aids

The study indicated that absence of books is a cause for poor argumentative English essay writing at LGCSE. If learners have no books, it becomes difficult for them to practise what they learned from the class. This finding is further disclosed from teachers' and learners' questionnaires as well as teachers' focus group. It is indicative that teaching without teaching aids might be challenging to both teachers and learners. The finding supports Wyrick (2017) belief that without appropriate tools, it becomes difficult to carry out any given task. The challenge is placed under effort as it relates to what teachers and learners can do or fail to do in order to improve learners' performance in English argumentative essay writing. The challenge is internal and unstable. It can change as it only depends on what learners and teachers do in the teaching and learning of English argumentative essay writing.

Inability to interpret the question

The study disclosed inadequate scrutiny of the question as a cause for poor performance in English argumentative essay writing at LGCSE. This finding is supported by Connelly and Forsyth (2012) understanding that failure to interpret the question may lead to a wrong answer. Some learners failed to correctly interpret the question. For example, one question was, *'Technology has brought more harm to human kind. Do you agree?'* Some learners interpreted the word 'kind' as 'a certain type of people'. Failure to understand the question steered some learners to support their arguments with irrelevant details. This discovery received good support from teachers' and learners' questionnaires as well as teachers' focus group. The cause is placed under task difficulty. The causal dimensions of ATSF describes it as external meaning that it does not emanate within the learner. It is stable and so cannot change. It is only the learner that needs to equip himself or herself with necessary skills to overcome the problem or difficulty of the question.

Inadequate time

In this study, lack of time was raised as a cause for poor English argumentative essay writing at LGCSE. This manifested itself in all data collection tools used for this study. Time appeared to be inadequate for learners to write the test, especially when they were expected to convince their readers in English. Learners were given one hour to write two to two and half pages on an argumentative topic. Some learners failed even to write one and half pages due to limited time as reflects ECOL (2014). The finding was categorised under luck/chance. According to causal dimensions of the theory, it is described as external and stable. This points out that it does not originate within the learner and so cannot change. The learner only needs to acquire skills needed to manage the time given for LGCSE English Language Paper 1.

Emotions

Emotions were also found to have ability to negatively impact on the performance of English argumentative essay writing. Teachers indicated that sometimes learners get over-taken by emotions and turn to relate stories that affected them in the past and forget to argue over several points to justify their choice of side on the topic. This came to reality with some learners who instead of writing argumentatively narrated their own experiences. The finding further emphasised by ECOL (2014) and Hackett (2005). It is placed under luck/chance and the theory describes it as external and unstable. It cannot change, what hurts the learner cannot be changed, only the learner can develop skills to overcome such challenge. The finding, therefore, can be described as a possible cause for poor English argumentative essay writing at Lesotho secondary schools.

Summary

Several learners committed numerous grammatical errors in their essays in an attempt to use language appropriately. It makes sense, therefore, to conclude that poor language proficiency results to poor performance in English argumentative essay writing at LGCSE as this was also demonstrated by teachers from their focus group. That being the case, teachers need to ensure that learners are well introduced to the grammatical rules of English Language. This is where activities like spelling bee, regular quizzes and reading competitions, among others,

may be used. These and other activities of their caliber have potential to help learners see how words are written, how certain words form their past tense and how some sentences are grammatically constructed.

Discussed data also revealed inability to argue points as a common challenge among learners in writing argumentative English essay writing at LGCSE. Thus, it is realistic to draw the conclusion that some learners at grade 11 are not able to argue their points convincingly. It is, therefore, important for teachers to ensure that learners are well trained to build their arguments sound, strong and convincing. This is where teachers may take learners to the parliament for them to see how arguments are made and supported in the parliament or courts of law.

Lack of information also manifested as the main finding for this study. It was mainly observed where learners failed to provide relevant information to the topic. The problem was emphasised by both teachers and learners. It is, therefore, sensible to conclude that lack of information on the subject matter under discussion may be a challenge to some learners writing English argumentative essay writing at LGCSE.

The analysed data further reflected that misunderstanding of the question is a common challenge to learners learning English argumentative essay writing. In that way, it becomes sensible to conclude that misunderstanding the question may have a direct impact on the poor performance of English argumentative essay writing.

Lack of teaching aids appeared to be a common finding for this study. The finding was emphasised by teachers in their questionnaires and focus groups. As a result, it becomes reasonable to conclude that lack of teaching aids maybe responsible for poor performance in English argumentative essay writing.

Emotions were also found to be a common finding for this study. This was mostly seen where learners deviated from the question in order to narrate their experiences related to the topic. This makes it reasonable to determine that emotions can be responsible for poor performance in English argumentative essay writing.

Conclusion

Th study aimed as exploring challenges that teachers face in the teaching and learning of English argumentative essay writing at LGCSE. And study challenges that learners face in the teaching and learning of English argumentative essay writing at LGCSE. The findings identified the main challenge that learners face in the teaching and learning of English

argumentative essay writing is poor language proficiency. Failure to observe instruction and inability to argue points as a common challenge among learners in writing argumentative English essay writing at LGCSE. The study further outlined lack of concentration, lack of information, inadequate practice and lack of education resources.

Recommendations

Satisfactory training on interpreting English argumentative essay writing should be emphasised. That is, English Language teachers need to train learners on how to interpret different English argumentative essay writing questions. Oral exercises, dictation, and impromptu speeches, among others, may be used to train learners listen and perform what the question requires them to do. Practice makes perfect.

Adequate teaching aids should be provided for an effective English argumentative essay writing. For example, it is important to provide books for learners to study how English argumentative essay writing can be handled at LGCSE. Such books may be offered by schools on rental basis or put in the school libraries where possible.

Teachers need to train learners to detach themselves from their past experiences or religious backgrounds as they write argumentatively. Regular practice on controversial topics can, therefore, help to train learners take control or detach their feelings from their work as they write in support or against a controversial topic. Teachers need to help them state their facts and never the emotions.

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