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# Learners' experiences of creative writing in English First Additional Language: Pedagogical implications

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## ABSTRACT

This paper is based on a qualitative study that investigated Grade 9 learners' experiences of creative writing in English first additional language (FAL). Following a social constructivist approach to learning, the paper argues that creative writing is a complex process that demands cognitive and metacognitive skills, so that the language in which learners write matters, since it determines the quality and level of creativity that learners portray in their writing.

The study was conducted in a township school in the Western Cape Province of South Africa, and its aim was to investigate Grade 9 learners' experiences of creative writing in English FAL. Data was collected by means of focus group interviews with

selected Grade 9 learners. The key findings of the study indicate that while the learners experienced language-related challenges, they also acknowledged the linguistic and cognitive benefits of creative writing in English. The study concludes that while learners portray positive attitudes towards English, this language remains a barrier to their learning, especially with regard to creative writing that demands imagination and critical thinking. This article recommends that creative writing be given more attention in schools, and that writing in the official languages be encouraged to enhance learners' creativity and literacy development.

**Keywords:** Creative writing, English first additional language (FAL), Grade 9, Literacy

## 1. Introduction and background

Writing is one of the vital language skills which is developed early in the child's life as part of emergent literacy. It is one of the basic language skills that learners have to acquire for meaningful learning across the curriculum (Nondabula, 2020). Writing plays a critical role in the child's learning as a means of creative expression and meaning discovery (Mathura & Zulu, 2021; Arshavskaya, 2015). It requires learners to become critical thinkers who produce a range of meaningful texts to express their thoughts and emotions on paper (Akinyeye & Plüddemann, 2016). Therefore, writing can be described as a psycho-social and cognitive construct which reflects how learners understand and experience their world (Yoo, 2018).

Creative writing is an important aspect of writing skills, and is based on a self-selected or given topic to enhance the writer's ability to express themselves (Freiman, 2015; Biggs & Collis, 1982). It is rooted in the writer's world and broader environment and often portrays the writer's originality, integrity and sincerity (Bilton & Sivasubramaniam, 2009). It involves a mental process presented externally, as the writer connects with or responds to the external world on paper (Freiman, 2015). While creative writing requires the writer to adhere to the conventions of language, topics are open to interpretation and writers are encouraged to express their imaginations, feelings and thoughts (Yoo, 2018). It encourages self-discovery and it is therapeutic (Blair, 1997; Klein, 1999; Yoo, 2018) because it provides a platform through which learners can express their thoughts of what is bothering them, thus promoting self-healing.

In South Africa, creative writing is introduced as early as Grade 1 in order to lay a good foundation for future academic writing (Mathura & Zulu, 2021). The national Curriculum Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) supports the development of learners' early writing as a means of fostering strong academic skills which are crucial for effective learning from primary to tertiary level [Department of Basic Education (DBE), 2011]. With the shift to English as the medium of instruction from Grade 4, which is the entry grade to the Intermediate Phase (Grades 4–6) in South African schools, many non-mother tongue speakers of English experience learning difficulties (Desai, 2012; Nomlomo, 2007). As a result, code-switching which entails the use of two or more languages interchangeably and simultaneously (Valdes-Fallis, 1978) has become a necessary tool of communication to facilitate and scaffold the learning process in many classrooms where an additional language is used as the main language of learning and teaching (Shinga & Pillay, 2021).

