

**FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO LEARNERS' INABILITY TO USE A VARIETY OF
SENTENCE STRUCTURES IN ENGLISH ESSAY WRITING: THE CASE OF FORM E
LEARNERS IN THREE SELECTED SCHOOLS WITHIN THE MASERU CITY**

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DISSERTATION

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CERTIFICATION

This is to certify that this dissertation has been read and approved as having met the requirements of the Faculty of Education, National University of Lesotho, for the award of the Degree of Master of Arts in Education.

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ABSTRACT

It is common in the language classroom that the ability to produce written productions is among most valuable requirements that learners aim to accomplish from language study. This is because the mode of examination is through written tasks. However, learners are not able to achieve this aim because one of their problems in writing is lack of variety in sentence structures. They seem to use mostly simple structure. Whenever they try to vary, they are limited to compound with the overuse of *and*. Therefore, the present study aims at investigating the factors contributing to learners' inability to use a variety of sentence structures in their essay writing.

The study adopted an interpretive paradigm that used a mixed methods approach – qualitative and quantitative approaches. Data was generated through marking thirty learners' essays and conducting one on one open-ended in-depth interviews with three teachers from the three selected schools. Analysis of findings revealed that learners' failure to vary sentence structures in essay writing because of these factors: lack of extensive reading, poor educational background, lack of practice and feedback, confusion of non-sentence sentences with complete sentences, teachers' content incompetency, lack of application of grammatical concepts in essay writing, teacher-centered teaching strategies as well as lack of exposure to English language.

Key words: Factors, sentence structures, sentence variation, essay and learners.

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my husband, Lebohang Letsela, my two children, Mpho Precious Letsela and Oetsi John Letsela; my mother, Johanna 'Mahlalisi Majara and my niece, Nonosi Nonny Kotelo for being a source of encouragement and inspiration to me throughout my study. Without their love, assistance and support, I would not be able to pass through the laborious process of this research.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS/ACRONYMS

CAP	Curriculum and Assessment Policy	
CLT	Constructivism Learning Theory	
COSC	Cambridge Overseas Senior Certificate	
DM	Direct Method	
ECOL	Examination Council of Lesotho	
EFL	English as a Foreign Language	
ESL	English as a Second Language	
FL	Foreign Language	
JC	Junior Certificate	
LGCSE	Lesotho General Certificate for Secondary Education	
MoET	Ministry of Education and Training	
NCDC	National Curriculum Development Centre	
NUL	National University of Lesotho	
SL /L2	Second Language	
TL	Target Language	
TLR	Teacher-Learner	Ratio

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter features the background to the study, the problem of the study, the research questions, the significance of the study and the methodology. The organization of the study, the ethical considerations and the strategies ensuring trustworthiness of the findings are other included aspects, while the summary closes the chapter.

2.2 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Communication is a way of expressing ideas, thoughts, opinions or interchanging information through words, phrases and sentences. Valentzas (2010) defines communication as an act of conveying information for purposes of creating a shared understanding of issues and messages. Communication is about a negotiated understanding of issues and messages. The author further asserts that communication is the activity of conveying information through the exchange of thoughts, messages or information by speech, visuals, signals, behaviour and writing. Underpinning communication is, therefore, clarity and meaningfulness of the message. In essence, Valentzas's emphasis is the different modes of communication, one of which is writing.

In written communication, words and sentences which constitute structural/building blocks of written discourses are used (Horne and Heinemann, 2011). Therefore, premium should be placed on appropriate choice of words and careful construction of sentences in order to achieve effective communication. The writer's ability to choose speckled and appropriate diction and cautiously construct sentences with variation is therefore mandatory for effective written communication.

People do not only communicate with those around them, but also with those in other countries; either verbally or written, the message using international language that exists in their country as second or foreign language. A second language (SL) is a language other than the mother tongue that is officially recognised and adopted in a multilingual country as a means of public communication (Forsyth, 2014). English is one such second and often international language for most countries, where it is used as a language of business, science and technology, international affairs and diplomacy, education, social mobility and wider communication. Stressing the same view is Lane (2009) who identifies English as a language closer to being the world's second language since it is the official or first language of around twenty three (23) nations and a second language to twenty five (25) nations.

In Lesotho, English is used as the second official language for executing the same functions as those drawn from Lane (2009). Specifically, the Lesotho Constitution (1993) accords English such status in its decree that

The official languages of Lesotho shall be Sesotho and English and, accordingly, no instrument or transaction shall be invalid by reason only that it is expressed or conducted in one of those languages (The Government of Lesotho, 1993:13).

Harmer (2007) asserts that academic discourse takes place in English. In other terms, English is the language of education in most countries of the world. Lesotho is one of those countries in which English is the medium of access to education. It is used as both a medium of instruction and taught as a subject in schools as early as class 3. The Lesotho Curriculum and Assessment Policy (CAP) (2009) reads:

While acknowledging, as the Lesotho Constitution states, that Sesotho and English are the two official languages, and in recognition of the fact that there are other languages besides Sesotho and English, mother tongue will be used as a medium of instruction up to class 3 while English will be taught as a subject at

this and other levels. From grade 4, English shall begin to be used as a medium of instruction and to be taught as a subject as well (Ministry of Education and Training, 2009:7).

CAP is organised around the following five (5) key learning areas of Linguistic and Literacy, Numerical and Mathematical, Personal, Spiritual and Social, Scientific and Technology, and Creativity and Entrepreneurial. Both English and Sesotho languages fall in the Linguistic and Literacy learning area and are both compulsory subjects. The learning area is focused on the foundations of language and its usage. It is described as “... a medium through which all learning areas can be adequately and effectively delivered. It promotes effective communication in all its forms” (MoET, 2009). The Linguistic and Literary learning area highlights the significant role of language in different modes of communication.

The English language has four basic skills which are listening, speaking, reading and writing (Harmer, 2007; Lane, 2009). For learners to reach requisite proficiency in English and effective communication, they have to display mastery of all these skills. In the terms of CAP,

In order to meet the life challenges and cope with different experiences, communication is important as a means to express ideas and feelings. Thus the learners should have the ability to communicate effectively in words, symbols, colours, signs, sound, media (print, electronic), and actions. Therefore, learners should be helped to develop the following skills: listening, speaking, writing and reading (MoET, 2009:13).

Any of these four essential English language skills, Harmer (2007) says is rarely used in isolation. The author argues that when people are engaged in a conversation, they use both listening and speaking skills. For example, when a teacher teaches a certain topic to students, the students listen, write notes and read them at the same time. In this scenario, the three skills intertwine simultaneously with one another. The author further indicates that since skills use is multi-layered, it would not be practical to teach each skill in isolation.

Writing is an important skill on a number of counts. It allows writers to convey their ideas, thoughts, feelings and emotions across to the readers. Yarber and Yarber (2007) describe the purpose of writing as to communicate facts, ideas and feelings in a clear and effective manner. In writing, serious mistakes in sentence structure or grammar may leave readers not only confused but irritated, and as a result, communication compromised. For example, too many simple sentences or too many long sentences may either irritate and/or confuse the reader.

Writing skills enable learners to compose their ideas, organise their thoughts and arguments, support key points and share information. Nowacek (2005) points out that writing equips people with communication and thinking skills that they need to participate effectively in democracy. The author further posits that lately writing is seen as a complex activity and/or a social act which reflects the writer's communicative skills which are difficult to teach, develop and learn especially in English, as a foreign language (EFL) or English, as a second language (ESL), contexts.

Though an important skill, writing is the most difficult skill for second language learners because they have to first generate ideas in their mother tongue, organise them and then translate them into the second language (SL) as readable, understandable and meaningful texts (Khati and Khati, 2009). Therefore, second language learners have to be taught not only how to apply their writing skill well in essay writing, but more importantly how to vary sentence structures in essay writing. Such teaching should, however, be research-appraised.

An essay is one example of a written communication. As a piece of communication, it must have a definite form. It must contain relevant information in the form of phrases and sentences. Huebsch (1996) defines an essay as a special type of communication that requires a logical and

clear arrangement of ideas. A well written essay has three fundamental parts namely, introductory paragraph, body and concluding paragraph. The present study focused on essay writing.

A paragraph is an important part of an essay that consists of the main idea contained in a topic sentence, supporting sentences that build on the idea provided in the topic sentence by means of examples, evidence and other details to support the topic sentence. It discusses one main idea. A paragraph, also, has a concluding sentence which is the last sentence of the paragraph that summarises the information that has been presented in a paragraph. It links the current paragraph to the next paragraph. An essay, therefore, is made up of paragraphs and sentences that need to be varied and put together to convey a meaningful message.

Sentence construction is one of the elements which characterise paragraphing in a good essay. A sentence is a grammatical unit of one or more words that express an independent statement, question, request, command or exclamation. A complete sentence should have a subject and a verb or a predicate. Fowler (1987) and Phythian (1987) write that a sentence is a combination of words which is complete as expressing a thought. A sentence has to follow the conventions of Standard English in both spelling and grammar. It begins with a capital letter and ends with end marks such as a period, an exclamation mark or a question mark. Therefore, a good essay entails sentences that are complete, grammatically correct and well punctuated in order to express ideas hence the purpose of writing is to write sentences that are correct, complete and logical. No matter how interesting the writer's ideas are or how well the writer organises their essay, a writer should have control over their sentences and vary them accordingly (Tredinnick, 2008).

Sentences may be classified according to their function. They may perform different functions such as making a statement, asking a question, giving a command or expressing emotions. Sentences may also be categorized according to their different structures. The structure of a sentence may either be simple, compound, complex or compound complex. A sentence that contains only one clause, that is, one subject and one verb phrase, is called a simple sentence while a sentence that has two complete statements connected by a coordinating conjunction like *for, and, nor, but, or, yet* and *so*, is a compound sentence.

When one adds a dependent clause to a simple sentence, the result is a complex sentence. Compound-complex sentence entails two or more independent clauses and at least one dependent clause. A dependent clause begins with a subordinating word and it does not express a complete thought in itself as it depends on an independent clause to complete its meaning. An independent clause expresses a complete thought (Altenberg and Vago, 2010). The study intended to investigate whether learners use these various sentence structures. If they do not use them, the study would investigate the contributing factors.

Many studies on essay writing have been conducted. For instance, Ahmed (2010) carried out a study in Egypt at the Qatar University. The study focused on the organisational problems that Egyptian student teachers of English encountered when they wrote an English essay. The study investigated students' cohesion and coherence problems in EFL essay writing. A mixed method research design was used together with a questionnaire and a semi-structured in-depth interview as instruments of data collection. Analysis of findings revealed that students overused coordinate sentences and misused topic sentences which were the reasons for their incoherent and unacceptable quality of writing.

Another study was conducted by Alarcon and Morales (2011) in Manila, Philippines at the University of Santo Tomas. The aim was to analyse the cohesive features in the argumentative essay of undergraduate students. The researchers analysed their data qualitatively and quantitatively using Halliday and Hasan's (1976) taxonomy features. The study revealed that students tended to be redundant and wordy in their use of conjunctions. The study further found out that the students had a problem with the usage of personal and demonstrative pronouns as reference cohesive items.

Sefako-Letsoela (2012) sought to find out how the National University of Lesotho (NUL) final year undergraduate students use metadiscourse in their research projects. Her study focused on transitional markers, attitude markers and frame markers as categories of metadiscourse. A more revealing result of the study was that students misused the marker *and* while other markers were underused as they had counts of less than ten. The findings further indicated that the students used frame markers correctly except that they were not as many as expected.

Another study was conducted by Carrio-Pastor (2013) at the Universidad Politecnica de Valencia in Spain. The main focus of the study was on the variation of sentence connectors in academic English essays and more specifically on the issue of whether language can change depending on the linguistic background of the writer. The results were analysed and the findings confirmed that variation of connectors may exist in academic English essays as the interpersonal style of writers could be different when their linguistic background is different. The results also showed that there was overuse of some sentence connectors such as *and* as well as *but*.

Though studies on essay writing were undertaken by different researchers in different places around the world, it seems not many of them looked at the variation of sentence structures in

essay writing. The dearth of research in this regard constrains assertiveness on the causes of learners' inability to use a variety of sentence structures in their essay writing. Most of the studies focused on university students but the current study focused on senior secondary school learners.

Essay writing, which is sometimes, called composition writing in the school system, is one of the topics which teachers are expected to teach at all levels of education (LGCSE) as per English Language Syllabus (2014). This is emphasised mostly at senior secondary education level where mastery of such writing is highly expected from learners in preparation for their entry into tertiary where it now becomes requisite. Documented scholarship, however, shows that teachers and learners face different challenges teaching and acquiring this skill (Nowacek, 2005). Sentence variation is one of the critical skills for learners to master in essay writing. If writing is a challenge as pointed out by the cited authors, then sentence variation as an aspect of writing can reasonably be deemed one of the research areas to be explored.

2.3 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The study drew from both the literature and the researcher's personal teaching experience as an ESL teacher for the statement of the problem. According to Mutikiri (2013), Lesotho Junior Certificate Examiner's Report (2006) and Cambridge Overseas Senior Certificate (COSC) Examiner's Report (2007), learners' failure to vary sentence structures could be one of the contributing factors to poor performance in English Language external examinations. It is a common concern amongst teachers of English Language, textbook writers, markers, examiners and moderators of the subject in the education system that learners do not vary their sentence structures. Whenever an attempt is made to do so, it is limited to the use of compound in which

only ‘*and*’ is used as a co-ordinating conjunction. The learners rarely or never use other conjunctions such as *but, for, nor, or, so, yet* and other conjunctive devices (Mutikiri, 2013).

The author points to examiner’s reports that poor performing candidates use sentences that are mostly simple and repetitive in structure; some use a variety of sentence structures but they repeat sentence types which result in monotonous effect. To show that this is a perennial problem at both high school and Junior Certificate levels (JC), the Lesotho JC examiner’s report (2006) points out that candidates also tend to use very long complicated sentences which in the end do not make sense. The COSC Examiner’s Report (2007) reiterates on the problems encountered by most learners in essay writing. The examiner singles out problems of sentence construction and variation, spelling, grammar and illegible writing.

As an experienced English Language teacher, I have noted over the years that one of the challenges teachers face is that of learners not performing well in English Language in their JC and LGCSE examinations. The poor performance seems to be due to learners’ failure to vary sentence structures in writing persuasive and/or imaginative essays. Since the expectation is that sentence variation is taught from at least secondary school level, one would expect learners to display basic functional knowledge of sentence variation in their JC examinations and later in their LGCSE exit examinations. However, this is seemingly not the case.

The results of deficient sentence structures variation are monotonous and difficult for the reader to make meaning of. As Bauman (2004) points out, essay writers need to use different types of sentence structures to capture their readers’ interest. According to this author, writers have to vary sentences according to their length and structure whenever they are writing in order to avoid monotony. Any piece of writing should have a mixture of simple, compound, complex and

compound-complex sentences. This is because readers lose interest when reading any piece of writing which has only one type of sentences.

English Language Code 0175 of LGCSE is assessed by means of Papers 1 and 2 (LGCSE syllabus, 2014). Paper 1 was the target in this study. It consists of two sections, namely, creative and directed writing. In Paper I, Section One tests creative and imaginative writing while Section Two tests speech, article, memorandum, email and report writing. For the latter section, examination questions' focus alternates by year. This means that if speech was tested this year, it would not be tested in the following year. On the contrary, essay writing is examinable every year. It is in essay writing where learners are expected to master their language skills which include sentence structure-variation to express their views, experiences and imagination. However, learners are unable to vary sentence structures in their essays.

Though learners' failure to use a variety of sentence structures in English essays is reported by teachers, markers, examiners and moderators (Mutikiri, 2013; JC Examiner's Report, 2006), seemingly there are no empirical studies conducted in Lesotho to establish the possible contributing factors to this handicap. As indicated earlier in the background to the study section, those studies undertaken on essay writing both internationally and locally focused on different aspects of an essay such as cohesive devices, metadiscourse, connectors and not on variation of sentence structures. According to Ahmed (2010), Alarcon and Morales (2011) and Carrio-Pastor (2013), an essay is an important way of communication that has to be clear, readable, understandable and interesting to the readers. It is in this premise that there is a need for research on the contributing factors for the learners' inability to use sentence structural variation in essay writing to secure an optimal success at their JC and later LGCSE final examinations and a space later in higher institutes of learning.

The intent of the study, therefore, was to address the gap of lack of studies that explore the use of the whole range of sentence construction in learners' essays. The study further sought to find out why learners fail to use variation of sentence structures in their English essay writing. Finally, it hoped to propose the necessary strategies of teaching and learning towards optimal sentence structural variation in essay writing. The study research questions follow in the next section.

2.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following research questions were aimed at helping the researcher find factors contributing to learners' inability to vary sentence structures in their essay writing. Creswell (2003) indicates that research questions serve different purposes, including guiding the research project, assisting in the construction of a logical argument, offering more clearly defined goals for the study and better guide for data collection.

2.4.1 The main research question of the study

The main question is good enough if it contributes to solving the problem that the researcher has defined in the problem statement (Bryman, 2007). Below is the main question of the study followed by the specific questions which unpack the main research question.

- ❖ What are the factors contributing to learners' inability to use a variety of sentence structures in their essay writing?

2.4.2 Specific research questions of the study

1. What sentence variation skills/abilities are required for essay writing in English?
2. What type of teaching strategies is adopted towards learners' knowledge of sentence structure variation in essay writing?
3. What challenges do learners face in sentence structure variation in essay writing?

4. What challenges do teachers face teaching for sentence structure variation in essay writing and what are the possible causes of these challenges?
5. What pedagogical strategies can be adopted to improve learners' ability to use a variety of sentence structures in their essay writing?

2.5 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The study will contribute to learners, teachers, curriculum planners and ESL teacher education, readers and writers as well as researchers. The study has a potential to improve English language teaching and learning in a number of ways which include shedding light on the importance of learners' needs. It will further enable teachers to know how to satisfy learners' needs and conduct successful and memorable learning. The study will also provide an understanding of not only the problems faced by learners in the variation of sentence structures in their essay writing, but also strategies for solving them. It will further generate knowledge on learners' writing style regarding the use of sentence structures. This way, it will hopefully equip the teachers with much needed information for English language teaching.

The study was intended to investigate methods and strategies of teaching and learning English language. In this case, it will provide teachers with the relevant and recent methodologies that may expose learners to the use of a broad range of sentence construction. If all these are achieved, it is hoped that the standard of English, especially essay writing, will improve and education will flourish as a medium of instruction in Lesotho schools.

The study intends to bring to English Language teachers' attention not only the contributing factors to learners' inability to use a variety of sentence structures in their English essay writing, but also possible strategies to rectify the situation. The objective is that learners should master

essay writing which entails application of all necessary language structural devices including sentence variation. The intention is to improve learners' performance in English Language in preparation for their entry in the world of work. Efficient and effective communication skill, either written or spoken, is a requirement in the field of work. Peck and Coyle (2005) assert that employers value employees who can write and speak grammatical sentences, vary those sentences and convey information accurately.

Sentence variation does not appear as a topic to be taught in the LGCSE syllabus. The study will hopefully help English Language syllabus developers to realise the need to include sentence variation in essay writing as a topic to be taught at secondary level in order for it to get attention from teachers in a classroom situation. The study will also open curriculum designers and planners' minds to different approaches to the teaching and assessment of essay writing, particularly writing skills. Instructors in teacher education will also be aware of the possible methods that they may emphasise and encourage teacher trainees to adopt in teaching sentence variation in an essay writing in order to help their learners to master written communication.

Readers and writers will also benefit from the study. Readers, on one hand, will understand the importance of communication especially written communication. On the other hand, writers will also be equipped on how to write good essays which vary sentence structures in order to fulfil the purpose of writing stipulated earlier in this chapter as to communicate the intended message to the intended readers.

Lastly, the study may also benefit researchers who may want to study the area of sentence structures and their variation in essay writing. In terms of the data generated by the objectives of

this study, it is hoped that its findings will inform teachers on the challenges learners face when attempting sentence structures in essay writing.

2.6 METHODOLOGY

Methodology refers to those ways of obtaining, organising and analysing data used in conducting the study (Creswell, 2003). Those ways include the research design, data collection techniques, data collection procedure, population and sampling procedure. Qualitative and quantitative research approaches based on interpretive paradigm were adopted in this study. However, the study is predominantly qualitative.

1.6.1 Data collection techniques

Polit and Hungler (1999) define data as information obtained in the course of a study, while data collection technique refers to the instrument which is used to collect data. In this study, data was collected through the use of a questionnaire, interview, document analysis as well as essay writing task.

1.6.2 Population

Polit et al. (1999) refer to population as an aggregate or totality of all the objects, subjects or members that conform to a set of specifications. The population in this study was all Form E learners and ESL teachers teaching in Form E in Lesotho.

1.6.3 Sample and sampling techniques

According to LoBiondo-Wood and Haber (2013) and Polit et al. (1999), sampling is the process of selecting a portion of the population to represent the entire population. Purposive sampling was used to select the three schools. Random sampling was used to select learners' essays. This

sampling is a variety of selection techniques in which sample is selected by chance but with a known probability of selection (LoBiondo-Wood et al, 2005).

1.6.4 Validity and reliability

Burns and Grove (2001) indicate that validity is a measure of truth or falsity of the data obtained through the use of research instrument while reliability is the degree of consistency with which the instrument measures an attribute. To satisfy validity and reliability, I gave learners an essay writing task in class during their normal English lesson and their teachers helped in invigilating them so that they could not copy from one another. Learners from the three chosen schools were given the same topic and their essays were marked by their teachers and the researcher to ensure validity and reliability of the results.

1.6.5 Data analysis

Data analysis is defined as a process of systematically searching and arranging the collected data to increase the understanding of phenomenon (LoBiondo-Wood et al, 2013). The study's collected data was analysed on the basis of research questions. The aspects of methodology mentioned in this paragraph are dealt with in detail in Chapter Three.

2.7 ORGANISATION OF THE STUDY

The study consists of five chapters. **Chapter 1** comprises the introduction and background to the study. It also presents statement of the problem, the main research question and specific questions of the study, significance of the study, highlights of the methodology, validity and reliability, as well as organisation of the study.

Chapter 2 is the literature review. It deals with operationalization of key terms in the study, the theoretical framework underpinning the study. The research questions/objectives of the study guide identification and review of relevant literature which include empirical studies related to the study title. The literature review chapter sections include summative perspectives of the researcher in line with the title of the study. It ends with a summary.

Chapter 3 specifically features the research design which is grounded in the interpretive, ontology and epistemology for paradigms. Population, sample and sampling techniques, methods of data collection, procedures for data collection and data analysis are explained in the chapter which unpacks not only how reliability and validity were satisfied but also how ethical considerations were met.

Chapter 4 presents analysis of data, interpretation and discussion of data while **Chapter 5** highlights the key findings and weaves them into the conclusions and recommendations of the study.

2.8 SUMMARY

The chapter highlighted the background to the study, statement of the problem, research questions, and significance of the study, methodology, validity and reliability as well as organisation of the study. The next chapter discusses the literature related to the study.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, the literature related to the study is reviewed. Creswell (2003) describes a review of the literature as a written summary of journal articles, books and other documents that describe the past and current state of information about a certain issue. The writer emphasises that it is part of the research where a researcher identifies theories and previous research that have influenced a particular subject. This chapter contains four main sections. Initially, it identifies the meanings of the key terms operationalized in the title of the study. Then it gives an overview of the theories that underpin this study. Thirdly, the chapter reviews relevant literature based on the research questions of this study. Lastly, the empirical studies related to this research are reviewed for the implications of their findings for the study.

2.2 OPERATIONALISATION OF THE KEY TERMS OF THE STUDY

Key terms operationalized in the study include sentence, sentence structure and essay.

2.2.1 Sentence

A sentence is a group of words which expresses one idea and conveys meaning in a certain sense of completeness. Harmer (2007) defines a sentence as a combination of words which is complete as expressing a thought. The author's definition cannot be helpful in this study because it says nothing about structural variation of sentences but only mentions the function of a sentence.

2.2.2 Sentence structure

Sentence structure is the way a sentence is arranged. There are four types of sentence structure namely, simple, compound, complex and compound-complex sentences (Chalker and Weiner, 2011).

2.2.3 Sentence variation

Yarber et al. (2007) define sentence variety in an essay as a practice of using different types of sentences according to their structure and length to avoid monotony. They further indicate that sentence variety is a means by which the writer helps the reader to understand which ideas are most important, which ones support or explain other ideas.

2.2.4 Essay

Essay, in this study, is understood to be a written piece of communication with a definite form made up of paragraphs and sentences. It is said to contain relevant information. Huebsch (1996) defines an essay as a special type of communication requiring a logical, clear, correct and effective writing style, as well as positive ordering (arranging) of ideas. The writer has to arrange his thoughts in such an orderly fashion that the reader will have a feeling of appreciation and the fullest possible insight into the written work.

In the context of this study, sentence structure variation means that learners have to use different types of sentences in their essay. These sentences have to be varied according to their length and structure in order to capture the reader's interest.

2.3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study is benchmarked on the Constructivism Learning Theory (CLT) whose proponents are Dewey and Vygotsky. Constructivism Learning Theory is based on observations and scientific study about how people learn. It is stipulated in the theory that people construct their own

understanding and knowledge of the world through experiencing things and reflecting on those experiences (Oliver, 2000). When learners learn something new, they have to reconcile it with their previous ideas and experiences. The new knowledge can change what the learners believe in or can discard the new information as irrelevant. In any case, learners are active creators of their own knowledge.

In CLT, learners are encouraged to use active techniques to create more knowledge and reflect on it while at the same time they are able to talk about what they are doing and how their understanding is improving (Oliver, 2000). As learners write essays, they reflect and express their feelings, thoughts and ideas; as they do this, they create more knowledge. In this way, learners become active creators of knowledge because they engage in the task of essay writing using different types of sentences. Learners have to master how to vary these sentences because sentence variety adds life and flair to writing and reflects a hallmark of good style.

CLT promotes social and communication skills by creating a classroom environment that emphasises collaboration and exchange of ideas (Oliver, 2000). According to Oliver's assertion, CLT will help learners to master essay writing as a written communication. Learners must learn how to articulate their ideas clearly as well as to collaborate on tasks effectively by sharing in group projects (Dewey, 1997). Essay writing is one of the ways of communicating ideas and thoughts clearly and logically. In this study, learners are expected to communicate their thoughts and ideas in essay writing where they will use correctly constructed sentences and vary them accordingly. Learners must, therefore, exchange ideas and learn how to negotiate with others and be able to evaluate their contributions in socially acceptable manner. This is essential in real world since learners will always be exposed to challenges in which they have to cooperate and navigate among the ideas of others (Olusegun, 2015).

CLT has a principle that learning is a process which is subjective, autonomous and active. The important principles of CLT's approach to language teaching include action orientedness, cooperative learning and learner-centeredness. In this theory, learners are actively involved in their own process of learning. The teacher functions more as a facilitator who coaches, mediates, prompts and helps learners develop and assess their understanding and thereby their learning (Olusegun, 2015). The study, among others, investigated the pedagogical strategies that can be adopted to improve learners' ability to use a variety of sentence structures in their essay writing. It makes sense to assume that learners encounter problems when dealing with sentence variation in essay writing because learning is predominantly teacher-centred. The study explored ways in which learners can be involved in their learning of sentence variation.

According to Phillips (1997), the central idea in CLT is that learning is constructed by learners. Learners build new knowledge upon the foundation of previous learning. In the case of this study, learners start writing compositions as early as Grade three using mostly simple and compound sentences where they start combining them with conjunctions like *and*. As they proceed to secondary level, learners ideally build upon what they have learned at primary level. But at this level, they add new information as they are expected to begin using a variety of sentence structures in their essays in order to make them readable, interesting and communicative. One of the interests of this study was to investigate learners' challenges in sentence variation during essay writing.

The study explored the extent to which learners' experience is valued in learner-based construction of knowledge in relation to sentence variation in essay writing. CLT will help the teachers to draw from learners' experiences on sentence structures variation in essay writing because learners do possess knowledge from their experiences; therefore, the knowledge they

have will be the starting point. Consideration of their prior knowledge on sentence structures variation will encourage them to be active participants in the teaching and learning of sentence structures variation in essay writing.

In essence, CLT is one of the theories which some researchers benchmarked their research on. Such studies though conducted in other national contexts with different education systems, include those of Olusegun (2015) and Brookes and Grundy (2000). These researchers conducted their studies to investigate factors contributing to learners' writing deficiency and the extent to which learning is learner-centred. Their studies indicate that ESL learners commit errors in sentence construction due to teacher-centred learning. According to these researchers, teachers do not use communicative teaching strategies which feature three elements advocated for in CLT principles. The elements are: 1) learners owning their learning and having something meaningful to say; 2) working in small groups and 3) working collaboratively.

Olusegun, Brookes and Grundy believe that CLT principles of learner-centeredness and collaborative working promote freedom to express one's opinions and ideas. Learners are recognised as a resource and should be allowed to discover new knowledge which is built from their experiences. The essence of constructivism in view of the above studies is learner-centeredness and involvement. The study augmented knowledge created by the above studies in that, based on the same theory but in the context of Lesotho was to find out the extent to which English language teachers are CTL oriented or not. This study also explored the extent to which learners are involved in activities which help them master sentence structures variation in their essay writing for effective communication in writing.

One of the main issues of this study was to find out factors which contribute to learners' inability to use a variety of sentence structures in their essay writing. Adoption of CLT in the study helped in exploration of how teacher-centred teaching is one of the factors contributing to learners' inability to use a variety of sentence structures in their essay writing. Teacher-centred methods disregard learners' role in creation of knowledge.

2.4 LITERATURE BASED ON THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS OF THE STUDY

This section discusses literature based on the research questions of the study and derives the implications of such scholarship for the research in question.

2.4.1 Factors contributing to learners' inability to vary sentence structures in essay writing

Writing is a significant skill in language production. Its significance increases when it comes to writing English Language which is extensively used for global mediation of knowledge (Khatai et al, 2009). However, it is considered the most difficult skill for ESL learners as they face many challenges when writing essay, especially in using a variety of sentence structures. Booth and Gregory (1987) argue that writing is an extremely difficult cognitive activity which requires the learner to have control over various factors.

The factors which emerged from the study were interrogated for the extent to which they were to do with academic background, personal interest of the writer to various linguistic and cognitive phenomena. Booth et al (1987) believe that performance in language development is subject to improvement in writing skills. According to these authors, a research is required to explore and examine factors that adversely affect writing skills of ESL learners. The purpose of this study was to investigate factors contributing to learners' inability to use a variety of sentence structures

in their essays. Issues in sentence variation can be more efficiently addressed if the factors that generate them are identified.

In view of scarcity of research on factors contributing to learners' inability to vary sentence structures in essay writing by ESL learners, it is apparent that the study in its own right adds new knowledge about essay writing needs of learners and teachers of English language in Lesotho. This study used the factors identified to understand and analyse those that emerged from the study's findings. The next section features the possible factors against efficient sentence structure variation in essay writing.

2.4.1.1 Lack of extensive reading

There is research evidence to the effect that learners who do not read a lot do not perform well in writing. It is believed that reading influences writing. Jani and Mellinger (2013) carried out a study to investigate factors influencing students' writing outcomes at the University of Maryland, Baltimore. The researchers found that lack of reading is one of the factors behind learners' poor writing.

According to the above mentioned researchers, learners do not read broadly to see how sentences are constructed and varied in other people's work. They seem to have little exposure to books and reading. As learners read, they come across new words as well as different types of sentences, short and long, structurally and functionally classified. They learn how such words are used in sentences and how sentences are varied in order to make the reading meaningful and interesting. In this way, their vocabulary and spelling are improved.

Reading in the writing classroom is understood as the appropriate input for acquisition of the writing skills because it is generally assumed that reading progress will somehow function as

primary model from which writing skill can be learnt or at least be inferred. Better readers tend to be better writers since they tend to produce more syntactically natural and better writing than poorer readers. One of the main concerns of this study was to investigate whether lack of extensive reading could be one of the factors contributing to learners' inability to vary sentence structures in essay writing.

2.4.1.2 Learners' poor educational background

Research indicates that one of the factors contributing to learners' writing deficiency is their poor educational background. A related study was conducted by Huy (2015) aimed to find out the problems affecting learners' writing skills in Grade 11 at Thong Linh high school. The findings revealed that lack of training at primary school is another factor which contributes to poor writing. Huy posits that learners' difficulties in writing have their roots in their education background where emphasis is put only on speaking and listening, not on reading and writing.

A further assertion of Huy is that learners seem to be underprepared when it comes to the task of writing. This might be because learners are strongly attached to their mother tongue which hinders the learning of target language writing skills. The present study's interest was to investigate the degree to which learners' poor educational background can be one of the factors that contribute to learners' inability to vary sentence structure in their English essays.

2.4.1.3 Lack of practice and feedback

One of the recommended ways for learners to learn and vary sentence structures in essay writing is to be engaged in extensive writing, which they unfortunately fail to do. Writing is the most complex and difficult skill for it requires a lot of training and feedback (Booth et al, 1987; and Harmer, 2007). This difficulty does not lie only in generating and organising ideas, but also in translating these ideas into readable text. This is according to the findings of a study conducted

by Kedir and Nemo (2015) on factors affecting writing skill for Grade 9 students at Adaba high school in Ethiopia.

The best way for learners to learn and vary sentence structures in essay writing is to be engaged in writing so that they can improve their spelling, vocabulary, punctuation, sentence structure as well as variation. Bevan (2008) suggests that in order to help learners produce well-written compositions, it is important to engage them in frequent writing exercises because good writing involves many elements such as sentence variation and adequate feedback which many high school teachers de-emphasise. One of the interests of this study was to explore the extent to which lack of practice is a factor contributing to learners' inability to use a variety of sentence structure in essay writing.

2.4.1.4 Differences between speaking and writing

The difference between speaking and writing is one of the factors which contribute to learners' inability to use a variety of sentence structures in their writing. A learner may be fluent enough to engage in a conversation yet struggle in writing an essay. Wilson (2014) found out that one cause of learners' struggle in writing is that when writing, the writer does not have an opportunity to read the other person's body language or expressions the way they would if they were speaking to the person. The immediate feedback from the person they are speaking to could allow them to make corrections when they realised they were not being understood. Since there is no immediate feedback when writing, the learners must be as clear and concise as possible. Another area of interest of the study was to find out whether the difference between speaking and writing is a factor contributing to learners' sentence variation deficiency or not.

2.4.1.5 Interference of mother tongue

Another factor contributing to learners' inability to use a variety of sentence structures in essay writing is the interference of mother tongue. Wilson (2014) and Kedir et al (2015) conducted studies whose purpose was to find out the extent to which mother tongue influences the target language (TL) in essay writing. The findings in Wilson and Kedir et al revealed that learners are strongly related to their mother tongue which hinders their learning of the TL, especially in writing.

According to these researchers, it is difficult for native speakers of English to write well. It is more difficult for a foreign or L2 learner to put into practice all the strategies that have been taught to them in essay writing since they first have to think in their native language then translate their ideas into L2. They emphasise that if learners have not developed the ability to thinking in English, probably it will be impossible to become good writers. One of the main issues of this study was to explore the extent to which interference of mother tongue is a factor contributing to learners' inability to use sentence structures variation in their essay writing.

2.4.1.6 Use of non-sentence sentences

Learners confuse sentence fragments, comma splices, loose sentences, parallel sentences and run-on sentences with complete sentences, and this causes problems in their writing. Non-sentence sentences infer that the writer is careless and unable to formulate a complete thought (sentence). Learners have consistent problems with sentence structures as they usually write incomplete sentences or write essays which do not have all parts of a well organised paragraph – no topic sentence and no supporting sentences. Instead, they use phrases, fragments and run-on sentences. This is according to the study conducted by Freed, Ashraf and Bilal (2016). This present study was aimed at finding the extent to which the use of non-sentence sentences can be a factor contributing to learners' inability to use a variety of sentence structures in their essays.

2.4.1.7 Teaching strategies

Another factor contributing to learners' writing deficiency is teaching strategies. Mmbaga (2002) conducted a study on factors influencing learners' writing problems at Thai University. Results showed that the strategies teachers use when teaching writing are teacher-centred. The author asserts that the reason behind using teacher-centred strategies is that writing has commonly been viewed as a support skill used to reinforce acquisition of grammar as in the grammar translation method or to support memorisation of language structures. Mmbaga further indicates that learners fail to write well since they are not given opportunity to engage into long discussions and conversations. Their teachers do not use communicative strategies which could at least afford them chance to improve their writing. Teachers are the ones who do most of the talking while learners do not contribute much in the discussions. One of the issues of concern of the current study was to find out the extent to which teaching strategies can be a contributing factor to learners' inability to use a variety of sentence structures variation.