The reading and writing difficulties experienced by many South African learners are reported in national and international high-stakes assessments such as the Progress in International Reading Literacy (PIRLS) and the (former) Annual National Assessments (ANAs) (Spaull, 2022; Howie, Combrinck, Tshele, Roux, McLeod & Gabriel, 2017; DBE, 2014). Grade 9 learners are expected to be independent writers (DBE, 2011), but the Annual National

Assessment (ANA) report of 2014 shows that many struggle with grammar, spelling and punctuation in their writing (DBE, 2014). Mathura and Zulu (2021) maintain that English remains a barrier in learners' writing as they internalise information in their home languages, and then translate it into English when they write. Some of the challenges encountered by learners in writing include cognition, language proficiency and writing proficiency, associated with limited communicative and grammatical competence in English (Fitrawati & Safitri, 2021; Bustamante & Eom, 2017). This is true for many South African schools where writing is still a challenge across the system (Akinyeye & Plüddemann, 2016). This is largely because many learners are second or third language speakers of English, despite the progressive *Language-in-Education Policy* which promotes the use of all 11 official languages and additive bilingualism which promotes the maintenance of the learners' home languages while learning an additional language such as English (Diko, 2022).

Research shows that the teaching of writing is the most neglected part of language learning in many schools (Uys, Van der Walt & Van den Berg, 2007). Currently, there are many educational and research reports on South African learners' literacy performance in the Foundation Phase (Grades R–3), especially in reading (Spaull, 2022; Howie et al., 2017; Pretorius & Murray, 2016; 2019; DBE, 2014). There is a paucity of research on Senior Phase (Grades 7–9) learners' writing. Grade 9 of the Senior Phase is a critical year because at the end of it, learners may exit the basic education system and choose their vocational or career paths. They are expected to possess strong language and literacy skills to enable them to function meaningfully and effectively, not only in education, but also in the workplace. The Senior Phase is regarded as a transition phase to the Further Education and Training (FET) phase (Grades 10–12) and beyond, where strong academic literacy is the key to student success.

In light of the above, we believe that there is a relationship between learners' difficulties with English language competency and how they approach creative writing. We argue that creative writing is a complex process that demands critical thinking and imagination, so that the language in which learners write matters, since it determines the quality and level of creativity that learners portray in their writing.

The purpose of this article is to uncover how Grade 9 learners experience creative writing in English first additional language (FAL) as one of the key language skills they are expected to possess and apply in their own learning, and outside school to understand the external world. It sheds light on the implications of the learners' experiences of creative writing for pedagogical strategies in the language classroom. It is guided by the following research questions:

- 1) How do Grade 9 learners experience creative writing in English FAL?
- 2) What are the implications of learners' experiences of creative writing for English language teaching?

As a point of departure, we unpack the concept of creative writing in order to gain an insight into how it is socially constructed and enacted in the academic or educational setting.

## 2. Understanding creative writing

There are various conceptions of creative writing. According to Gilliland (2019), creative writing encompasses many genres and text types in which learners express their ideas and feelings to find their individual voices. Some scholars believe that creative writing involves technical and thinking skills that generate ideas (Natsuchawirang, Wimonrat & Thanya, 2017; Greyling, 2011) while others refer to creative writing as a recursive process that involves both cognitive and metacognitive processes (Bashir, Amin & Batool, 2020; Gilliland, 2019; Larkin, 2009). It involves communication and construction of texts to express ideas (Pfeiffer, 2014) and is influenced by the writer's cognitive abilities, attitudes and motivation. Natsuchawirang et al. (2017) maintain that it is a personal and emotional practice that aims to appeal to readers through imagination and creativity.

Creative writing enhances learners' vocabularies as they play or experiment with words and write from the heart (Fitrawati & Safitri, 2021; Gilliland, 2019). Through creative writing, learners may use their imaginations and express their ideas freely, which has the potential to boost their confidence, enthusiasm and motivation to write (Arshavskaya, 2015). This effect could be achieved easily if they wrote in their home languages without having to be concerned with the rigours of English grammar and spelling. In South African schools, the majority of learners do not speak English as a home language. This implies that the language in which creative writing occurs matters, since a fear of using incorrect English can cause learners to develop nervousness and anxieties when writing in that language. Obviously, learners' creativity and imagination, which are crucial in creative writing, could be adversely affected under such uncondusive learning conditions (Mathura & Zulu, 2021; Gilliland, 2019; Arshavskaya, 2015; Bilton & Sivasubramaniam, 2009).

In light of the above, we report on how Grade 9 isiXhosa-speaking learners from an under-resourced school in South Africa experienced creative writing in English additional language.

## 3. Literature review

While the focus of this article is creative writing, we begin this section with a review of the literature on writing in general, as creative writing is a key component of general writing skills (Freiman, 2015).

A number of empirical studies have examined the teaching and learning of writing in English (FAL) over the past decade. Some studies have focussed on the challenges experienced by

learners in English (FAL) writing (Fitrawati & Safitri, 2021; Gilliland, 2019; Arshavskaya, 2015; Akinyeye & Plüddemann, 2016; Manyike, 2014; Taylor, 2012), while others have explored the pedagogies employed by teachers in teaching writing (Mathura & Zulu, 2021; Ngubane, Ntombela & Govender, 2020; Nondabula, 2020; Roundy & Liu, 2015; Mabasa & Lumadi 2016; Akinyeye, 2016). These studies illustrate the linguistic, cognitive and social aspects of writing.

A study by Fritawati and Safitri (2021) reveals that English second language learners often struggle with grammar and limited vocabulary in their writing. Other areas of difficulty for English (FAL) learners include verb forms, subject and verb agreements, the use of appropriate articles and verbs, tenses, spelling and punctuation (Fritawati & Safitri, 2021; Mathura & Zulu, 2021). Mabasa and Lumadi (2016) established that FAL learners often use the wrong prepositions when writing and fail to write coherent sentences.

Manyike's (2014) study focused on Grade 7 Sepedi learners' writing and reported learners' excellent English writing proficiency skills in rural schools in the Limpopo Province, South Africa. These skills were attributed to the school's bilingual language policy. This school implemented the additive bilingual policy which is promoted in the South African Language-in-Education Policy, while many schools follow an English-only policy from Grade 4. The findings of Manyike's (2014) study highlight the value of learners' home language in facilitating the acquisition of first additional language skills.

Following the action research methodology, Mathura and Zulu (2021) explored how flashcards could be used to enhance Grade 1 learners' creative writing in English (L2). The findings of this study show that there was an improvement in the Grade 1 learners' abilities regarding participation in lessons and their written pieces, which were more coherent and logical than they were before the use of flashcards. While this study was conducted with Grade 1 learners who were still in the process of learning to read and write, its findings are valuable as they provide an insight into pedagogical strategies that can enhance learners' academic writing from an early age to lay a solid foundation for future academic literacy (Mathura & Zulu, 2021).

Another study by Akinyeye (2012) reports on the teaching and learning of writing in English (L2) in Senior Phase classrooms in the Western Cape Province of South Africa. The results of this study show that learners had difficulty with punctuation, pronunciation and spelling (Akinyeye, 2012). A study by Uys et al. (2007) showed that teachers did not show an interest in teaching their learners how to write coherent sentences. This resulted in learners' low writing proficiency (Uys et al., 2012) which translates into ineffective writing due to one's inability to write logical sentence and paragraphs.

Natsuchawirang, Wimonrat and Thanya (2017) developed a writing model for Mattayomsueka Three (Grade 9) learners at rural schools in the north-east of Thailand. This study was inspired

by learners' concerns that creative writing was the most challenging aspect of writing. The findings of this study indicate that learners who were taught through the creative writing model showed a higher ability in writing (Natsuchawirang et al., 2017).

Finally, Arshavskaya (2015) implemented a series of English (L2) writing assignments with university students in a south-western university in America. This study revealed that the students had positive experiences of creative writing as they found the assignments not only enjoyable, but also advantageous for enhancing their writing abilities. The students' positive attitudes towards creative writing in this regard increased their motivation, enthusiasm and creativity which are crucial in learning across the curriculum.