2.4.2 Sentence variation skills/abilities required for essay writing in English

One of the important aspects of the essay is sentence structure variation. The aspect makes an essay interesting and shows emphasis (Yarber et al., 2007). However, as indicated in (1.3) learners' poor performance in both JC and COSC (later LGCSE) final examinations, is attributed to their failure to vary sentence structures in their essay writing. Good essay writing involves sentence structure variation. White and Arndt (2011) assert that an essay is said to have a quality of sentence variety if sentences are pleasingly rhythmic with stress key points at the beginning or the end of the sentence and reflecting a tone of voice appropriate to the point of view. Below are the sentence variation skills/abilities required for essay writing in English.

2.4.2.1 Functional knowledge of different sentence structures and conjunctions

In order to master sentence variation in essay writing, learners must have an ability to understand different types of sentence structures, the clauses which make up sentences and the connecting words necessary to create sentence variety. Yakoob (2015) conducted a study at Kuala Lumpur high school to examine whether sentence variety checklist developed learners' performance in essay writing.

The researcher found out that learners need knowledge and practice of the different sentence structures and the connecting words to create sentence variety. According to the findings of that study, learners have to know simple, compound, complex and compound-complex sentences and structures based on the number and type of clauses they contain. The findings further showed that learners must have a thorough knowledge of the connecting words used with these sentences. Based on literature and Yakoob's study, the following are the different sentence structures and the connecting words that learners have to know.

a) Simple Sentence

A simple sentence structure is made up of a single independent clause. According to Bevan and Brennan (2014), writers use the simple sentence for particular effects such as to supply topic sentence, emphasise an idea, express emotions or build tension and add variety of sentence structure in their work.

b) Compound Sentence

A compound sentence is defined by Langan (2003) and Yarber et al. (2007) as a sentence which is made up of two or more simple sentences which are sometimes called independent clauses, combined with coordinating conjunctions such as *and*, *or* and *but* or other compounding devices.

Coordinating conjunctions are used to connect any two units that are of the same type. These units can be two sentences, two nouns, two verbs, two determiners, two prepositions or two adjectives. There are seven coordinating conjunctions in English, namely, *for*, *and*, *nor*, *but*, *or*, *yet* and *so*. The most commonly used coordinating conjunctions include *and*, *or* and *but*. Altenberg et al. (2010) indicate that a commonly used way to remember the coordinating conjunctions is to think of *FANBOYS*. F stands for (for), A (and), N (nor), B (but), O (or), Y (yet), and S (so).

c) Complex Sentences

Complex sentences, like the name says, are very difficult to construct. This is why it is stated in (1.3) that learners do not attempt to use this type of sentences in their essay writing. Many sentences, especially in written language, are complex. Crystal (undated) indicates that a complex sentence is a sentence containing one independent clause and at least one dependent clause. He further states that a dependant clause is a group of words containing a subject and a verb but is not capable of standing alone as a sentence. It always needs to be attached by a subordinating conjunction to an independent clause in order to complete its meaning.

Table 2.1: Common subordinating conjunctions that introduce a dependent clause

After	even though	than	whenever
Although	how	that	where
As	if	though	wherever
As if	in order that	till	whether
As though	once	unless	which
Because	rather than	until	while
Before	since	what	who
Even if	so that	whose	when
In order to			why

d) Compound - Complex Sentences

Yarber et al (2007) and Tredinnick (2008) point out that a compound–complex sentence is a sentence that contains at least two independent clauses and at least one dependent clause. They further indicate that a compound–complex sentence is made up of a compound sentence and a complex sentence. The compound part of it means that the sentence has two or more independent clauses while the complex part of it means that the sentence has at least one subordinate clause.

Demonstration of writing needs someone who knows these types of sentences hence one of the interests of this study was to investigate the extent to which learners vary sentence structures in

their essay. The purpose of the study was to show that it is imperative to use simple sentences in essay writing but they should be coupled with other types of sentences. Simple sentences must be varied with compound, complex and compound-complex sentences to capture readers' attention and to avoid redundancy. Therefore, learners are not only to be taught these four structural types of sentences at high school level but also shown how they may variably use them so that they can write clear and effective English essays.

2.4.2.2 Functional knowledge of functionally classified sentences

Knowledge of functionally classified sentences is one of the skills that can help learners to master sentence variation in English essay writing. These sentences are classified according to the function they perform in a spoken or written discourse. The sentences declare, ask, command and exclaim (Huddleston, 2004).

a) Declarative Sentence

This is a sentence that makes a statement or expresses opinion. Since it declares a statement, it is always ended with a period/full stop. In its most basic sense, a declarative sentence states an idea either objectively or subjectively on the part of the speaker and may be either true or false (Huddleston, 2004).

b) Imperative Sentence

An imperative sentence is defined by Kurilich and Whitaker (2008) as a sentence that makes a command, order, directive or demand.

c) Exclamatory Sentence

This is a sentence that conveys strong feeling and shows emphasis. Since the exclamatory sentence conveys strong emotions, it is not found at all in formal writing such as reports and essays unless it is used in quotation (Yarber et al, 2007).

d) Interrogative Sentence

According to Huddleston (2004), an interrogative sentence is a sentence that asks a question. It always ends with a question mark.

2.4.2.3 An ability to understand sentence construction errors

Learners must be able to understand possible problems with sentence structure so that they cannot only recognise but write effective sentences. Learners mostly make syntactical-related errors as a result of imperfect development of sentences. The sentence problems arise from incomplete mastery of syntax in writing. Sentence structure errors include sentence fragment, run-on sentence, comma-splice, parallel sentence, loose sentence, choppy sentence and stringy sentence (Tredinnick, 2008).

2.4.3 Teaching learning strategies adopted towards learners' knowledge of sentence structures variation in essay writing

Teachers adopt instructivism (an approach to teaching marked by direct communication of the teaching material from the teacher to the learners, learners are passive recipients of the knowledge which is possessed by the teacher) approach of teaching when teaching sentence variation in essay writing (Vij, 2015). This means that they tend to use teacher-centred strategies because of the large classes and a number of topics that they have to cover within a confined period of time (Fowler, 2010).

According to Mmbaga (2002), teachers resort to teacher-centred strategies such as lecture method when teaching sentence variation in essay writing on account of their accommodative nature in terms of content coverage and time saving. However, a lecture method has some disadvantages. Among the shortcomings of a lecture teaching strategy is that individual difference is neglected. Benjamin (2005) argues that with lecturing method, learners are pretty much omitted to their own capacity of understanding and in big classes; it becomes more difficult for teachers to recognise slow learners.

According to Mmbaga (2002), another teaching strategy that the teachers use is direct method (DM). Benjamin (2005) indicates that direct method focuses mainly on the development of oral skills. Its objective is to enable learners to understand the second language (L2) rules without incorporating those of the first language (L1). Though a good teaching strategy as it is, DM has some shortcomings. One of them is that it ignores systematic written work and reading activities. Benjamin further states that learners take minimal part in their learning because teachers become the most dominant source of information. One of the main focuses of the study was to find out the type of teaching learning strategies that the teachers adopt towards learners' knowledge of sentence variation in essay writing. It makes sense to assume that learners encounter problems when dealing with sentence variation in essay writing because learning is predominantly teacher-centred. The study explored ways in which learners can be involved in their learning of sentence variation.

2.4.4 Learners' challenges in sentence structure variation in essay writing and their causes

English as a second language writing is considered to be the most challenging aspect in ESL learning, (Bevan, 2008). As a result of this, learners are faced with challenges in sentence structure variation during essay writing. These are some of learners' challenges:

2.4.4.1 Confusing non-sentence sentences with complete sentences

Learners are faced with a challenge of confusing non-sentence sentences with complete sentences when trying to vary sentence structures in their essays. In a study conducted by Solikhah (2017) on significant differences of corrections on grammar, sentence variety and developing details on the quality of the essay by Indonesian learners, the findings revealed that learners are faced with the challenge of confusing non-sentence sentences such as sentence fragments, comma-splices, loose sentences, run-on sentences and parallel sentences with complete sentences. The cause of this confusion is that teachers do not treat sentence structures variation as a topic on its own as they find it boring. Another cause is learners' imperfect development of sentences as they lack complete mastery of syntax in writing. Non-sentence sentences are not sentences like the name implies.

It is very imperative to define these non-sentence sentences as they are one of the factors which contribute to learners' inability to use a variety of sentence structures in their essay writing. It is also necessary to give the possible ways of correcting them to help the readers of this study to avoid using them because, as stated in section (2.4.1.6), learners confuse them with complete sentences. When non-sentence sentences are used in writing, readers become confused and irritated; as a result, communication is compromised. That is, the purpose of writing which is to communicate ideas, facts and feelings in a clear and effective manner is not achieved. These are caused by the mistakes made in sentence structure or grammar.

a) Loose Sentences

A loose sentence is a sentence which results from the use of too many “*and*” connectives when other conjunctions would convey a more precise meaning. Again, a loose sentence results from weak sentence construction and the inclusion of many phrases and clauses in no particular order.

b) Parallel Structure

Parallel structure means that parts of a sentence which are in sequence do not all follow the same grammatical or structural principle.

c) Choppy Sentences

These are a succession of short sentences without transitions to link them to each other. Only simple sentences are used. This makes an essay boring and difficult to comprehend

d) Stringy Sentences

Stringy sentences are sentences in which too many clauses are connected, usually with *and*, *but*, *so* and *because* to form one long sentence. The result is a sentence that seems endless.

e) Sentence Fragment

A sentence fragment is a group of words that resembles a sentence though it lacks an independent clause. It is punctuated like a complete sentence but cannot stand on its own.

f) Run-on Sentences

Run-on sentences are sentences containing two or more clauses not connected by the correct conjunction or punctuation.

g) Comma-splice

A comma-splice occurs when two independent clauses are connected with only a comma. As defined by Yarber et al. (2007), comma-splices are the result of the writers confusing a conjunctive adverb with a coordinating conjunction. A conjunctive adverb is a kind of

connecting word that looks like a conjunction but is actually an adverb. Greffenberg (2010) and Langan (2003) list the following as examples of conjunctive adverbs:

Table 2. 2: Conjunctive adverbs

Some Conjunctive Adverbs			
Accordingly	also	besides	consequently
Furthermore	hence	however	moreover
Nevertheless	otherwise	therefore	nonetheless

One of the main issues of this study was exploration of learners' challenges in sentence structure variation during essay writing. As a result, challenges which emerged in this section were used to understand and analyse those that emerged from the study.

2.4.4.2 Difficulty in constructing complex and compound-complex sentences

Learners are faced with a challenge of constructing complex and compound-complex sentences.

To find the extent to which this can be a challenge, Solikhah (2017) carried a study on significant differences of corrections on grammar, sentence variety and developing details on the quality of the essay by Indonesian learners. The findings of Solikhah's study showed that learners are faced with the challenge of writing complex sentences because their teachers do not give them enough practice of these sentences. The findings further exposed that during the observations, the teachers seemed to be uncomfortable when teaching this type of sentences. Even the most talented learners need to learn how to understand complex sentences, differentiate between different nouns and proofread their writing for errors (Yarber et al., 2007).

2.4.4.3 Inappropriate use of punctuation

Learners have a problem of using punctuation correctly as they vary sentences in their essays. They use inappropriate punctuation or do not use punctuation at all. Some learners have a tendency of writing long sentences which are not punctuated but wrongly combined (Langan, 2003). According to the findings of Solikhah's study (2017), learners have a challenge of using punctuation correctly. They end up using run-on sentences, sentence fragments, comma-splices, loose sentences, parallel sentences or choppy sentences which are the result of using too many simple sentences in their essay writing.

The findings further indicate that choppy sentences can be corrected by combining two or three simple sentences to make one compound or complex sentence. Although simple sentences are quite effective sometimes, their overuse is considered a poor style in academic writing (Tredinnick, 2008). The study's other interest was to explore the extent to which the above can be learners' challenges in sentence structure variation in essay writing.

2.4.5 Teachers' challenges when teaching for sentence structures variation in English essay writing

Teachers face different challenges when teaching for sentence structure variation in essay writing. Some of these challenges are related to the learners while some are related to the work load that teachers are expected to have covered within a stipulated period of time.

2.4.5.1 Learners' different abilities

As stipulated in different syllabi, teachers have to cover certain number of topics within a given time frame. The syllabi do not say anything about learners' different abilities. This poses a challenge to the teachers as they teach learners with different learning abilities. Some learners are good performing learners while some are poor performing learners. Benjamin (2005)

indicates that in classrooms, learners do differ in terms of understanding and their social background that contributes to their lesson understanding.

The author further shows that teachers do not concentrate more on the poor performing learners because they are pressed by time and have to cover all that is in the syllabus. Mmbaga (2002) conducted a study in Tanzania on the challenges faced by teachers when teaching essay writing. The researcher found out that teachers are faced with the problem of overcrowded classes, learners with different learning abilities, shortage of teaching learning materials and limited time for learning.

2.4.5.2 Learners' lack of reading culture

Eisterhold (1999) conducted a study on teachers' challenges when teaching writing. The author found out that teachers are faced with a challenge of teaching learners who lack reading culture. According to Eisterhold, reading and writing indicate that better writers tend to be better readers. This means that good writers are those who read more. While reading, good readers learn new words and how these words are used in sentences. They learn to produce more syntactically mature writing than poor readers. Good readers use a variety of sentence structures in their works. The author further indicates that good writers are those learners whose teachers encourage to use their first language skills (FL) in learning a second language (SL). The teachers did this by making clear the interrelationship between reading and writing in both FL and target language (TL). Kreshen (1985) state that increasing the time spent on reading can improve writing even more than frequent writing.

2.4.5.3 Teacher-learner ratio (TLR)

Teacher-learner ratio is another challenge. Being a teacher for more than fifteen (15) years has taught me that in most of the public schools in our country, teachers have large classes of sixty

(60) to seventy (70) learners per class. Teachers are expected to teach all these learners, give them essays of two to two and half pages long to write , mark the essays and give learners feedback. This is a challenge to the teachers because they do not teach one class. Most of them have maximum of thirty (30) lessons per week.

Teachers are expected to treat their classes equally by giving them work and marking them, which is impossible. Koc and Celik (2015) conducted a study in Turkey high schools on the impact of students per teacher on students' performance in English as a second language. The goal of the study was to identify if there is a significant correlation between the number of students per teacher and students' performance. The findings revealed that the cities with greater number of students per teacher tend to have a low performance in English.

To confirm that TLR is a challenge, another study was carried out by Kambuga (2013) in Tanzania. The purpose of the study was to examine the teaching learning process in public primary schools in Tanzania within the context of teacher-learner ratio in teaching learning process with reference to two selected administrative districts in Dar es Salaam region, Temeke and Kinondoni, to represent the country.

The findings of Kambuga's revealed that teacher-learner ratios in these regions is 1:71 to 1:125 in both rural and urban areas and this has a negative impact on learners' performance in English essay writing as they do not get enough practice because they get feedback after a long time. The present study's main issue was to investigate the challenges that teachers face when teaching for sentence variation in English essay writing, so the above challenges will help in exploring the extent to which such can affect teachers when teaching for sentence structure variation in essay writing.

2.4.6 Pedagogical strategies to be adopted to improve learners' ability to vary sentence structures in essay writing

When teaching sentence structures variation in essay writing, teachers have to use strategies that allow learners to own their learning. Teachers also have to choose activities that enable learners to master sentence structures variation in essay writing. Hassard (2005) argues that teachers' pedagogical choices range between instructivism and constructivism but the best is constructivism. The author urges teachers to adopt constructivist ways of teaching when teaching ESL learners. Vij (2015) supports Hassard's idea by indicating that an effective constructivist classroom consists of learner-centred activities in which knowledge is not a thing that can be simply transmitted by the teacher to the learners but is constructed as learners acquire, explore, question, debate, apply and reflect upon what they know and can do.

One of learner-centred activities which ESL teachers are encouraged to use when teaching sentence structure variation in essay writing is sentence-combining. According to Chin (2017), sentence-combining is a strategy of joining short sentences into longer, more complex sentences. This activity involves teaching learners to construct more complex, sophisticated sentences through exercises in which two or more basic sentences are combined into a single sentence. Teaching learners how to write complex and compound-complex sentences enhances the quality of their writing.

As learners engage in sentence-combining activities, they learn how to vary sentence structures in order to change meaning and style. Various studies such as those of Cooper (1975); Hillocks (1986); Strong (1986); Weaver (1998); Saddler and Graham (2005); Graham and Perin (2007) and Chin (2017) show that the use of sentence-combining activities is an effective strategy for improving learners' sentence structures variation in essay writing. The value of sentence-

combining is most evident as learners recognise the effect of sentence variety in their own essays.

Group work is another activity which teachers are encouraged to use in order to help learners in the mastery of sentence structures variation in essay writing. Kambuga (2013) asserts that learner-centred teaching strategies such as group work stimulate learning because learners' collaborative involvement in sentence structures variation helps them to share ideas and knowledge on how to master sentence variation. The author further states that as learners share their knowledge on how to vary sentence structures variation in essay writing, they engage in long discussions that allow them to use different types of sentences. As a result, learners' communicative strategies are improved.

2.5 LITERATURE REVIEW ON RELATED EMPIRICAL STUDIES

The researcher found it necessary to review studies that are related to the present study. Most of those studies focus on essay writing not on sentence structures variation in essay writing. This was done in order to provide basis for comparison. However, it is assumed that no study on sentence variation has been conducted in Lesotho.

Abdullah (2014) conducted a study at Kuala Lumpur high schools to examine whether sentence variety checklist developed learners' performance in essay writing. The researcher carried out this study after realising that one of the learners' problems in writing is lack of variety in sentences as they seem to learn one basic pattern of subject, verb and object. The intent of his study was to examine learners' performance in essay writing before and after using a sentence variety checklist adapted from Langan (1993) and to analyse learners' perceptions towards using

the sentence variety checklist in their writing. Quantitative methods were employed in collecting data.

The results revealed slight increase of students' writing performance in generating complex sentences as compared to simple and compound sentences. In addition, most students said that the checklist made writing more interesting and urged them to become aware of what they were writing. The findings further revealed that most learners were challenged by lack of knowledge and practice of the different sentence structures.

An experimental research carried out by Solikhah (2017) at the State Islamic Institute in Indonesia on *Corrections on grammar, sentence variety and developing detail to qualify academic essay of Indonesian ESL learners* is also relevant to the present study. The purpose of the study was to examine 1) significant differences of corrections on grammar, sentence variety and developing details on the quality of the essay by Indonesian learners; and 2) different effects of corrections on grammar, sentence variety and developing details on the quality of the essay. Data were analysed using one-way Anova Test. The study discovered that sentence variety is the most dominant technique to improve quality of the essay. The findings also revealed that it is very significant for learners to vary sentence structure in order to improve the quality of their essays.

Similarly, Carrio-Pastor (2013) conducted a study at the Universidad Politecnica de Valencia in Spain. The main focus of the study was on the variation of sentence connectors in academic English essays but more specifically on the issue of whether language use can change depending on the linguistic background of the writer. The main objective of the study was to analyse whether native English speakers and non-native English speakers vary the frequency of

connectors and their use across different sections of research papers depending on the rhetorical choices of the writers to construct identity.

The occurrences of the categories of individual connectors were compared in order to determine whether Spanish writers of English and native English writers employed the same categories of sentence connectors to join ideas in the sections of the research paper. The results were contrasted and the conclusions confirmed that variation of connectors may exist in academic English essays as the interpersonal style of writers could be different when their linguistic background is different. The results also confirmed that there is overuse of some sentence coordinator connectors such as *and but* which learners use to connect compound sentences.

Another study was conducted by Alarcon and Morales (2012) at the University of Santo Tomas. The study incorporated Halliday and Hasan's (1976) grammatical cohesion as the framework for the analysis of the essays. Out of 104 learners' essays only 64 qualified as the corpus of the study. In their study, they wanted to find out which cohesive devices are frequently used by the learners in their English essays. The findings from the study showed that reference is the most frequently used cohesive device followed by conjunctions and substitution.

The study found that conjunctions are used to establish counterclaims. However, there was a high frequency of the use of the adversative *but* which may suggest learners' limitation of sentence variation in their essays. The study further found out that there was a misuse of the additives *and also*. The conjunction misuse revealed prepositional and collocational confusion which is common among second language learners.

Moji (2014) conducted a study on *Analysis of cohesive devices and coherence in the fundamental parts of an essay* in Lesotho high schools. The study focused on analysing how high school

learners write introductions and conclusions to their English essays. The study also investigated the cohesive devices (demonstrative determiners, relative pronouns, possessive determiners and conjunctions) and transitional markers learners use in the three conventional parts of an English essay which are an introduction, the body and the conclusion as well as finding out whether those devices and markers were used appropriately or not. The present study's interest was on conjunctions because when constructing sentences both coordinating (compound sentences) and subordinating (complex sentences) conjunctions are used. The findings of Moji's study revealed that *and so* were the most inappropriately used coordinating conjunctions while *because* and *then* were the most inappropriately used subordinating conjunctions.

Another relevant study was undertaken by Sefako-Letsoela (2012) at the National University of Lesotho- an aspect which makes her study more related to the present study as it was also conducted in Lesotho. The main focus of the study was to find out how National University of Lesotho (NUL) final year undergraduate students use metadiscourse in their research projects. She studied metadiscourse consisting of the following sub-categories: transitional markers including conjunctions, which constitute part of the present study, attitude markers and frame markers. The concept metadiscourse is relevant to the current study because as a functional category, metadiscourse is recognised through a range of linguistic units including exclamatory punctuation, scare quotes, whole clauses and sequences of several sentences. Metadiscourse is a range of devices writers employ to explicitly organise their texts and engage their readers (Hayland and Tse, 2004).

Sefako-Letsoela's findings revealed that there was multifunctionality of the marker *and*. This marker appeared to be the most versatile marker as it was used to reflect additive, contrastive as well as resultive relations. According to the study, the reason for these findings could be that

students were not exposed to a number of markers to explicitly present their arguments. The study again revealed that although students use a wide range of transitions, many of them were under used as they had less than ten counts. Out of twenty three different markers, only eleven had ten counts or more. One of the current study's interests was to investigate whether the findings in each of the empirical studies discussed in this chapter would emerge from the data collected in this study.

2.6 SUMMARY

This chapter has reviewed literature and discussed its implications for learners' mastery of sentence variation in essay writing. The next chapter discusses methodology adopted in the study. Given this entire chapter, the study was driven forward by the following:

- ❖ As learners write essays, they reflect and express their feelings, thoughts and ideas. As they do this, they create more knowledge as learners' experiences help them to gain and build new knowledge. On this basis, learners become active creators of knowledge because they are the ones engaging in essay writing employing various types of sentences.
- ❖ The study, among others, investigated the pedagogical strategies that can be adopted to improve learners' ability to use a variety of sentence structures in their essay writing. It makes sense to assume that learners encounter problems when dealing with sentence variation in essay writing because learning is predominantly teacher-centred. The study explored ways in which learners can be involved in their learning of sentence variation.
- ❖ One of the interests of this study was to investigate learners' challenges in sentence variation during essay writing. The study explored the extent to which learners'

experience is valued in learner-based construction of knowledge in relation to sentence variation in essay writing.

- ❖ The study augmented knowledge created by the above studies in that, based on the same theory but in the context of Lesotho, it found out the extent to which English language teachers are CTL oriented or not. This study also explored the extent to which learners are involved in activities which help them master sentence structures variation in their essay writing for effective communication in writing.
- ❖ The study's interest was to investigate the degree to which learners' poor educational background can be one of the factors that contribute to learners' inability to vary sentence structure in their English essays.
- ❖ One of the issues of this study was also to explore the extent to which lack of practice is a factor contributing to learners' inability to use a variety of sentence structure in essay writing.
- ❖ Another interest of the study was to find out whether the difference between speaking and writing is a factor contributing to learners' sentence variation deficiency or not.
- ❖ The study also investigated the extent to which interference of mother tongue is a factor contributing to learners' inability to use sentence structures variation in their essay writing.

In view of scarcity of research on factors contributing to learners' inability to vary sentence structures in essay writing by ESL learners, the study in its own right adds new knowledge about essay writing needs of learners and teachers of English language in Lesotho. The next chapter features research design and methodology.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter features the research design and methodology, specific orientations related to the study such as interpretive paradigm, ontology and epistemology, the population under study, the sampling procedure and the methods that are used to collect and analyse data. It further addresses the reliability and validity of the research instruments. Ethical considerations pertaining to the research are also discussed.

3.2 RESEARCH DESIGN

The study will adopt both qualitative and quantitative approaches. Quantitative approach explains phenomena by collecting numerical data that are analysed using mathematically based methods in particular statistics (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007). The aim is to predict, describe and explain quantities, degrees and relationships drawn from the sample by collecting and analysing numerical data (Creswell, 2009). The quantitative approach is therefore, suitable because the intent of the researcher is to calculate the frequencies of the sentence structure variation errors/deficiencies by type and factor used in learners' essays.

Qualitative approach investigates the quality of relationships, activities, situations or materials. It emphasises detailed and holistic description from several viewpoints (Cohen et al 2007; Fraenkel and Wallen (1990). Willig (2008) posits that the objective of qualitative approach is to describe, identify, analyse and possibly explain events and experiences. Miles and Huberman (1994) add that the general reasons for conducting qualitative research are description and hypothesis generation.

In qualitative approach, data is in the form of words. It enables the researcher to learn at first-hand experience through involvement and participation in the social world under investigation while focusing upon what individual actors say and do. It focuses upon investigating social behaviour in natural settings. For instance, in a school setting, research requires that close attention be paid to what ordinarily and routinely happens in schools and classrooms (Cohen et al., 2007; Brink, 2001; Polit et al., 1999).

Qualitative approach was adopted because it allowed the researcher to interact with the participants in their natural setting. In the context of this study, such a setting comprises assigning learners essay writing task and invigilating them at the learners' and teachers' schools, lessons and actual classrooms. This enabled the researcher to identify, analyse, describe and explain and interpret learners' essays and identify the types of sentences used, extent of variation and the factors contributing to use of a variety of sentence structures in their essays.

In this study, a mixed method of both qualitative and quantitative approaches was adopted to enhance the credibility of the findings. This approach was in line with Creswell's (2003) recommendation that combining qualitative and quantitative approaches explains the research problem well and provides suitable and reliable data. So, following the two approaches was to render the results of this study more holistic and defensible.

Furthermore, a case study design was employed in this study. A case study, as explained by Willig (2008), is basically realistic in orientation as it aims to improve understanding of what is going on in a particular situation. Polit et al. (1999) assert that a case study assumes that things may not be as they seem. It provides an opportunity and privilege for in-depth inquiry over coverage; that is, understanding the case for what it is rather than generalising the findings to the

whole population at large. Drawing from both authors, the researcher focused on the Form E learners' English essays in three (3) selected schools in Maseru City. These essays were intensely analysed to find out the extent to which learners vary sentence structures in their essays and the contributing factors to learners' inability to vary sentence structures in essay writing.

3.3 THE RESEARCH PARADIGMS

A research paradigm is defined as a set of beliefs and agreements shared between scientists about how problems should be understood and addressed. Research paradigms can be characterised through their ontology and epistemology. Ontology and epistemology create a holistic view of how knowledge is viewed and how we can see ourselves in relation to this knowledge (Willig, 2008). The study's paradigms are discussed below.

3.3.1 The interpretive paradigm

The study aligns with interpretive paradigm. The interpretive paradigm reality is socially constructed. In the view of Scott (2000) and Cohen et al. (2007), an interpretive researcher's aim is to understand the subjective world of human experiences. The researcher starts with individuals and sets out to understand their interpretation of the world around them. The purpose of research to the interpretive researcher is to describe and interpret the phenomena of the world in attempt to get shared meaning with others (Pollard, 2002). Interpretive researchers seek to understand a particular context.

As Cohen et al (2007) state, the process of interpretive research takes place in social context where the focus is on the interaction itself as a unit of study. The researcher tried to find out the factors which contribute to learners' inability to use a variety of sentence structures in their English essay. The social context which I sought to understand was the extent to which learners vary sentence structures in their essay writing and exploration of the factors contributing to the

learners' inability to vary sentence structures in their essays. To understand this, I gave learners essay writing task in which I hoped to find the factors contributing to learners' inability to vary sentence structures in their essays and explored the extent to which they vary sentence structures.

3.3.2 Ontology

Interpretive paradigm and the combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches are informed by the ontological and epistemological assumptions. Walsh (2001), Bell (2010) and Babbie and Mouton (2001) highlight that ontology deals with reality. It is a system of beliefs that reveals an interpretation of an individual about what constitute a fact. These authors point out that the interpretive researchers view reality as socially constructed and subjective as a result of human thought, therefore, a social phenomenon.

In order to find out which factors contribute to learners' inability to vary sentence structures in their English essay writing and how these factors can be eradicated, the researcher interviewed Form E English language teachers in each of the three selected schools. The intention was to find the social reality from the teachers who engage on day-to -day teaching of the subject. Cohen et al. (2007 and Scotland (2012) indicate that the aim of ontological assumption is to find out the meaning of social behaviour. In the light of this aim, the researcher gave selected learners in selected schools essay topics to write on. In this manner, the researcher expected to find either conformity or disconformity on whether sentence structural variety contributes to the degree of performance in English essay writing as Mutikiri (2013) argues (see Statement of the problem, 1.3).

3.3.3 Epistemology

Epistemology refers to the study of knowledge, how it is derived, tested and validated (Scott, 2000). The writer defines epistemology as the study of the grounds, nature and origins of knowledge and the limits of human understanding. In Scott's opinion, three epistemological factors contribute to knowledge acquisition. These factors include truth, belief and justification. The author further indicates that individuals always have some knowledge, even if it is tacit, of what life is about.

Scotland (2012) concurs that epistemology or the theory of knowledge is concerned with people's knowledge of what they do, what justifies their belief in what they do and what standards of evidence they use in seeking truths about the world and human experience. In order for the researcher to understand the reality or the learners' and teachers' epistemological knowledge of correct sentence structure variation, the first attempt was to establish the way in which participants in the study create meanings in their lives around sentence structure variation. To find whether learners correctly vary sentence structures in their essay writing or not, the researcher had to interact with them in their social context which is made up of their written essays. Similarly, teachers were probed for their knowledge-based understanding of pedagogical interventions towards learners' correct use of sentence structures variation.

3.4 POPULATION

Population involves objects, events or individuals having common characteristics that the researcher is interested in studying or the aggregate of all cases that conform to some designated set of specifications (Scott, 2000). The population in this study were all the Form E learners and all the English language teachers for Form E learners in Lesotho. The learners were chosen because Form E is the final year of secondary education; therefore, it is at this level that learners

are expected to functionally understand sentence structures variation so that they may perform well in English essay writing during the LGCSE examinations.

The Form E teachers were included in the sample because the researcher assumed that they knew their learners better than anyone else. The expectation was that the teachers could be helpful in providing the factors which contribute to learners' inability to vary sentence structures in their essay writing as they routinely teach and assess their learners' essay writing. The same teachers could also be helpful in identifying learners' challenges in sentence structures variation during essay writing.

In the same manner, the researcher believed that teachers could provide the challenges that they face when teaching sentence structure variation in essay writing as well as the methods that they use when teaching the sentence structures variation in English essay writing. Lastly, the teachers could be instrumental in trying to find what could be done to improve learners' ability to use a variety of sentence structures in their essay writing.

3.5 THE SAMPLE AND SAMPLING TECHNIQUES

According to Scott (2000) and Polit et al. (1999), sample means a portion of the target population selected to participate in the research study. The writers further state that in essence, sampling maximises representation of the selected population and allows generalisation to be as accurate as possible. Rakotsoane (2007) points out that what is said of the sample can equally be said of the entire population. This means that the sample represents the whole population and what is found from the sample is believed to be what can be found from the entire population.

It is both impractical and uneconomical to involve all the members of the population in a research project (Welman, Fanie and Bruce, 2005). Therefore, the researcher selected three

schools in Maseru city. This was for proximity reasons resulting from the lack of financial capacity and timeframe within which to complete the study. The researcher requested Examinations Council of Lesotho (ECOL) to provide her with a list of schools, based in Maseru city, according to their performance in English language. The first school was one of the best performing schools in English language, the second one of the average performing schools and the third one of the poor performing schools.

For convenience purposes, only the schools which are close to the researcher's work place were chosen. Some schools stream their learners according to their learning ability and performance. In this case, purposive sampling was found to be the most suitable technique to use. Welman et al (2005) define purposive sampling as a sampling technique in which a researcher relies on her own judgement when choosing members of population to participate in the study. The selection was based on characteristics of population and objective of the study. The selection of the learners, specifically, helped the researcher to find out the extent to which learners vary sentence structures in their essay writing.

Random sampling was also adopted in this study. Random sampling means that all members of a group have an equal and independent chance of being selected (Bannigan, 2004). It is a process of assigning the random numbers to the elements of the population and selecting some of them by way of certain specific rule to ensure that the samples vary as much as the population itself and can be conducted in shorter time duration (Miles et al, 1994). The objective of a random sampling is to both represent the target population and eliminate sampling bias.

The researcher assigned numbers to each of the Form E learners in each of the three selected schools. Having written the numbers on, a separate paper, she cut, folded, put them in a container

and asked ten (10) learners in each school to pick a paper, one after the other. The learners whose numbers were chosen were the ones whose scripts were considered a sample. Due to time constraints and intensive analysis required, only ten (10) learners from each school were chosen to make the total number of thirty (30) participants. As the study is mostly qualitative in nature, one teacher in each school answered the interview questions. The total number of teachers was three (3). The overall total number of participants, both teachers and learners, was thirty three (33).

3.6 DATA COLLECTION TECHNIQUES/METHODS

Data collection techniques refer to devices used to collect data such as questionnaires, tests, semi-structured and open ended interview schedules and checklists (Gay and Alrasian, (2000); Polit et al., (1999). Data collection instruments of this study were essay writing task, document analysis and interview.

3.6.1 The essay writing task

The researcher gave the learners a task of writing an essay in the classroom in the presence of the researcher and their teachers. Two topics on different types of composition/essay were given to them. One topic was on narrative essay and the other on descriptive essay. The topics were taken from the old LGCSE final examinations' question papers. This was done so that each learner could be free to choose the topic on which she or he had sufficient materials to present in respect to the prescribed length. This aligns with Bevan and Brennan's (2014) assertion that in the examination, candidates are given a choice of essay topics. Almost always, at least one topic requires a description of some kind while one requires learners to narrate stories about themselves or others.

The researcher then marked these essays in order to find out, firstly the extent to which learners vary sentence structures in their essays, secondly, factors contributing to learners' inability to use a variety of sentence structures in essay writing as well as the challenges learners are faced with in sentence structure variation.

3.6.2 Document analysis

The contents of any written discourse which is intended to communicate an important message to the readers can be analysed in various ways. The critical document analysis was employed as a method of data collection in this study because it expresses the researcher's evaluation of the text analysed. In the view of Bell (2010), document analysis is a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from data to their context. It usually involves counting the number of times particular terms occur in a sample of sources. The documents to be analysed may include books, newspapers and essays. In document analysis, the information that might be difficult or even impossible to obtain through direct observation or other means, can be gained through analysis of written communication material.

In the case of this study, the documents analysed were learners' essays. The researcher counted the number of the types of sentences which learners have used in their essays and converted the numbers to percentage in order to find out whether learners have varied sentence structures in their essays or not.

3.6.3 Interviews

Data was collected through face to face interviews. According to Gubrium and Holstein (2001), an interview is a conversation for gathering information. Interviews are said to be the most popular and oldest form of data collection (Bell, 2003). The researcher decided to use interviews because they are particularly useful for getting the story behind the participant's experiences and

they also allow the researcher opportunity to clarify ambiguous answers and when appropriate, sought follow-up information (Leedy and Ormrod, 2001).

Interviews helped the researcher to collect in-depth information on participants' thoughts, opinions and feelings. The researcher prepared interviews with open-ended questions. Interviews are said to be suitable for interpretive studies. Consistent with this observation is Kelly's (2010) position that interviews fit well with the interpretive approach to research as they provide interaction between the researcher and the participants to get to know each other better. In an interview, both the interviewer and the interviewees ask for clarity in questions and statements that are not clear.