The cited literature provides insights into the existing research on writing and creative writing across the globe, showing that English second or third language speakers struggle to master the conventions of English, which impedes their creative expression and confidence. In seeking to overcome these difficulties, teachers who used flashcards, writing models and, importantly in South Africa, the home language, had some success in boosting learners' abilities in creative writing. Projects that excited and engaged young writers were also found to help, boosting their enthusiasm and motivation to write.

## 4. Theoretical framework

This paper draws on Social Constructivism Theory, which considers knowledge a human construct in which people learn by sharing their knowledge with each other (Vygotsky, 1978; Gredler, 1992). This theory stresses the development of pedagogy (Vygotsky, 1978; Kaufman, 2004) and promotes the idea of interaction and active participation in the classroom (Kalina & Powell, 2009).

From a social constructivist perspective, the learning process involves a simultaneous use of prior and new knowledge as learners draw on their existing knowledge to construct meaning of new knowledge (Kapur, 2017). Language plays a crucial role in shaping an individual's thinking during this process (Liu & Matthew, 2005).

With regard to creative writing, it could be said that learners draw on their imaginations, which are influenced by their experiences of the socio-cultural environment. Hence creative writing is regarded as a component of human activity which involves language and culture and is rooted in one's family (or upbringing), community, history and environment (Landis, 2003; Parlakian & Sánchez, 2006). This implies that a learner's home language acts as a mediator in the creative writing process and in the formation of independent thoughts expressed in writing. Creative writing reflects not only one's ideas, but also one's identity, culture and experiences, irrespective of the language used (Landis, 2003).

Through creative writing, learners develop an understanding of the social and cultural literacy practices that influence writing (Landis, 2003; Van Steensel, 2006). However, a mismatch between one's home language and the Language of Learning and Teaching could adversely affect learners' writing (Molteno, 2017). Since creative writing demands a knowledge of the fundamentals of grammar and appropriate vocabulary (Fritawati & Safitri, 2021; Gilliland, 2019), many English (L2) learners experience difficulties in expressing their ideas and feelings and projecting their individual voices in writing. It is, therefore, important that teachers employ a variety of learner-centred approaches to scaffold learners' creative writing (Natsuchawirang et al., 2017).

Using Social Constructivism Theory as the lens through which to view learning, this study sought to understand how isiXhosa-speaking learners understood creative writing, and how they engaged with it to express their ideas through English FAL.

## 5. Research methodology

The study employed a qualitative research approach to investigate Grade 9 learners' personal experiences of creative writing in English (FAL). Qualitative research is about understanding how individuals construct meaning in a particular phenomenon (Guest, Namey & Mitchell, 2013). The qualitative study was conducted at a township school in the Cape Flats in the Western Cape Province, South Africa, where there are high rates of poverty, unemployment and crime (Standing, 2003).

A purposeful sampling method was used to gain access to the Grade 9 learners of the selected school. There were 43 learners in the selected Grade 9 classroom: 26 girls and 17 boys, all home language speakers of isiXhosa. The age of the learners ranged from 13 to 16 years.

Data was collected by means of focus group interviews and document analysis which entailed an examination of 10 learners' mid-year examination scripts. Following Liamputtong's (2011) view, focus group interviews were used to gain insights into the Grade 9 learners' shared perspectives of creative writing and to capture their lived experiences. Ten learners were randomly selected to participate in focus group interviews. They were divided into two groups, referred to as Focus Group 1 (FG1) and Focus Group 2 (FG2). There were six girls and four boys in total; each group had three girls and two boys.

The main aim of the focus group interviews was to investigate what learners thought and felt about creative writing in English FAL. The aim was also to investigate the challenges they encountered and to understand the barriers to creative writing in English FAL. The learners were asked about the significance of creative writing and the challenges they experienced in their writing in English FAL. In order to protect their identity, the learners were given codes in

the form of letters, as follows: Codes A-E were used in Focus Group 1, while F- J were used in Focus Group 2.