Open-ended questions were prepared and one Form E ESL teacher from each of the three selected schools took part in an interview. Teachers were interviewed individually to provide them with an environment where they could be free to answer the questions. The interviewees granted the researcher a permission to use a tape recorder. Therefore, a tape recorder was used in all interviews for later reference as not all the information could have been easily captured on paper. Qualitative data, based on the research questions, was generated through the use of interviews with the teachers.

3.7 DATA ANALYSIS

Data analysis is the systematic organisation and synthesis of research data (Polit et al, 1999). The collected data was analysed on the basis of the study's research questions. Learners' marked essays were analysed to find out, one, factors contributing to their inability to vary sentence structures in their essays, two, types of sentences they have used and three, the frequent errors they make in relation to sentence variation in essay writing.

As stated earlier in this chapter, qualitative approach involves the use of words. Consequently, words were used to analyse and describe learners' essays. This is in support of Babbie and Mouton's (2001) observation that qualitative approach offers a complete description and analysis of a research data without limiting the scope of the research and the nature of participants' responses. Tables were used to display the number of sentence structures based on the extent to which learners varied them with a special focus on the pattern each sentence in an essay followed. This was done by identifying constituents of the sentences and the order in which they were patterned. Learners' sentence construction errors such as sentence fragments, loose sentences, parallel sentences, stringy sentences, comma-splices, run-on sentences and choppy sentences were also analysed. Each of the thirty (30) essays was analysed in this manner. The qualitative information on interviews which addressed all the research questions was transcribed.

3.8 RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY

Reliability refers to the consistency of the results obtained from research study while validity refers to the extent to which a research study actually investigates what the researcher claims to investigate (Nunan, 1993). To ensure validity and reliability, the researcher gave learners an essay writing task in class during their normal English language lesson. The task was done in the presence of their teachers who helped the researcher in invigilating the class to ensure that there is no copying or any discussion between the learners. Learners from the selected schools were given two different topics, one narrative and the other descriptive to choose from. Their essays were marked by their teachers and the researcher to ensure validity and reliability of the results.

3.9 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The researcher introduced herself to the participants and briefed them on the purpose of her study. She then provided them an opportunity to ask questions and air their feelings in relation to

what was said. She also informed the participants about their right to either participate or withdraw from the study at any time. The researcher has a moral obligation to strictly consider the rights of the participants who are expected to provide their responses (Cohen et al, 2007). She told the participants that they have a right to ask for clarification if they are not sure of what they are expected to do.

Polit et al. (1999) state that confidentiality means that no information that the participant divulges shall be made public or available to others. The right to privacy and confidentiality as supported by LoBiondo – Wood et al. (2002) was respected. The researcher ensured the participants that their identity will not be disclosed and that the data collected will be used for the purpose of this study only. The researcher also reassured the participants that the anonymity of their schools will be protected by making it impossible to link aspects of data to a specific school. This means that no names will be attached to either learners' essays or their schools, as only numbers will be used instead. Lastly, the researcher emphasised the participants' significance in order for the study to take place.

The researcher requested an introduction letter from the National University of Lesotho Department of Language and Social Education that she could present to the principals of the schools she were to collect data from. With such a letter in hand, the researcher visited each of the three selected schools in Maseru city to set appointment for data collection. I discussed my investigation in detail and explained the purpose of my study with the principals and then sought permission from them to collect data. I also asked for permission to meet with the subject teachers in Form E to explain the nature and the purpose of my study to them as well.

During the interviews with the teachers, I asked them to give their responses to the questions freely and frankly, honestly and sincerely so as to help the researcher gather the correct information. I made the teachers aware that there are no right or wrong answers to the questions and reassured them that their responses will be kept strictly confidential. The researcher then prepared a consent form which she asked the participants to fill in order to show their willingness to be part of the study.

3.10 SUMMARY

The chapter dealt with the research design, the population, sampling procedure, data collection techniques and procedures, validity and reliability and ethical considerations. The next chapter interprets data and reports research findings.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATION

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents findings and interpretation of data collected through essay writing task given to Form E learners. Data collected from teachers of the same class to solicit their opinion on the factors contributing to learners' inability to use a variety of sentence structures in essay writing through interviews is also presented. The findings are reported by research questions and discussed on the basis of literature as discussed in Chapter Two. The analysis is also done by research questions and each section ends with discussion and interpretation of the findings.

4.2 FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO LEARNERS' INABILITY TO VARY SENTENCE STRUCTURES IN ESSAY WRITING

This section attempts to address the question on the factors contributing to learners' inability to use a variety of sentence structures in essay writing. Data for this research question was generated through marking of thirty learners' essays explained in Section 3.5. In addition, the data was generated through one on one open-ended interview with three Form E English language teachers at the selected schools. The interviewed teachers were coded as 01 from (the good performing school) school A, 02 from (the average performing school) school B and 03 from (below average performing school) school C. The findings were reported by data collection techniques.

To ensure validity and reliability, the researcher gave learners an essay writing task in class during their mid-year examinations. The English language teachers at the selected schools helped the researcher in invigilating to ensure that there is no copying or any discussion between the learners. The selected schools did not write the same paper as they were already in the middle of

their exams. Learners' essays were marked by their teachers and the researcher to ensure validity and reliability of the results.

4.2.1 Data from interviews with teachers

Based on their experience, teachers were asked to mention factors contributing to learners' inability to use a variety of sentence structures in their essay writing. Teachers mentioned these factors:

a) Teachers' content incompetency

Teachers indicated teachers' incompetency is one of the factors contributing to learners' inability to use a variety of sentence structures in their essay writing. Teachers do not teach all types of sentences but expect learners to vary them in essay writing. These teachers said that they feel that teaching of grammar is just a waste of time because of the load of content that the syllabus expects them to teach within a short period of time. Similarly, teacher 03 shared the same feeling and disclosed that she has never taught learners compound-complex sentences because she does not know them. She even revealed that she avoided mentioning this type during the interview for the fear that the researcher may question her on them.

b) Lack of extensive reading

All the three teachers pointed out that lack of extensive reading is another factor contributing to learners' inability to vary sentence structures in learners' essays. They stressed that English language assessment involves reading and writing, even though learners are not aware of this relation. According to them, a good reader becomes a good writer as reading improves one's vocabulary, sentence construction and linguistic competence. Again, learners are not aware of the importance of reading because they come from a background where reading is not a habit.

Teacher 02 said that lack of reading is not only a concern for teachers but of the National Curriculum Development (NCDC) as the latter even took an initiative of holding a workshop for English language teachers to find out what could be done to instil a reading culture in learners. The finding is similar to Jani and Mellinger (2013) in (Section 2.4.1.1) where they affirm learners' lack of extensive reading. It is reasonable to assume that there might be a relation between writing and reading culture. If learners do not read, it might be impossible for them to read.

c) Lack of application of grammatical concepts in writing

Lack of application is one of the factors contributing to learners' inability to vary sentence structures in their essays. Teachers 01, 02 and 03 share the same opinion on this matter. They stated that learners learn topics in isolation because they do not apply what they learn in grammar to their written tasks. The teachers further stated that learners do not link what they learnt at Junior Certificate (JC) to what they learn at secondary level because they fail to apply the knowledge they have acquired at JC level in their essays. What learners do is contrary to what CLT (Section 2.3) advocates about learners building new knowledge upon the foundation of previous knowledge.

d) Confusion of non-sentence sentences with complete sentences

Teachers mentioned that one other factor is that learners are not able to differentiate between sentence fragments and complete sentences. They are concerned that learners write very long meaningless sentences of about five to six lines, use statements which do not make sense or start their sentences with conjunctions like *and*, *but*, *or* and *because*. Teacher 01 stressed that some learners are not able to construct even a simple sentence instead they write dependent clauses

that leave the reader hanging as they do not convey any meaning. This factor is consistent with Freed, Ashraf and Bilal (2016) in (Section 2.4.1.6).

e) Lack of practice and feedback

Another factor which is a concern to teachers 02 and 03 is lack of practice and feedback. These teachers said they assumed that Form E learners are old enough to do the work on their own so they focused mainly on the lower classes. Lack of practice and feedback factor is consistent with Krashen (1995), Booth et al. (1987), and Harmer (2007). On the contrary, teacher 01 said his main concern was to see learners pass the examinations. As a result, he gave them a lot of work to write because ECOL's mode of assessment is writing. He stressed that it was through a lot of practice that he was able to identify each learner's problems in sentence variation and therefore curbed them as early as possible. Teacher 01's idea is similar to Kedir and Nemo (2015) and Bevan's (2008) assertion (Section 2.4.1.3) that in order for learners to perform well in essay writing, they have to be engaged in frequent writing where they could vary sentence structures accordingly. This finding also implies that explicit feedback on learners' writing errors is genuinely needed.

f) Learners' poor educational background

The three teachers indicated that learners' poor educational background is another factor contributing to their inability to use a variety of sentence structures in essay writing. They pointed out that the introduction of free primary education has brought difficulties in Lesotho education even though it was meant well. According to them, primary teachers have many learners in their classes so much that they fail to attend individually; instead, the teachers focus mainly on covering the content about speaking and listening skills. As a result, learners are

underprepared for writing and reading tasks. This aligns with Huy's (2015) observation in Section 2.4.1.2.

g) Lack of exposure to English language

The three teachers have the same feeling that lack of exposure is another factor. They said that competence comes along with practice but learners do not practice speaking English which they believe would improve their writing. They pointed out that learners do not have exposure to English at home and even at school because the commonly used language is Sesotho. The teachers said that learners are strongly attached to their mother tongue and this hinders the learning of target language writing skills especially sentence structures variation. Teachers 01 and 03 said that they sometimes explain some English language concepts in Sesotho to help learners understand them better. However, it seemed Sesotho speaking impedes learners' competence in English. Hence their expression is limited to simple and/or compound sentences to a small extent where they over use *and*.

Therefore, it is logical to assume that incompetent teachers, lack of extensive reading, lack of application, confusion of non-sentence sentences with complete sentences, lack of practice and feedback, learners' poor educational background as well as lack of exposure are the factors contributing to learners' inability to use a variety of sentence structures in their essay writing. To validate what the teachers have said, the researcher marked learners' essays in order to find out whether she would identify the same factors.

4.2.2 Learners' essays

The researcher analysed learners' essays following the selection procedure explained in Section 3.5. There were 30 essays, ten per school. As the essay marking was done, the researcher based

herself on what was said in Section 2.4 about factors contributing to learners' inability to use a variety of sentence structures in their essays. She was looking for these factors and those that can emerge but not covered by the literature. Findings are presented in a table form in tables 4.1, 4.2 and 4.3 below as per school

Table 4.1: School A sentence variation

	Script 1	Script 2	Script 3	Script 4	Script 5	Script 6	Script 7	Script 8	Script 9	Script 10
Simple	2	18	6	14	2	4	3	7	6	5
Compound	0	6	3	6	2	4	10	8	7	9
Complex	0	2	4	7	0	2	2	7	8	3
Compound-complex	0	2	7	3	0	0	1	2	5	6
Total no of sentence structures used	2	28	20	30	4	10	16	24	26	23

Discussion and interpretation

There is no sentence structure variation in scripts no.1, 5 and 6 because the total number of sentences used is 2, 4, and 10 respectively while the rest is non-sentence sentences. In script no. 1, out of ten (10) paragraphs, five (5) are one sentence paragraphs. These paragraphs have very long meaningless sentences. Different conjunctions are used to combine these sentences but they are wrongly used. Four of the remaining paragraphs are also one sentence paragraphs joined by the conjunction *and* which is used more than once. The over use of *and* is consistent with (vide 1.3) where it is stated that learners who try to vary sentence structures use *and* mostly which in this case is used inappropriately. Furthermore, the learner used the comma inappropriately.

Script no. 5 is full of non-sentence sentences. Out of nine paragraphs, seven are made up of sentences which begin with *and* and *because*. This repetition robs an essay a sense of variety.

The following are excerpts from the data.

- *I recally one night when I was sleeping and I had a lot of noise outside and it was a noise made by many people and they were shouting at one of my neighbour, they were also calling him by the name and I went to the window and look trough it and find that he is the one. = A loose sentence joined by too many and.*
- *However, Lerato called us in, his bedroom to charger. And he borrow us some clothes. And we groom ourselve not know that, we are grooming for the trouble. And after sometime the party being. And I was choosen to give speech about Lerato. = A paragraph made up of sentences that start with and.*
- *Because I have give them like. Because I was scared I give them, and Lerato asked why I did it. Because I didn't know them. Because now all drinks are gone and there are no more drinks left. = A paragraph made up of sentences that begin with because.*

The sentence writing style adopted in these scripts show that the learners lack extensive reading that can help on how to vary sentence structures by copying the way sentences are varied in other people's work. Another contributing factor could be lack of practice and feedback because if the learners had enough practice and feedback, the teacher could have noticed this shortcoming and rectified it. In addition, it seems like the learners are underprepared (poor educational background) for the writing task.

Sentence structures are varied in scripts no. 2, 4, 8, 9 and 10. The total number of sentences used is 28, 30, 24, 26 and 23 respectively. Learners have varied both structurally and functionally

classified sentences because they used interrogative (rhetoric questions) and exclamatory sentences mostly. There are still sentence construction errors like sentence fragments and comma-splices.

- *The carbon monoxide gas which may cause the lung cancer.* = sentence fragment
- *Most people were outside, because it was not dark.* = comma-splice

In scripts no. 3, 6 and 7, sentence structures are varied. Though sentences are varied at these scripts, script no. 6 does not have compound-complex sentences and there are still some incorrect sentence constructions in three of them. In all the three scripts, learners have used punctuation incorrectly and omitted the punctuation in some cases.

- *As it was about to pass us (,) it stop and we rushed to it.* – Omission of comma after *us*.
- *On that particular day (,) I saw death near.* – Omission of comma after *day*.

Out of ten students in the well performing School A, only two learners were unable to vary sentence structures in their essays. This is evident that learners in this school perform well as 8 learners out of ten have succeeded in varying sentence structures in their essay writing. This variation helped learners to articulate their ideas clearly as their essays were readable, interesting and above all communicative. Mastery of written communication is consistent with Constructivism Learning Theory (CLT) vide 2.3 as it promotes communication skills. The table below shows sentence structures variation in School B.

Table 4.2: School B sentence variation

	Script 1	Script 2	Script 3	Script 4	Script 5	Script 6	Script 7	Script 8	Script 9	Script 10
Simple	0	3	0	3	2	2	0	18	6	16
Compound	1	10	3	1	0	6	2	8	3	11
Complex	0	5	0	0	0	3	0	5	3	1
Compound-complex	0	8	0	0	0	3	0	0	2	4
Total no of sentence structures used	1	26	3	4	2	14	2	31	14	32

Discussion and interpretation

Scripts no. 1, 3, 4, 5 and 7 lack sentence variety. Total number of sentences used is 1, 3, 4 and 2 respectively. The scripts are full of errors of sentence construction where learners used punctuation inappropriately or omitted it. The learners tried to make their essays sound more academic by writing long and more complicated structures of sentences such as sentences that start with dependent clause and end with an independent clause but did not put the comma at the end of the dependent clause. Most of their paragraphs have one long sentence of about forty (40) to seventy one (71) words. Sentences in these scripts follow the same pattern, the same length and they are full of commas, details and conjunctions.

- *The boy was notorious of such crimes, and when the conductor recognised him, he was certain that he might have caused trouble, he stabbed me twice on the leg when he tried to run away, but the conductor caught him, and bit him to a pulp, I took my chances beard the lion in his own down, and in the presence of the conductor, I made sure he bit the dust.* = One long sentence of seventy one (71) words.

- *The old boy hectored me “bring that money young boy” and I hesitated a bit at first because I was afraid but helplessly handed it over to him at the end as happiness had deserted me and the journey became absolutely a terrifying experience for me.* = A stringy sentence made up of several complete thoughts strung together with *and, because, but, and as.*
- *When I had all the privilege someone made sure to ruin my trip to Durban.* = a sentence structure that begins with dependent clause followed by an independent clause but with the omission of a comma at the end of the dependent clause

The above scripts lack extensive reading which is an effective means of improving learners’ writing. As learners read extensively, they come across different types of sentences, both short and long. They learn how such sentences are varied so that they can do the same in their different works. Furthermore, these learners seem to have poor educational background because they are unable to construct just a simple sentence as most of them do not have simple sentences in their essays. Another factor is that learners are not able to distinguish between sentence construction errors and complete sentences. Hence their essays are full of run-on sentences, comma-splices and sentence fragments.

Data shows lack of practice and feedback. If students had enough practice and were given feedback, their essays would not have these kinds of errors. It is note-worthy that these learners are at the last year of their secondary education where they are expected to master sentence structures variation in preparation for further studies and the world of work. However, they seem to lack essential skills such as functional knowledge of sentence structures and the different conjunctions used in each of the structures.

There is a demonstration of sentence variety in scripts no. 2, 6, 8, 9 and 10. The total number of sentences used is 26, 14, 31, 14 and 32 respectively. Sentences are well varied in these scripts as learners have used sentences that vary according to their structures and length. Even though sentences are well varied, there are still some few non-sentence sentences which is a sign that learners confuse non-sentence sentences with complete sentences. The way learners have varied sentence structures in their essays prove that they read extensively and learn how other writers have varied sentence structures in their written works.

The variation is also a proof that learners have good educational background and have built their new knowledge on what they had already gained from their previous classes. This is consistent with CLT as it stipulates that learners build new knowledge upon the foundation of previous learning. Only 5 learners out of ten in School B have varied sentence structures. The following table shows sentence variation in School C.

Table 4.3: School C sentence variation

	Script 1	Script 2	Script 3	Script 4	Script 5	Script 6	Script 7	Script 8	Script 9	Script 10
Simple	4	0	1	0	12	2	5	2	0	11
Compound	0	1	0	0	14	0	1	2	0	3
Complex	0	0	0	0	5	2	2	1	0	4
Compound-complex	0	0	0	1	3	0	4	0	0	3
Total no of sentence structures used	4	1	1	1	34	4	12	5	0	21

Discussion and interpretation

There is no demonstration of sentence variety in scripts no. 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 8 and 9 as the total number of sentences used in each script is 4, 1, 1, 1, 4, 5 and 0 respectively. Learners have used very long and meaningless sentences joined by the coordinating conjunctions *and*, *but*, and *because* in their attempt to vary sentence structures in their essays. This repetition of long sentences overshadows learners' arguments and forces the reader to focus on the structure of the text rather than engage with the story.