Guided by the work of Thomas and Hodges (2010) on research ethics, permission was sought from the Grade 9 learners' parents to involve their children in the study as the learners were under the age of 18. Consent letters and information sheets were handed out to the principal, class teacher, parents and learners to inform them about the purpose of the study. Permission to conduct the study in schools was granted by the Western Cape Education Department, and all the teachers gave consent to be involved in the study. Participation in the study was voluntary. The learners' and schools' identities were protected by using codes, as indicated above.

Thematic analysis was employed and the broad themes that emerged from data analysis were: (i) Linguistic and cognitive benefits of creative writing, (ii) the global status of English, (iii) language-related challenges and (iv) collaborative learning and code-switching.

## 6. Findings

### 6.1 Linguistic and cognitive benefits of creative writing

The majority of Grade 9 learners (six) who participated in the two focus group interviews concurred on the importance of creative writing, which they perceived as playing a pivotal role in their learning and mastery of English, and a way of expressing themselves. They also considered creative writing a mediation tool that enhanced their proficiency in English, as shown in the responses below.

*(FG1 - A): Um ... I think ibalulekile i-creative writing siyifunde (it is important to learn creative writing) because isifundisa (it teaches us) uhhm ... sikwazi ukusebenzisa iEnglish (so that we are able to use English.)*

*(FG2 - F): Ngoba, kulapha u-expressa indlela yakho yokubhala (because it is where one expresses one's way of writing) and to understand i-English more.*

The learners' utterances above align with the description of creative writing as a linguistic and cognitive construct. As a linguistic construct, creative writing fosters communication whereby learners transfer speech into written words (Fitrawati & Safitri, 2021; Gilliland, 2019). It stimulates the learners to think about grammar and spelling, while accelerating language learning (DBE, Education, 2011; Fitzgerald & Shanahan, 2012).

The learners' responses show that creative writing is situated in the cognitive domain, in that it enhances their understanding and proficiency in the English language. The cognitive



processes of creative writing are embedded in the acquisition of language skills which entail making meaning of one's experiences and translating these into written meaningful texts, while adhering to the conventions of writing (Fitzgerald & Shanahan; 2012; Defazio, Jones, Tennant & Hook, 2010). Therefore, creative writing is associated with enhanced literacy skills in English.

## 6.2 The global status of English

In line with the linguistic role of creative writing, learners showed their awareness of English as a global lingua franca which connects people across languages and cultures. The excerpts below illustrate that creative writing presents learners with an opportunity to understand English and see themselves as fitting into a global community.

*(FG1 - E): Ibalulekile, coz sometimes iindawo esihamba kuzo kuthethwa iEnglish. (It is important, because English is the spoken language in places we go to). So sifuneke siyibhale, so that sizo understanda. (So we must write it so that we understand [it].)*

*(FG2 - D): Because xa uhambile, for example, usithi uya eChina, for example, then ke ngoku uthethe loo language, then in English, uyazi ba bayayizisizwa than isiXhosa. (Let's say you go to China, then you are able to speak English, you know that they understand English rather than isiXhosa.)*

The learners' responses above place more emphasis on the value of English acquisition than on the benefits of English creative writing. This is not surprising, given the hegemony of English and the socio-economic benefits associated with it across the globe (Nomlomo & Katiya, 2018; McKinney, 2007). Moreover, English is the main LOLT in schools and in tertiary education, and is perceived as a language for climbing the socio-economic ladder. As a result, it continues to enjoy a high status in education at the expense of other languages, especially on the African continent. This occurs despite its negative impact on the academic achievements of the majority of learners who do not speak it as a home language. This finding shows that the learners' share the national obsession with English, irrespective of their limited proficiency and performance in it.

Some of the learners' responses showed aspects of subtractive bilingualism, with one learner pointing out that she did not fully understand her home language, isiXhosa. She preferred writing in English than in her own home language, even though isiXhosa was taught as a home language in the school.

*(FG1 - C): Mna ndiba happy, ngoba isiXhosa ndingasazi kakhulu. (I am happy [to write in English] because I do not know isiXhosa well.)*

The learner's response above almost implies a deliberate distancing of herself from her home language in favour of English. It seems unlikely that she would not 'know isiXhosa well' if she speaks it every day. Her words may portray an eagerness to disassociate herself from her home language and acquire English in its place. However, while the learner indicated her 'happiness' with English, her response did not correspond with the quality of essays that were examined and analysed as part of data collection. This phenomenon poses an academic risk to learners as English is the language used in teaching and learning across the curriculum and in higher education.

Also, one of the learners (FG2 – G) regarded English as a language with future prospects, as shown below.

*(FG2 - G): It makes me feel happy, because it prepares me for the future.*

Despite these positive views of having to write in English, it became apparent that some learners were torn between English and their home language (isiXhosa) in terms of writing meaningful texts. It appears that some were aware of the academic benefits of writing in their home language, but were compelled by the language policy of the school, which required them to learn through the medium of English. This is evident in the utterance below:

*(FG1 - A): I would rather ndibhale ngesiXhosa but inyazelekile kuba kufuneka English siyifundile. (I would rather write in isiXhosa, but it is compulsory to write in English because we have to learn it.)*

In the South African context, the learners' responses in this regard could be understood in relation to English hegemony and the marginalisation of African languages in education and in the economy of the country (McKinney, 2007). In this case, it could be argued that the aspiration to write in English was inspired by the socio-economic benefits associated with this language. However, it was apparent that many of the learners experienced challenges in expressing their ideas through the medium of English. Reference to isiXhosa could be understood as learners' intuitive understanding of the value of additive bilingualism in learning.

### 6.3 Language-related challenges

To triangulate the focus group interview data, the Grade 9 mid-year examination scripts of randomly selected learners were examined and analysed to understand how the learners approached writing, and the areas in which they experienced most difficulty. This entailed looking at the mid-year examination question paper to establish the types of creative writing genres that students had to engage with, and then examining how they responded to them. The analysis covered the learners' writing styles and the common errors they made.

The majority of learners from both groups (n = 7) had said that they had many difficulties with creative writing. One was with the genre type, which required learners to use figures of speech, creating pictures with words. The narrative and descriptive genres are often regarded as the easiest to write, but the learners mentioned that they struggled with them owing to limited vocabularies to express their views properly. While they were allowed to draft mind-maps before writing the first and final drafts of their essays, they found this challenging because of the differences between the syntactical and lexical structures of their home language (isiXhosa) and English. The challenge was exacerbated during examinations because they were not given sufficient time to prepare for creative writing, and had no access to dictionaries, which they were allowed to use when writing essays in class or at home.

The learners' texts had grammatical errors, especially with regard to the use of verbs and tenses. They also used prepositions and articles incorrectly, e.g. 'go in malls', instead of 'go to the mall'. In this case, the error could be attributed to home language interference or literal translations from the learner's home language, isiXhosa, to English. In isiXhosa some locatives are always marked by a suffix (-ini) as in 'edolophini', which could mean both 'in town' or 'to town', depending on the context. This could easily confuse the issue of which preposition to use in English.

## 6.4 Collaborative learning and code-switching

The focus group interview data also revealed that learners worked in groups before they worked on individual creative writing tasks. This practice assisted them when they did not understand the requirements of a particular task, allowing for collaborative learning, which involves the sharing of knowledge.

*(FG1 - A) Siyancedana, ngamanye amaxesha. (We help one another sometimes.)*

According to Natsuchawirang et al. (2017), collaborative learning has reciprocal benefits. In creative writing, it would work best during the brainstorming phase, allowing active learning and joint construction of knowledge, while enabling learners to find their voices (Gilliand, 2019).