These scripts like those of schools A and B are full of one long sentence paragraphs of about thirty (30) to fifty (50) words. Only three learners out of ten have varied sentence structures in this below average performing school. Therefore, it would seem logical to assume that learners in this school do not perform well because they fail to vary sentence structures because out of ten learners, only three have varied sentence structures. The total number of sentences used is 34, 12 and 21.

Learners are expected to vary sentence structures in their essay writing to improve their performance (vide 1.2). In contrast, scripts no.1 and 5 in School A, scripts no. 1, 3, 4, 5, and 7 in School B as well as scripts no. 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 8, and 9 in School C failed to fulfil this expectation. The findings in all these scripts are consistent with what Jani and Mellinger (2013), Kedir and Nemo (2015), Huy (2015) and Freed, Ashraf and Bilal (2016) state in sections 2.4.1.1, 2.4.1.2, 2.4.1.3 and 2.4.1.6 on factors contributing to learners' inability to vary sentence structures in essay writing. These are lack of extensive reading, poor educational background, lack of practice and feedback, and use of non-sentence sentences. The findings on learners' essays are consistent

with what the teachers said during the interviews about factors contributing to learners' inability to vary sentence structures in their essays.

On the basis of this, it seems sensible to conclude that learners' failure to vary sentence structures is related to lack extensive reading, poor educational background as learners seem underprepared to engage in essay writing task. The scripts also show that learners' failure to vary sentence structures could be connected to lack practice and feedback which could have helped in curbing their sentence construction errors each time they discuss some errors in sentence variation with their teachers.

In addition, learners seemingly do not know the difference between non-sentence sentences and complete thoughts because the above mentioned scripts are full of sentence fragments, comma-splices, run-on sentences, parallel sentences, choppy sentences and stringy sentences with errors in sentence construction. Therefore, it seems reasonable to conclude that learners' inability to vary sentence structures could be associated with learners' confusion of non-sentence sentences with complete sentences. The next section deals with sentence variation skills/abilities required for essay writing.

4.3 SENTENCE VARIATION SKILLS FOR ESSAY WRITING

The question in this section inquired skills/abilities on sentence structures variation. To this effect, data for this research question was generated through marking learners' essays to identify the skills. It was also generated through one on one open-ended interview with Form E ESL teachers at the selected schools.

4.3.1 Data from interviews with teachers

When asked to mention sentence variation skills needed for essay writing, the teachers mentioned the following as the skills/abilities which they think are required in sentence variation in essay writing:

a) Knowledge of all sentence structures

The three teachers mentioned that learners must have knowledge of all sentence structures so that they can vary them in their essays. They insisted that conjunctions cannot be divorced from sentence structures; as a result, learners must also have an understanding and an ability to vary them in essay writing for effective communication.

b) Knowledge of conjunctions

Knowledge of both coordinating and subordinating conjunctions is a skill which learners are expected to possess. Teacher 03 said that learners must not only know these two types of conjunctions but also the purpose served by each of them. She gave an example of *and* which is used for addition and *but* which is used to show contrast. The idea is similar to White et al (2011) and Yakooob (2015) who stated that learners need functional knowledge of sentence structures and conjunctions in order to master sentence variation in essay writing.

c) An ability to distinguish between non-sentence sentences and complete sentences

Learners must be aware not to confuse sentence structures with non-sentence sentences. Teacher 01 said that learners must have an ability to distinguish between complete sentences and non-sentence sentences as these are errors in sentence construction. Teachers 02 and 03 indicated that if learners do not have an ability to understand sentence structure errors, they end up confusing sentence fragments and run-on sentences with complete thoughts. This is inconsistent with

Tredinnick (2008) in (Section 2.4.2.3). It seems that teachers through their knowledge and experience know the skills/abilities learners need when writing an essay as they mentioned the following: knowledge of sentence structures, knowledge of conjunctions as well as an ability to distinguish between non-sentence sentences and complete sentences.

4.3.2 Learners' essays

As indicated in Section 2.4.2, learners are expected to possess certain skills to master sentence variation in English essay. As a result, learners are expected to have functional knowledge of sentence structures and the connecting words. Learners must also have functional knowledge of functionally classified sentences as well as an ability to understand sentence construction problems. However, all learners in schools A, B and C even those who have varied sentence structures well in their essays seem to lack functional knowledge of different sentence structures.

In addition, the learners seem to lack knowledge of connecting words as well as an ability to understand sentence construction errors. This could be an answer to why all of them are challenged distinguishing between non-sentence sentences and complete sentences. The finding is contrary to White et al (2011) in Section 2.4.2.1, Huddleston (2004) in Section 2.4.2.2 and Tredinnick (2008) in Section 2.4.2.3 when they say that learners should have functional knowledge of different sentence structures as well as an ability to understand sentence construction errors. With this in mind, it would seem logical to conclude that all learners in schools A, B, and C are not able to differentiate between complete sentences and non-sentence sentences because even those who varied sentence structures still have non-sentence sentences in their essays. The next section covers teaching strategies adopted towards learners' knowledge of sentence structures variation in essay writing.

4.4 TEACHING STRATEGIES TOWARDS SENTENCE VARIATION

Data for this research question was created through one on one open-ended interview with teachers of English language in the selected schools. When asked about the teaching strategies to adopt when teaching sentence structures variation, teachers 02 and 03 pointed out that their teaching strategies are predominantly traditional. These teachers said they use lecture method where they simply impart knowledge to the learners because they do not have time to engage them in the learning of sentence structures variation. The teachers continued that they teach for examination so they are always under pressure to finish the syllabus. The same teachers said they are aware of CAP's (2009) advocacy of learner-centred teaching strategies but they are unable to comply because of the pressure of finishing the syllabus as they teach for examination.

The use of teacher-centred strategies is in contradiction to Constructivism Learning Theory whose essence is learner-centeredness and involvement (Section 2.3). The finding is similar to those of researchers such as Oliver (2000) and Brookes and Grundy (2000) and Mmbaga (2002) in (Section 2.4.3). The researchers benchmarked on CLT like the present study. They found out that ESL learners commit errors in sentence construction due to teacher-centred learning. Teacher 01 indicated that he uses a combination of teacher-centred and learner-centred strategies but to a certain extent. Based on the different perceptions about this, it seems sensible to conclude that failure to teach for sentence variation structures could be attributed to teacher-centred strategies. These strategies seem to side-line learners' role in creation of knowledge. The next section discusses learners' challenges in sentence variation.

4.5 LEARNERS' CHALLENGES IN SENTENCE STRUCTURE VARIATION

The researcher in this section asked teachers to indicate learners' challenges in sentence structure variation during essay writing. All the three teachers said that writing is a very difficult skill.

Their view is similar to Bevan (2008) (Section 2.2.4) which shows that ESL writing is considered to be the most challenging aspect in ESL learning. Learners are faced with challenges in sentence structures variation in essay writing. The challenges are confusing non-sentence sentences with complete sentences, difficulty in constructing complex and compound-complex sentences as well as inappropriate use of punctuation hence the use of long meaningless sentences.

The findings in all the scripts are similar to Solikhah (2017) in section 2.4.3.1, 2.4.3.2 and 2.4.3.3 where it is stated that learners are not able to distinguish between non-sentence sentence and complete sentences. They are also said to encounter some problems in constructing sentence structures and use punctuation incorrectly. Therefore, it seems practical to conclude that learners are incapable to differentiate between non-sentence sentences and complete sentences and unable to use punctuation especially comma appropriately. The next section deals with teachers' challenges when teaching sentence variation in essay writing.

4.6 TEACHERS' CHALLENGES WHEN TEACHING FOR SENTENCE STRUCTURE VARIATION

Data in this section was collected through face-to-face interviews of a conversational nature to solicit information and to probe responses from ESL teachers on challenges they face when teaching for sentence structures variation in essay writing. Differences are noted in how participants perceive teachers' challenges. For instance, teachers 02 and 03 indicated that teacher-learner ratio is an obstacle since it prevents them from giving learners written tasks regularly. Teacher 03 said that he has 70 learners in Form E class while teacher 03 said she has 65. These teachers said that essays in these classes cannot be marked overnight because of these large numbers.

The teachers further indicated that the Form E syllabus is overloaded but time for teaching that huge amount of content is short. The finding is similar to Celik (2015) in Section 2.4.5.3 where it is indicated that teachers are not able to teach for sentence variation because of overcrowded classes. However, teacher 01 holds different opinion. He said that one of his Form E classes is 75 but he is able to give them work regularly, mark and give them feedback. Therefore, it would seem practical to conclude that teacher-learner ratio is a challenge to teachers when teaching sentence structures variation in essay writing. The next section deals with pedagogical strategies to be adopted to improve learners' ability to vary sentence structures in essay writing, the last question of this study.

4.7 PEDAGOGICAL STRATEGIES TO IMPROVE LEARNERS' ABILITY TO VARY SENTENCE STRUCTURES

In this section, the research question needed pedagogical strategies to be adopted to improve learners' ability to vary sentence structures in essay writing. Data for this question was generated through one on one open-ended interview with Form E English language teachers at the selected schools. Teachers 01, 02 and 03 believed that learners can vary sentence structures in their essay writing if they are involved in their learning. The teachers indicated that this can be done by giving learners activities which will help them discover for themselves and construct knowledge rather than getting all the information from the teacher. This is consistent with Constructivism Learning Theory (CLT) discussed in Section 2.3 as it advocates for learner-centeredness and collaborative learning.

According to CLT, learners should be recognised as a resource and should be allowed to discover new knowledge which is built on their experiences. The three teachers said learners already know simple sentences (experience) and should be asked to join these simple sentences

to form compound, complex and compound-complex sentences (new knowledge). The teachers said that learners must be allowed to work in pairs or in groups so that they can help one another. The finding is consistent with Hassard (2005) and Vij (2015) in Section 2.4.6 where the best pedagogical choice is constructivism in which learners take charge of their learning and work collaboratively. It, therefore, seems reasonable to conclude that learner-centred strategies can improve learners' ability to vary sentence structures in their essay writing as learners would be involved in their learning.

4.8 SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS

The study found out that learners do not vary sentence structures in their English essays. The study also revealed that there are many factors contributing to learners' inability to use a variety of sentence structures in their essay. The factors according to the findings are incompetent teachers, lack of extensive reading, lack of application, confusion of non-sentence sentences with complete sentences, lack of practice and feedback, learners' poor educational background as well as lack of exposure. These findings are similar to Jani and Mellinger (2013), Kedir and Nemo (2015), Huy (2015) and Freed, Ashraf and Bilal (2016) as narrated in Sections 2.4.1.1, 2.4.1.2, 2.4.1.3 and 2.4.1.6.

Learners are expected to have some specific skills/abilities in order to vary sentence structures in essay writing. However, the findings discovered that learners lack the functional knowledge of structurally and functionally classified sentences, conjunctions and the purposes they serve as well as an ability to understand sentence construction errors. The findings are contrary to White et al (2011) in Section 2.4.2.1, Huddleston (2004) in Section 2.4.2.2 and Tredinnick (2008) in Section 2.4.2.3.

The findings revealed that teachers use teacher-centred teaching strategies when teaching sentence variation in essay writing. The findings are similar to those of researchers such as Oliver (2000) and Brookes and Grundy (2000) and Mmbaga (2002) in Section 2.4.3 who found out that ESL learners commit errors in sentence construction due to teacher-centred learning. Teacher-centred learning is in contradiction to the essence of CLT, the theory benchmarking this study (Section 2.3) which is learner-centeredness and involvement. The researchers benchmarked on CLT like the present study.

The findings discovered that learners are faced with a challenge of using punctuation appropriately. The teachers said that learners write long sentences with wrong punctuation or omission of punctuation. They seem to forget that punctuation plays a significant role in writing. The essence of the findings is that learners use punctuation inappropriately. The finding is similar to Solikhah (2017) in (Section 2.4.4.3). Furthermore, all the teachers said that learners are unable to construct complex and compound-complex sentences. The finding is consistent with Solikhah's (2017) assertion in Section 2.4.4.2.

Teachers showed that they are challenged by teacher-learner ratio. Teacher 02 has 70 while teacher 03 has 65 Form E learners. They said that essays in these classes cannot be marked overnight because of these large numbers. The finding is similar to Celik (2015) in Section 2.4.4.3.

The teachers indicated that learner-centred teaching strategies must be adopted in order to help learners to master sentence structure variation in their essay writing. The finding is consistent with Hassard (2005) and Viji (2015) in Section 2.4.5 and CLT which advocates for learner-centredness in involvement where learners own their learning. The findings are also consistent

with CAP as it also advocates for learner-centered teaching strategies. The next chapter provides the conclusions of the study based on the findings that are presented in this chapter. Recommendations on how to overcome the challenges in sentence structures variation will also be presented.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The chapter features conclusions and recommendations based on the findings per research questions as reported in Chapter Four. It starts with conclusions followed by recommendations.

5.2 CONCLUSIONS

Conclusions are organized by main findings per a research question.

5.2.1 Conclusions on findings related to the factors contributing to learners' inability to vary sentence structures

a) Teachers' content incompetency

Under teachers' lack of competency, teachers disclosed that they lack content knowledge which they have to pass to learners. The finding points to a conclusion that teachers' lack of content knowledge competency can be related to learners' inability to vary sentence structures in essay writing. If teachers lack content knowledge of concepts necessary for sentence variation, learners may not be able to vary sentence structures in their essay writing.

b) Lack of extensive reading

As said in Section 4.2.1 (a), teachers indicated that another factor contributing to learners' inability to vary sentence structures in essay writing is that learners lack extensive reading culture. Direct reference was made to NCDC by one of the teachers who said this deficiency is not a concern for teachers only but of NCDC as well. Literature shows that extensive reading influences learners' writing. For instance, Greiffenberg (2010) asserts that reading in the context of SL writing, is understood as the appropriate input for acquisition of writing skills because it is

generally assumed that extensive reading will function as a primary model from which writing skills can be learnt or at least inferred.

Greiffenberg's assertion further indicates that extensive reading helps learners gain fluency; learn text structures and language that they can transfer to their own writing. It is believed that through reading, learners have incidental contact with the rules of grammar; so, they develop a sense for the structure of the language and its grammar and increase their vocabulary. On the basis of this observation, the study concludes that reading and writing are related hence learners' inability to vary sentence structures in their writing could be related to their lack of extensive reading.

The conclusion aligns with that of Jani and Mellinger (2013) in Section 2.4.1.1 of this study in that learners do not read broadly to see how sentences are constructed and varied in other writers' work. According to constructivism, when learners engage in extensive reading and see how sentences are varied, they create new knowledge to improve upon the foundation they got in class as teachers were teaching the sentence variation (Section 2.3).

c) Lack of application of grammatical concepts in essay writing

Teachers indicated in Section 4.2.1 (c) that learners are unable to apply what they have learnt in grammar in their writing tasks. It is arguable as reflected by the findings that the use of grammatical aspects in written tasks is very crucial because learners who do not practise what they have learnt in grammar when engaged in written tasks might not be able to vary sentence structures in their essay writing.

d) Confusion of non-sentence sentences with complete sentences

In Section 4.2.1 (d), teachers pointed out that learners are not able to distinguish between non-sentence sentences and complete sentences. This is why their scripts are full of sentence construction errors such as sentence fragments, comma-splices, run-on sentences, stringy sentences as well as choppy sentences. Therefore, it seems that learners' confusion of non-sentence sentences with complete sentences could be related to learners' inability to use a variety of sentence structures in their essay writing. The conclusion is consistent with Freed, Ashraf and Bilal's (2016) finding that learners have persistent problems with sentence structures as their sentences are incomplete (Section 2.4.1.6). If learners confuse non-sentence sentences with complete sentences, it is impossible for them to vary sentence structures.

e) Lack of practice and feedback

As shown in Section 4.2.1 (e), teachers stated that learners' lack of practice and feedback is another factor contributing to their inability to vary sentence structures. At the same time, literature proves that learners' frequent engagement in writing improves their writing skills. For instance, Bevan (2008) points out that it is important to engage learners in frequent writing in order to help them produce well-written compositions because good writing depends upon many elements such as sentence variation and adequate feedback which many high school teachers de-emphasize. However, teachers indicated that they do not give learners' written tasks often and do not provide adequate feedback. The finding reflects that if learners are not engaged in regular written tasks and do not get satisfactory feedback from their teachers, they might not be able to vary sentence structures.

f) Learners' poor educational background

According to what teachers said in Section 4.2.1 (f), another factor contributing to learners' inability to vary sentence structures is learners' poor educational background. Poor educational background influences learners' style of writing and limit it to a certain extent. The indication of the finding is that learners' inability to vary sentence structure is related to learners' poor educational background. If learners have poor educational background, they might not be able to vary sentence structures.

g) Lack of exposure to English language

Teachers specified in Section 4.2.1 (g) that learners' lack of exposure is another factor contributing to their inability to vary sentence structures. Teachers stated that learners are not exposed to English because they are surrounded by people who speak Sesotho. Teachers themselves admitted that they teach some English language concepts in Sesotho. Similarly, literature confirms that lack of exposure to English leads to poor performance in written tasks. For example, Al-Maheooqi (2015) states that learners' poor performance in written tasks becomes worse in countries where the medium of instruction at schools is English but learners are exposed to English for a limited number of hours. Learners in these schools spent more hours using their native language. The finding points to a conclusion that learners' inability to vary sentence structures could be linked to learners' lack of exposure to English because if learners are not exposed to English, they cannot vary sentence structures.

5.2.2 Conclusions on findings related to sentence variation skills/abilities

Findings from the analysis of data taken from Form E English Language teachers and learners' marking point to the following constraints; one is learners' lack of the functional knowledge of structurally and functionally classified sentences. Learners, for instance, do not seem to know both coordinating and subordinating conjunctions and the purposes each of them serves.

Learners also lack an ability to understand sentence construction errors hence their confusion of non-sentence sentences with complete sentences. Because of lack of the above mentioned skills, learners resort to the use of many simple sentences and the overuse of conjunction *and* as indicated in Section 4.2: tables 4.1, 4.2 and 4.3, and scripts 1, 2, 5, and 9 in Appendix D. The findings are consistent with Alarcon and Morales (2011), Sefako-Letsoela (2012), and Carriopastor (2013)'s findings that learners overuse the conjunction *and*. The findings have led to the conclusion that lack of functional knowledge of structurally and functionally classified sentences, conjunctions and their purposes as well as an understanding of sentence construction errors, might be associated with learners' inability in sentence variation during composition writing.