Regarding the teaching and learning of genres as part of creative writing, some learners relied on translations to understand the content delivered through the medium of English. The data shows that learners were comfortable with code-switching, which seemed to be a common practice in the classroom.

*(FG1 - D): Sometimes ... mhlawumbi athethe iEnglish and then ke ngoku ayitranslate to...kwisiXhosa. (Sometimes ... perhaps he speaks in English and then translates into isiXhosa.)*

*(FG2 - H): Uteacher, uqale asicacisele nge-English, then ke ngoku uyayicacisa ngesiXhosa. (The teacher first explains in English, and then explains it in isiXhosa.)*

According to Snow (2014) learners usually acquire language skills in their home language (HL) and then transfer those skills into a FAL. In this case, the learners' home language was used in the form of code switching as a mediation tool and linguistic resource to facilitate learners' access to knowledge. Since writing is a complex activity requiring creative thinking and coherent expression of ideas, the home language becomes an effective mediation tool (Landos, 2003). It could be argued that the learners' home language acted as a mediation tool in their creative writing. However, code-switching could also pose as a challenge for the learners, since learning is assessed through writing, which does not accommodate code-switching.

In the context of creative writing, this could mean that learners drew on their familiar language to formulate their opinions and ideas. While such a practice has a scaffolding and mediation role in learning, direct translation could result in the loss of meaning, as many terms cannot be literally translated (Lomaka, 2017).

## 7. Discussion of findings

The findings show that learners acknowledge the importance of creative writing, not only as a mediation tool in learning, but also as a means of gaining access and proficiency in the English language. The findings also confirm the power of English as an international lingua franca with hegemonic status (Kolade, 2012; McKinney, 2007). Paradoxically, the learners supported the use of English and claimed to be happy about using it, yet they struggled to use it. In this sense, they were limited in their own imaginative expression because of it.

With regard to creative writing, which demands creativity, clear communication and imagination (Defazio et al., 2010; Bloch, 2002), it may be argued that the Grade 9 learners who participated in the study did not exhibit these skills owing to their limited proficiency in English FAL and their struggles with vocabulary and grammar. This suggests that writing in a second or third language makes it difficult for learners to connect their thinking and imagination with English FAL. This would be exacerbated by limited vocabularies and incorrect use of grammar in the unfamiliar language. Therefore, it can be concluded that English (FAL) is a barrier to learners' creative writing, which is a complex internal (cognitive) and external (socio-cultural) process for knowledge construction and meaning-making (Freiman, 2015).

Collaborative learning seemed to assist learners to generate ideas for creative writing. It is through others that learners acquire social and cultural knowledge and skills (Dudley & Marling, 2004). In the case of creative writing, collaborative learning is ideal at the brainstorming stage which stimulates learners to think of the key concepts that will inform their writing. This approach scaffolds individual writing and generates a wealth of ideas, which would be helpful to Senior Phase learners who are expected to write a variety of texts independently (DBE, 2011). Collaborative learning is in line with Social Constructivism

Theory, which maintains that learning happens easily when learners interact with others in their environment (Vygotsky, 1978).

The findings also show the role of code switching in enhancing the teaching and learning of creative writing. The use of code-switching as an alternative and effective strategy in bi-/multilingual classrooms has been widely researched (Nomlomo, 2007; Banda, 2003). Banda (2003) mentions that while code-switching could be helpful in explaining certain concepts, it may not be helpful in writing classes, where learners may misinterpret some isiXhosa words and fail to acquire the necessary vocabulary in English. Nondabula (2020), too, claims that code-switching may not be useful in writing classes as teachers may use concepts and phrases in the home language that learners may not be able to express meaningfully in English. Aziakpono and Bekker (2010) also caution that certain terminology is not easily translated from the home language to the target language. In the case of our research, the limitations of code-switching could be exacerbated by learners' limited exposure to English in the township environment. Therefore, the use of code-switching in creative writing which demands not only imaginative skills, but also coherent and logical expression with appropriate vocabulary for particular genres, may not be helpful in mastering the appropriate language on paper.