5.2.3 Conclusions on findings related to teaching strategies adopted when teaching sentence variation

Concerning research question on the teaching strategies that teachers use when teaching sentence variation on essay writing, the teachers pointed out that they use teacher-centred strategies. These teachers further indicated that they lecture in order to save time and finish the syllabus. This means that the teaching techniques that teachers use when teaching sentence variation are not appropriate. Teachers consider themselves as the only source of knowledge and disregard learners' experiences/prior knowledge; as a result, learners fail to portray how much they already know hence their failure to vary sentence structures. The finding points to a conclusion that

learners' failure to vary sentence structures in essay writing could be related to teacher-centeredness of pedagogical practices in teaching essay writing.

Teacher-centred pedagogical practices in teaching contradicts with constructivism and its principle that learners have a responsibility to create and contribute to construction of knowledge. The teacher is regarded as the main source of information while learners are said to be passive participants who do not possess any pre-requisite knowledge. The study concludes that it is impossible for learners to master sentence variation if they do not take part in their learning.

5.2.4 Conclusions related to learners' challenges in sentence structures variation

With reference to the research question on learners' challenges in sentence structure variation in essay writing, teachers showed that learners are faced with the following challenges:

a) Inappropriate use of punctuation

Teachers said learners seem to forget that punctuation plays a significant role in writing because they use it incorrectly or sometimes omit it. They complained that the mostly misused punctuation by learners is a comma. This is indicated in Section 4.4. The finding is similar to the narration given in Section 2.4.4.3 that learners do not use punctuation correctly in essay writing.

b) Inability to construct sentence structures

Teachers indicated that learners are unable to construct complex and compound-complex sentences because their teachers do not teach them these sentence structures. Teachers confirmed in Section 4.2.1 (d) that they do not know these sentence structures. The finding seems to suggest that learners' failure to construct sentence structures could be due to teachers not exposing learners to the different sentence structures. Therefore, if learners are unable to construct

sentence structures in isolation, they cannot vary them in essay writing. The present study's conclusion that learners' struggle to construct complex and compound-complex sentences could be linked to that of Solikhah (2017) in Section 2.4.4.2 that learners are faced with a challenge of constructing complex and compound-complex sentences.

5.2.5 Conclusions related to teachers' challenges when teaching sentence variation

Relating to the research question on teachers' challenges when teaching sentence variation on essay writing are the following challenges:

a) Overcrowded classes

Analysis of data from interviews reflected that teachers are challenged by teacher-learner ratio. Teachers specified that they teach large classes of about 70-80 learners per class; as a result, it is very difficult to attend to the needs of each learner. The finding leads to an impression that learners' failure to vary sentence structures in essay writing could be linked to overcrowded classes. Over crowdedness makes it difficult for the teachers to attend to the needs of each child when teaching sentence variation. The conclusion is similar to the findings that teacher-learner ratio has a negative impact on learners' performance in essay writing as their needs in sentence variation are not attended to (Koc and Celik (2015) and Kambuga (2016) as indicated in Section 2.4.5.3).

b) Overloaded LGCSE syllabus

In Section 4.6, teachers pointed to overloaded LGCSE syllabus as another challenge when teaching sentence variation. These teachers mentioned that the LGCSE syllabus is loaded with the content which has to be taught within a short period of time; therefore, teachers rush over the topics as they teach for examination. If the LGCSE syllabus is overloaded, learners might not be

able to vary sentence structures because teachers do not elaborate on the topics due to limited time. Based on this finding, the present study concludes that learners' inability to vary sentence structures could be connected to overloaded LGCSE syllabus. The conclusion is similar to Benjamin's (2005) assertion that teachers concentrate more on good performing learners because they are pressed by time and have to cover all that is in the syllabus.

c) Exclusion of sentence variation as a topic in the syllabus

Teachers stated that sentence variation is not one of the topics which must be taught because it is not included in the LGCSE syllabus. Because of this exclusion teachers do not make significant effort to teach learners to vary sentence structures in their essay writing (Section 4.6). The study, therefore, concludes that exclusion of sentence structures variation as a topic in the syllabus is associated to learners' failure to vary sentence structures. If teachers are not instructed to teach sentence structure variation, learners might not be able to know sentence structures and vary them in their essay writing.

5.2.6 Conclusions related to pedagogical structures that can improve learners' ability to vary sentence structures

With regard to the question on the pedagogical strategies that can be adopted to improve learners' ability to use a variety of sentence structures in their essay writing, teachers emphasised that learner-centred teaching strategies must be adopted in order to help learners master sentence structures variation in their essay writing (Section 4.7). Teachers indicated that these strategies should be adopted because they encourage learners to be involved in their learning as they build new knowledge on the foundation they acquired at primary and Junior Certificate levels. Therefore, it seems reasonable to assume that learner-centred teaching strategies relate to learners' ability to vary sentence structures.

If learner-centred teaching strategies are adopted when teaching sentence variation, learners might be able to vary sentence structures in their essay writing because learners would have been fully engaged in activities that help them own their learning. Learner-centred teaching strategies are linked to constructivism (Section 2.3) as learner-centeredness and creation of new knowledge are some of its principles. According to constructivism, when learners are involved in their learning, they seem to grasp the concepts and use them accordingly. That is, if teachers design learning activities that involve learners, especially when teaching sentence variation, learners would be able to vary sentence structures.

5.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations are based on the conclusions of this study stated in Section 5.2 above.

1. In relation to teachers' competencies and a conclusion that learners' inability to vary sentence structures could be linked to teachers' incompetency, there are teacher training implications. Teachers must have a lot of in-service teacher training programs. The trainings can be done nationally, regionally or at school level. Such programs should not focus on only strategies of teaching but should also revisit content. Teachers should be given an opportunity to mention their content training needs so that they can be in-serviced accordingly. This recommendation translates into further suggestions that:

a) In addition, teachers whose schools are considered the best performing schools in English should visit other teachers whose schools are regarded as poorly performing schools. This should be done in order to offer assistance to the teachers in poor performing schools so that their learners can perform well too.

b) Teachers should also be encouraged to work collaboratively amongst themselves at their schools and even with other teachers from the neighbouring schools to help one another in the teaching of sentence variation. Thus, team teaching should be encouraged amongst teachers.

c) Furthermore, teachers who are English language examination markers should share their marking experiences and expectations with other teachers. This will help the teachers to guide their learners so that they can perform better in English essay writing.

2. With reference to lack of extensive reading which teachers and literature (Section 2.4.1.1) attribute to learners' inability, schools should have libraries with recent reading materials that learners can read to improve their sentence variation. If learners read a lot, they will appreciate how other writers vary sentences in their works. Schools should also buy newspapers so that learners can read and apply other writers' writing styles in their essay writing. Krashen's (1985) assertion also supports the idea of extensive reading. The author states that increasing the time spent on reading can improve writing even more than frequent writing.

3. Concerning lack of application which the findings showed as one of the contributing factors to learners' inability to vary sentence structures, learners should be informed from the beginning that there is a relationship between what they learn in grammar and their writing task so that they will be able to apply what they have learnt in grammar in their writing tasks including essay writing.

4. Regarding confusion of non-sentence sentences with complete sentences which the finding in the study by Freed, Ashraf and Bilal (2016) in Section 2.4.1.6 also revealed as one of the contributing factors, learners should be taught the structures of each of the four structurally classified sentences, namely, simple, compound, complex and compound-complex sentences and

the conjunctions used with each structure so that they would not confuse them with non-sentence sentences.

5. Relating to lack of practice and feedback, learners should be engaged in essay writing tasks regularly, be marked and get adequate feedback frequently in order to help them identify their problems related to sentence variation and find ways of curbing them as early as possible. The recommendation is supported by Bevan's (2008) proposition that learners should be engaged in frequent writing and get adequate feedback so that they could produce well written essays.

6. In relation to lack of exposure, learners should be exposed to English from as early age as possible and teachers be strictly asked to stick to English as a medium of instruction as indicated in the CAP (2009) that English shall begin to be used as a medium of instruction and taught as a subject in Lesotho schools.

7. As indicated in Section 2.4.4.3, learners have a challenge of using punctuation incorrectly. Concerning the conclusion that learners use punctuation inappropriately, learners should be taught punctuation marks so that they can use them appropriately in sentence structures variation.

8. Regarding pedagogical strategies to be adopted when teaching sentence variation, teachers should be encouraged to use learner-centred teaching strategies as stated in the CAP in order to help learners master sentence variation in essay writing. The essence of constructivism (Section 2.3) is learner-centeredness and involvement as learners get fully engaged in different activities that enhance their writing skill. If learners are involved in their learning, they might be able to gain new knowledge to build upon what they already know about sentence variation.

9. Teacher-learner ratio was demonstrated in the studies by Koc and Celik (2015) and Kambuga (2016) as teachers challenge when teaching sentence variation. The present study also concluded

that teachers' failure to teach sentence variation could be linked to teacher-learner ratio. With reference to teacher-learner ratio, the number of students per teacher should be considered in order to avoid overcrowded classes.

10. The present study concluded that teachers' failure to teach sentence variation could be connected to overloaded LGCSE syllabus. Related to this conclusion, it would be worthwhile for all stakeholders in education, especially NCDC, to reduce the number of topics to be taught at LGCSC in order to accommodate sentence variation in the syllabus as one of the topics to be taught as it adds meaning to the written communication.

Sentence structures variation is very important in any piece of writing as it influences the academic performance of learners; so, all stakeholders in education: parents, teachers and government must help in improving the writing skills of learners. Appropriate pedagogical strategies should be employed to facilitate and nurture functional acquisition of writing skills in learners.

The purpose of this study was to investigate factors contributing to learners' inability to use a variety of sentence structures in their English essay writing. The study also hoped to propose the necessary strategies of teaching sentence variation in essay writing. Both qualitative and quantitative approaches with interpretive paradigm were adopted in the present study. However, the study is predominantly qualitative. A case study design was adopted, three high schools in Maseru city were selected and thirty (30) learners' essays were marked in order to find out what could be the possible factors contributing to learners' inability to vary sentence structures. Three Form E English language teachers from the three selected schools were also interviewed to share their experiences in relation to learners' inability to vary sentence structures.

After analysing data from teachers' interviews and marking learners' essays, the findings revealed that teachers' content incompetency, lack of reading, lack of practice and feedback, learners' poor educational background, lack of application of grammatical aspects into essay writing, lack of exposure, confusion of non-sentence sentences with complete sentences as well as teacher-centred teaching strategies were the factors contributing to learners' inability to vary sentence structures in their essays. These findings led to this study's conclusion learners' inability to use a variety of sentence structures in their essay writing could be related to the above mentioned factors.

5.4 SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The factors contributing to learners' inability to use a variety of sentence structures in their essay writing such as lack of extensive reading, lack of exposure, lack of practice and feedback and others should be considered for further research.

It is important that the findings of this study be considered representative of what happens to all Form E learners as they were the population for the study. However, the sample for this study, though fairly selected, was from one district and only the city part of the district. Further research needs to be conducted with larger sample from schools situated in different areas throughout the ten districts of the country to see if the same findings would be revealed.

5.5 SUMMARY

The chapter highlighted the conclusions, recommendations as well as the suggestions for further research. The chapter was organized into two sections presenting conclusions and recommendations respectively. The conclusions were drawn from the findings of the study while recommendations were drawn from the conclusions of the study.

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APPENDICES

Appendix B: School A essay topics and script

At the head of your essay put the number of the question you have chosen.

You are advised to write 350-500 words or 2-2 ½ pages.

[30 marks]

Write on one of the following topics:

1. Write a story about a night robbery which happened in your village.
2. Humans are largely responsible for the negative changes in the environment. Explain how this is the case and what can be done to improve the situation.
3. Tourism in Lesotho is not used effectively to create jobs. What are your views?
4. Write about an experience when you became very scared.
5. Describe an occasion when someone helped you when you really needed assistance.

Script 1

1. Usually when its time for festive in my village people couse troubles that end up affecting other people. There are some people who work over night and steal from other, not just to steal but they also catch people when they are from work especially women and rape them.

I recally one night when I was sleeping and I had a lot of noise outside and it was a noise made by many people and they were shouting at one of my neighbour, they were also calling him by the name and I went to the window and look trough it and find that he is the one.

Fear rose upon me. I began to ask my self some questions, that was waiting of time because I could not find and answer, one of the most question was that how am I going to trust this person, how did he manage to work over night and

The villager shouted at him. And some of them did not know what he did they kept on asking but still there was no answer I put on my blanket and went outside to gather some information, when I reach there I was told that the man was found in one of the villager's shop stealing.

They kept on beating him because he did not tell the truth I did not like what they did to him because he was my beloved neighbour but nothing I could do to stop them, I had mercy on him but what he did was wrong so he deserve a punishment.

After some minutes I went next to where he was sitting and looked into his eyes and he was shy to look at me, I asked him a question which he had a problem of answering which stated that, why did you do this?, according to my understanding, maybe he did this because of friend because since I know him he was a good man who could not be involve in such troubles.

The man cried a lot, he kept on

The man kept on crying but not one felt sorry for him, he also ask for forgiveness but still no one was willing to forgive him, he tried to explain some reasons why he did that but the answer he got from the villagers was that “were you sure of what your doing?”, he said that its because of friends.

One of the villager. Said the man should be burnt or buried alive, all people agreed with the point, I was left alone begging them to forgive him but I was not listened. I kept on praying until they change their mind but the did not stop beating him until he bleed.

His face was full of blood, his hands could not touch, he had so many wounds he could not walk by him self, his clothes were torn because of sticks they used to beat him. What was most socking is that they even put big stones on him their intension was to kill him.

The owner of the shop the man was cought in informed everyone to stop beating the man and call the police, the man was now relieved.

Script 5

4. “My Blood frozen into veins,” when I remember that day because it was a very wonderful day to me.

Firstly, it was on 24 December 2016 on Monday when I went with friend Thabo, besides that we were strolling at Lithabaneng to the birthday party of one of my friends Lerato. He was turning up 18 years young.

However, we arrived and everything was prepared. All people were wearing black and white, house music DJ was there, his classmates, food, drinks and also his parents were there. And because of that everything was looking good and amazing.

Unfortunately, I was not prepared. And all who were there were so curious wanted to know who I am and what I am doing here. Because I was wearing unwashed clothes, my old “all star” shoes.

“Kabelo and Thabo what happened with you guys,” asked very loudly.

“Ah! Ah! you are here for your birthday party,” whispering.

“No!! No!! come on guys like this, look at you K.B wearing like this,” he shouted.

However, Lerato called us in, his bedroom to change. And he borrowed us some clothes. And we groomed ourselves not that, we were grooming for the trouble. And after some time the party began. And I was chosen to give a speech about Lerato.

Moreover, while it was my time to give a speech. Some of Lerato’s classmates were staring at me I was like a fish out of water because I didn’t know them. And I was scared what if I give the wrong information about Lerato.

Nevertheless, I was appointed to serve food and drink for assistance. And those class mates come to me asking for some more drink. Because I was scared I give them, and Lerato asked why I did it. Because now all drinks are gone and there are no more drink left.

And his father came to me, asked me and go and buy some drinks because I have give them like. And I was scared because he ever touched me with T.Shirt. And because of his enraged I think he was going beat me in front of everyone.

I will never forget that day because it was my first time to be scared. And disappointed at the party.

Appendix C: School B essay topics and scripts

At the head of your essay put the number of the question you have chosen.

You are advised to write 350-500 words or 2-2 ½ pages.

[30 marks]

Write one of the following topics:

1. Describe two interesting and different buildings in your neighbourhood you should describe their appearance and atmosphere and not just stories about what happens in them.
2. Is it better to have younger brothers and sisters or older ones? Give reasons and examples to support your view.
3. Write a story about a bus ride that had an unexpected ending.
4. Write a story about an occasion when the groom could not show up in church on his wedding day.
5. Write about the effects of early childhood marriage on girls.

Script 1

3. The old boy hectored me “bring that money young boy” and I hesitated a bit at first because I was afraid but helplessly handed it over to him at the end as happiness had deserted me and the journey became absolutely a terrifying experience for me. I had never before had, a trip to Durban. When I had the privilege someone made sure to ruin it for me.

Few minutes before the departure of the bus, my parents had accompanied me to the bus stop, and for the first time in my life had I enjoyed their presence. They made sure, I sat comfortably in the bus, and bid me a goodbye on its departure. From then I sat quietly on my seat, for all faces in the bus looked unfamiliar.

I was excited at first because my father had given 1000 bank notes. I countlessly counted my cash, for I could not believe my eyes, later on as I made another attempt to read my money, an older boy on the front seat took notice of me.

He stared at me for a while, and seemed to whisper something to his colleague I quickly hid some of my money in the side pocket of my back, while I put the rest in the pocket of my trouser. He then came to my seat and seemed to be telling her something as well, and my neighbour left his seat for this total stranger. He sat quietly next to me, and was desirous to come directly in contact with me, but I shifted a bit.

He peeped through the window and seemed to be saying, ‘let lying dogs lie,’ Unfortunately I fell into his trick, and felt something slipping through my back pocket, but was awakened by the sound of a vibrating phone. I caught hold of the stranger's hand before he could pickpocket me, and when he realised that I was awake, he took out his knife and, ordered me to give him my money, I actually hesitated a bit at first, but handed it over to him, by then, my fury knew no

bounds. I whispered something in anger, but seems as if I had twisted the lions tail, “What did you just say?” he questioned me, and I courageously repeated my words.

He was a boy of about a year older than me, and he seemed taller and a little bit well build, I swallowed all my pride and decided that I would not let him get away with my money, and I called on for a bus conductor, He started trembling with apprehension, but I had to made sure he does not escape.

The boy was notorious of such crimes, and when the conductor recognised him, he was certain that he might have caused trouble, he stabbed me twice on the leg when he tried to run away, but the conductor caught him, and bit him to a pulp, I took my chances beard the lion in his own down, and in the presence of the conductor, I made sure he bit the dust. The bus stopped and the boy was thrown off the street, but I also did not reach my destination, for I had to give the detailed statement of the incident to the police, and would probably be returned back home for cure.

Script 3

4. I vividly recall the sounds, of the machines when her heart stopped, I could not move for fear had laid his icy hands on me. I have lost her good this time, my most treasured gift, is no more.

It was in the early hours of a great Friday, the sun was smiling brightly down on us, we were all busy in the kitchen preparing for work and school, my parents were not in a good space, my dad threatened a divorce, we all sat on table for breakfast, and my dad cleared his throat and said, "I am taking the kids with me." Mama tried to hold, it but failed, Tears started to flow down her face like Niagra falls.

My poor mama; all I did was to sit and stare at her cry for her children, my dad turned a blind eye on her hurting and continued eating my brother got up and left the room. Out the blue mama fell from her sit down to the carpet. Quickly I rushed to her reseue but my dad did not, I began to scared; I felt blood freeze in my veins. It was only then when I cried out loud dad came to her, He shouted and told me to get the car ready, she needs a doctor.

I had never in my life before see my dad so worried. He drove as fast as lightening and before I knew it, we were at the medi clinic. Porters rushed to help us carry her in and we followed them, they showed us a seat and left us there. I could not keep still I cried until I was out of tears, my dad took my hand; he tried to convince me everything is going to be fine. I wanted to believe him but my heart found no room for hope.

Daddy told me not that he loves mama no more but they were too young to understand and to ever know that lovers drift apart, he told me their love was so beautiful, and so real. It is just that somewhere along this windy road they lost the spark; I love my daddy more, I still do but there is

no love like mother's love for her child that I knew to the core of my heart that is why I failed to understand daddy.

Minutes later Doctor Lewi walked out of the intensive care unit to us. He said we can go in and see her. my heart was at ease then. We followed him in and she was out of this world. Doctor said we only have five minutes and walked out, I took her hand and wiped my tears; Daddy was rubbing my back then he said we need her like a blind needs a miracle and I did not understand his saying.

A minute later, the machines made a loud painful noise that could touch even the oldest heart; my dad called for help and they rushed in, they tried to jump her but it was already yesterday, I cried a lot and my dad hold me tight, we left the room and the doctor said she passed out. I thought my ears were playing tricks on me, my dad and I walked home very hurt, no one, did breathe a word during the drive; until we got home.

It is true; not all that glitters is gold but mama was way more that. She loved me; her family and mostly my dad I felt angels cry when my dad and I kissed her goodbye.

Script 4

4. We were told that the groom would arrive in an hour's time, but one hour dragged into several; I glanced at my watch and I was jostled, that three hours had passed. I started shattering unwaveringly, and shivers of apprehension were sent my spine, lest the groom would not show up at all.

That day, we woke up happily, it was finally the day we had been impatiently waiting for, my sister's wedding day; the idea of seeing her walking down the aisle could not be, suppressed. Everything was ready – her too was glowing all ready in her – white gown that awed everyone as she' strutted to the car that would take her to church.

We were all ready, dressed to the nines, just waiting for a call from the church; we strutted in front of the mirror rehearsing cat walk moves, we were smashing I was beaming with bride I could not believe that I was myself, not even in my wildest dreams had I ever thought I would look like that, never!

Some minutes later, there were hooters of the cars outside and pearls of ululations. We were ushered out of the house to the limosine cars that drew more than just envious; look from the neighbours and we drove off.

At our arrival at the church everything was ready, people were already there and waiting people dashed out of the church to see the bride; there were rearing pearls of fire leaping up into the sky; people cheered everytime the flares sizzled and exploded in to the sky. It seemed so beautiful. And that I felt an overwhelming urge to cry that I could not even hold myself.

We walked on the red carpet towards, the church door, and when the bride was sitted. Everyone else took their respective seats. Everyone was waiting for the groom. We waited about an hour admiring the red roses and candles which flicked aimlessly; on the tables clothed red, capped by the refreshing smell, that was dessipated by the roses.

After some time, everyone became restless and started muffing in droned voices, I could not bear the face on my sister's face, her feigned smile little did disguise the sense of the impending betrayal she felt, was rooting at her; I felt anger gradually building in me suddenly my jaw sagged when I saw her running out of the church, with tears cascading down her visage.

Gradually people left one by one, greatly disapointed, there was nothing we could do, the groom had disappeared in to thin air, we just had to grin and bear it.

Script 5

3. “Yes!” I exclaimed with enthusiasm; as I woke up, the match day for the LISA tournaments was finally on. So I prepared my lunch for that day, soon as I had made my bed, and then did my ablutions.

I was afraid that I would miss the bus, if I had breakfast, so I skipped it and quickly dashed my mother’s bedroom for my pocket money, I then bid her goodbye and left my humble abode, our bus was going to depart at 6 am to Setsoto Stadium but the driver arrived 5 minutes late due to a slight hiccup of traffic jam.

We were standing at the assembly as our names were called according to how we paid, and then the headmaster commanded us to make a queue as we went to the bus; soon everyone was in the bus and the journey commenced. As we made our way to the main road one of the students prayed for all of us to have a safe trip.

Soon after the short prayer the music was let to flow and everyone, except myself and other From A students, made their way to the passage where the dancing was done, few of us were not completely au fait with bus trips because we all used taxis for our trips so this craziness really left us a little bit abstract.

Soon everyone who had been dancing was sweating and then a whiff of sweat kept passing by as it made its way out of the window in exchange of fresh air. To my surprise the dancer did not make any effort to sit down in their very condition, to them it seemed to be an ala mode situation.

To keep up with the beat from the car heater and an unpleasant smell from the colleagues I put off my jersey. I wrapped it around my neck, then covered my nose. An apriori assumption would be that we would all be sick if the dancing did not slow down.

As we approached the capital city Maseru our bus was stopped by an officer of law. As I peeped by the sight of our car illuminating the sight of the bus and the nearby complex in blue, and red, in the next 5 minutes a police officer ordered us to go out.

The bus driver had left his license at home, so he was manacled. To the team this was a crueling experience as they had sacrificed their time training. Now everyone had to go to the grounds on feet; and we arrived late that we lost before even playing.

Script 7

3. He knew he was living on borrowed time the moment he saw a group of police cars; surrounding his bus, what an atrocious and egocentric bus driver he was. I believe that if reincarnation dwelled amongst us; he would have been the great Adolf Hitler himself.

Usually August is a time of fun and concord for me, but this happened to be quite the contrary on August last year, I woke up at the crack of dawn to prepare myself for the big day ahead of me, it was our farewell party held at Maphutheng lodge and not only was everybody pleased to bits/ but also dressed to kill in one's best beats and tucker.

To our surprise when we arrived at school we were told that our customary bus driver had been changed. "How strange." I thought to myself without further ado, we made acquaintance of our new bus driver and there was something strange about him, but I could not tell what, his jokes were so old that the last time I heard they were riding on a dinosaur but, I would have rather French kissed a rattle snake than follow my own intuition.

Our journey commenced at around 9:00 am and we had the radio on full blast. And everybody seemed to be having a barrel of laughs. Suddenly the weather seemed to change when we reached Makhoakhoeng and that was only the tip of the iceberg, It suddenly became freezing so much that even polar bears we wearing jackets.

The driver stopped the bus for us to go outside and pee but my friend and I remained behind, unnoticed, and as silent as a graveyard we were. He received a call and I could not believe it. The driver was involved in human trafficking; and I could not bear the thought of envisaging myself, working as a slave for a white folk.

The students returned to the bus and out of the blue another bus overtook our bus and blocked the way and all of this happened at the blink of an eye; hunks of men got out of the bus and ordered us in to their bus and suddenly a mood of melancholy descended on me.

“Palesa”, as they customarily called her, was ensnared next to a seat and she could not get out, so they decided to leave her behind. Then they poured propane inside the bus and dropped the lighter, we watched as the bus burned down to ashes and Palesa screaming for help indeed she was a true damsel in distress after a few minutes, her cadaver was charred beyond recognition.

Luckily, my friend had his phone with him and he called for help, none of the hunks managed to see him, and as they were ready to depart, we heard sounds of syringes and before one could say Jack Robinson, they were surrounded.

Appendix D: School C essay topics and essays

At the head of your essay put the number of the question you have chosen.

You are advised to write 350-500 words or 2-2 ½ pages.

[30 marks]

Write on one of the following topics:

1. Write a story about a poor man who unexpectedly became rich.
2. Describe an ideal beauty of someone you would want to marry.
3. Discuss some of the challenges that are faced by farmers as a result of soil erosion.
4. Write about someone who was given a bad advice.
5. Teachers should be allowed to have cell phones in the classroom. To what extent do you agree?

Script 1

3. Agriculture is the most important institution. from what all people in life depend on, Because our staple food is maize, and the life without agriculture is not easy to run.

All around the world people depend on Agriculture even those who do not have the land and are not interested to plough they depend on buying Pap, beans vegetables like carrots bitroot green peas and others. And there is no proper life without Agriculture because the food that are not from the field are very expensive to buy.

That's why Agriculture is important. But when there is no soil erosion because of heavy rains Agriculture declines, because most of the people depend on it especially the people living in rural areas. Because they are jobless so it becomes the burden on them not knowing what to decide. Because they will harvest the poor food and not enough to provide the family.

Furthermore it also led to the poor harvest because the farmers were applied the much effort to grow plants and at the end the soil erosion makes them to feel desperate because they are going to have the crops that are not healthy and strong to carry their life.

Apart from that Even the farmers who are known with the good quality of the better crops they have harvest in the fields now they are going to be known as the poor crops because the soil erosion which is known as a removal of soil from one place to another by wind and water has taken the top layer of top soil.

Even the plants will lack their nutrients as a result, of soil erosion. Because the good soil which is on top has been taken, and therefore there will be the poor commercial farming system. The farmers

product will no longer be attractive. Again and easy to be bought at the supermarkets like transporting beans. Because it takes the soil that help the plants to grow.

In the field as a result there will be left with the soil that do not have the enough nutrients, because when the top soil has gone the soil will become poor. And even when the farmers can like their soil to become good again it will never. They are going to harves the poor crops; every year after year.

Moreover the shortage of some nutrients to the soil will let to the bad crops. They are going to end up buying the fertilisers. that are very expensive so that their soil will be good again. Also the subsistence farming who provide for their family.

This problem will not end there. The other farmers will began to eat or consume their seeds which they store them in order for the coming future, as a result of poor in the family because of the soil erosion which course the poor harvest. And the seed when are finished there will be the poverty in the house.

Even the fiends will have the dongas as a result of a removed soil on top. And this will course them to cultivate soil which is not easy because of the machines.

Script 2

5. I agree because styles of learning, or the way the teachers teach students is different. To some teacher teaching can be difficult without phones and as technology changes from year to year the information written in books might be old fashioned so the phone can assist teachers to goggle for more details.

More over, teacher might have some meetings to attend so if such a teacher is un aware that time is if surpose the meeting was to meet at 15.30 hours and the teacher is in a class so his or her watch has lost the time his or hare colleaques can call him or her to remember him that is time up. In addition if the teacher is teach science and perhas he wants to teach about the phone he or she would not be able if the phone is not there and for him or her to be believed by student while teaching there should be proof of what he or she is teaching about.

Teachers should be allowed to have cell phones in the class because some students are silly. but attending all the classes and some are not respecting teachers so if the teacher meat such a problem he or she must have the cell phone in class so that he or she can call the parent of the student to inform him or her about the behaviour of his or her child.

However the students can be affected accademically if the teacher is allowed to have a cell phone in class because some teachers are lazy they can just give students many exercises and log in social media like facebook, whatsapp and Twitter while in class and teaching stops and even if the phone can ring the teacher would stop teaching and waste time for students by answering his or her call and sometimes him or she can go for good and leave the students alone.

Script 3

1. Oh! This is an unbelievable life style of who would finally face an enjoyable life as one who unexpectedly be come rich.

A man named stuck. Who lives at Linakeng was strickly faces problems in his life so nobody at the community cares about him, he was a disadvantage man who had nothing at all. This man was not educated. by he knows how to make things at his own, because of his dirtiness, and all his physical appearance made him as if he was a lunatic as if not.

Moreover this man's situation depresing me and I had nothing to do because I am so young. when I told my parents about him things even get worse because he was disliked by every body in the community because of bankcrupcy and also his lifestyle you cannot image a man sharing food with a pig remember that pig eats rotten food and this make all my life to feel pity for him.

His lifestyle was so disgusting when compare to each an every human being who lived on Earth, because when he asked for job in our community nobody cares about him, for example the simple job of fetching some water his was denied. I remembered that one day my neighbours sheep went disappeared so each an everyone putted eyes on him as a sign that his is the one who knows where the sheep were.

Furthermore this man was innocent because of wondering he was blamed that he sells those sheep to any of his friends so that he could survive as I remember his body was hang on the tree as a result of people thinking that he could tell the truth but still truth failed to be out.

Script 4

5. It seldom that any feeling of happiness comes allayed by the mixture of sorrow for students sake of allowing teachers to have their phones in class rooms.

Teachers should be allowed to have their phones in class rooms, but in a way of helping them to have access to internet. If necessary to help them teach even by pictures. To huge extent this could be beneficial in such a way that some students are able to learn by pictures, some hearing and some seeing.

Personally me I could even say even students but for teacher this should be permitted but there should be limitations regarding the use of the cell phone in the class room. Students will be able to have different ideas; concerning a certain issue due to information from the teacher, books and internets.

However if there are not limitations or rules that states how the phones should be used it might be troublesome to the students in such a way that some teachers might use their phones incorrectly. As it may happen that, instead of teaching and the tendency of some teacher to say they would be spoon feeding students.

That is true but sometime teachers use such chances differently as stated by answering call during lessons, and that distructs and it may happen that they may even play games or going over their whatsapp messages.

The sky is the limit meaning school masters should be the one to correct mistake made by the teacher instead of doing what is expected. This could help students in being creative and having different ideas. And this could encourage students to use their phones for school work; when she or he has data, she would think only about his or her work for him or her to compete with the teacher.

Agreement to myself is the betterment of my future Because if not I would stay with one idea but if he teacher are facsinated this could improve the school's academic performance as a whole. Even though dictionaries are there but they have limitation but with internets this could help to have access, to any information the person needed even more than what she or he expected.

Script 6

1. It is true when the saying goes “ a poor beggining makes a good ending” there was a widower man who was actually supposedly my neighbour, this man quite in the Contrary was extremely poor but uexpetedly became rich.

Everyday almost in the mornings I used to see this man by the name of ntate Sehlabo, walking on his foot to work and henceforth sometimes I could even see him again when he departure from work also walking on foot. Hm: not to forget that to his work from where he Stayed was extra miles, like it was something like a distance from Maseru town to Ha Tsolo, it was quite a long distance. Accesoryly, ntate Sehlabo had four children and his wife past away after borneing his fourth Child, all of them was raised by him with what? the peanuts he called salary, he had to feet them, to take them to school and to clothe them but his salary was nothing but half a loaf.

So he could not afford to purchase school uniform for all of his children and to pay all four of them school fees, because they were all in secondary level. As a result only two of them was able to go to school as he could afford to pay school fees for two and the other two had to stay at home doing nothing.

Not to forget that this man lived in a Squatter Camp and he had to pay monthly rent for staying in that squatter the question is with how much? He could always receive letters from his children’s school. They reminded him of paying school fees.

However one day I was taken aback when I glimpsed at him driving a black flashy fortuner brand new from the box. Then I was like “ is that Sehlabo’s car or is it his works car”! but then ntate Sehlabo works at the industries who could let him his car? I found out that he is staying with a very rich woman in town. This was the man who used to be poor.

Script 8

1. There was a poor man at my village who unexpectedly became rich. The man was living with his mother, two wives, children and grand children in his small house. This man was working as a shepherd and one of his wife was a teacher while the other one was staying at home taking care of the house and children and her husband's mother; this man was unable to buy food and clothes for his children.

Sometimes he used to plough crops at his fields and sell them. so that he can get a little from people. On the rainy days his children who was still attending school, they were not going to school because he was not having money for transport so they stay at home.

If I remember vivetely, I was in standard seven with his daughter, she was second daughter of his and his first one was not attending because she droped the school while she was in standard seven too, because she got pregnant, so the father of the baby dinied her and she had to stay at home to nurse the baby.

It was on friday, november 2013 while, I was writing my final examination with the man's second daughter. The dark clouds looked stormy, the clouds missed from the horizon, there was a heavy shower of rain. We were writing our favourite subject mathematics. I went to school with my high hopes, thinking that she is going to be at school too, but unfortunately she did not pitch; when I get home I asked her why didn't she ask for in our school bus so she told me that she will no longer go to school because her mother got some job at the factor. She is going to take care of the house. This girl stopped going to school because she got a bad advice.

Script 9

1. What the surprised in my life time I was thinking that a person who is poor will be poor forever and a person who is rich will be rich forever I never thought that one day a poor man can unexpetedtly become rich, that was like a miracle I remember one day, there was a man at my village and that was at Lithabaneng Maseru that man was like he was not normal because every time when I saw him he was talking alone loudly, pointing somethings that you will never see or singing, he has the big hair and the were he dressed he always wear big trousers his shoes were mess.

When I looked at him I can see that he need same help like always asked people to to gave him food to eat and asked them to gave him job and place to live even his face I can notice that something is wrong about him.

I remember one day when I was on the way to tuck shop I found people as many makes some noise looking other man beaten that poor man and he was down his face was full of blood, when I asked people what had happened told me that poor man was trying to step that man so he beat him up.

When time goes that poor man started to improve like he found job now he found the place to live he is able to get food and able to wear beauty clothes, he surprised people by buying a new car and he is now able to trave his own car now his the one that help other people that are ineed, I was so surprise because I never thought that a poor man can one day be rich.

Appendix E: Interview consent form

I understand what is requested of me as a participant in the research. Therefore, I freely consent to participate.

Name of the interviewee

Name of the interviewer

Signature of interviewee

Signature of interviewer

Appendix F: Interview guide

1. Based on your teaching experience, what would you say are the factors contributing to learners' inability to use a variety of sentence structures in essay writing?
2. What sentence variation skills/abilities are required for essay writing in English?
3. a) What type of teaching learning strategies do you use when teaching sentence structures variation in essay writing?
b) Why do you use these strategies?
4. a) What are learners' challenges in sentence structure variation during essay writing?
b) How do you deal with these challenges?
5. a) What challenges do you face when teaching for sentence variation in essay writing?
b) What are the possible causes of these challenges?
6. What pedagogical strategies can be adopted to improve learners' ability to use a variety of sentence structures in their essay writing?