While this study did not focus on teachers, its findings have implications for innovative pedagogies that could enhance learners' creative writing. With regard to the teaching and learning of English in South African schools, Ngubane, Ntombela and Govender (2020) assert that its use is often a challenge for both the teacher and the learner owing to their limited proficiency in this language. Teachers who are not home language speakers of English often find it difficult to help learners develop cognitively and linguistically (Ngubane et al., 2020; Arshavskaya, 2015). They also do not make thorough corrections to incorrect use of language in learners' English essays, and almost never require that learners re-write certain sentences to correct their English after they have had their essays marked. This means that many learners remain unaware of where they may have gone wrong.

This deficiency is regarded as one of the hindrances in the development of good writing skills from lower to senior grades (Ngubane et al., 2020). Poor writing skills in the early grades are likely to have negative effects in subsequent learning, including university education.

Finally, the current language curriculum (CAPS) is not explicit with regard to the teaching methodologies of creative writing in Grade 9, other than referring to the different genres, namely argumentative essays, narrative essays, descriptive essays, letters and emails (DBE, 2011). Therefore, there is a need for innovative and inclusive pedagogies that prioritise creative writing as a foundation for academic literacy from basic to higher education. This calls for a re-look at teacher training, both pre- and in-service, with regard to pedagogies that embrace linguistic and cultural diversity. Writing is an important aspect of learning across the curriculum (Harris, Graham & Friedlander, 2013), and can be mediated and scaffolded through

a variety of activities, including brainstorming, which encourages learners to generate ideas and become independent writers (Kapur, 2017; Maghsoudi & Haririan, 2013).

## 8. Conclusion

The findings of this study indicate the diversity of Grade 9 learner experiences in creative writing. They raise interesting issues about the benefits of creative writing and pedagogical approaches that appeal to learners. They also highlight the challenges of creative writing in English FAL, and the dilemma pertaining to the prestigious status of English on the one hand, and the significance of the learners' home language in facilitating meaningful learning, on the other. They reveal the discrepancy between the cognitive and social dimensions of learning, which are influenced by learners' language proficiency in the language in which they write.

Further research on creative writing in African languages, especially with regard to the different genres and the depth of learners' argumentation in creative writing, would be valuable. While the results of such research might seem obvious, they shed light on how the learners' home languages could be used effectively to enhance learners' creative writing in the FAL, especially regarding genre requirements and vocabulary development. The use of the home language would also be valuable in exercises that have to do almost entirely with imagination and not with writing. It is often imagination, not only skill in writing, that is so lacking in young peoples' written work.

The findings have implications for innovative pedagogical strategies that can be used in English (FAL) classrooms. There are various pedagogies for teaching creativity where correctness is thrown out of the window and learners are encouraged to give free rein to their thoughts through making up stories (verbally as well as in writing). Writing tasks in the home language, for example, could include imagining a day in life from the point of view of a dog or a bird, describing oneself as a colour and explaining why. Learners can be given three inanimate objects and asked to construct a story around those objects; giving learners a fantasy scenario to kick start their stories. These tools could act as precursors to writing, whether in the home language or in English. One cannot write well if one's imagination has been stifled.

The findings also contribute to language teaching across the curriculum which has the potential to strengthen meaningful writing in other disciplines. They cannot be generalised owing to the small sample used, but they provide insights into the complexity of the creative writing process and how the language of instruction may facilitate or impede learners' creativity and imagination in writing. They therefore have implications for language policy implementation and practice in linguistically diverse classrooms.

Finally, English FAL may be seen as a barrier not only to creative writing abilities but to the exercise of imagination per se. Therefore, the language in which learners write matters. The

matter of creative writing should be given more attention in schools, and teachers should be equipped to nurture imagination and creativity in learners' writing.

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