

**SOCIOCULTURE AND STUDENTS' ARGUMENT
WRITING IN ENGLISH: A CASE STUDY FROM THE
VHEMBE DISTRICT, LIMPOPO PROVINCE,
SOUTH AFRICA**

By

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ABSTRACT

Essay writing is one of the major academic practices that students are expected to master and display. As there is a paucity of information on the nature of sociocultural influence on second language education in the Limpopo Province of South Africa, this study attempts to contribute to knowledge on writing, in general, and on argument writing, in particular in the sociocultural context of the Vhembe District. The central premise for this study is that the way an environment constrains second language learners or frees them to explore and to learn is constituted by sociocultural factors and this includes pedagogical processes. In sociocultural theory, the argument is that to truly understand the human condition, there is a need to analyse and interpret it within the relevant social, cultural and historical context. This is because a learner's cognitive, language and academic development are strongly influenced by the sociocultural context in which they live and learn and the effect could be either negative or positive. This is because the identity of a learner is constructed in subtle ways that align an individual's aspirations with societal goals. In this alignment, learning is performance based, and it also functions as a self-check mechanism in which written discourse illuminates relations, such as the ones between discourse and value systems, which are transmitted through the education system.

This study attempts to understand and explain second language writing within the Vhembe sociocultural context. Such understanding has emanated from abstractions from experience, the exploration of the literature reviewed for the purpose, and from the evaluation and interpretation of the students' engagement in the samples, which have been included in the appendices.

The students' performance in writing was taken as an illustration of sociocultural influences. Using document analysis, observations and abstractions, the study found that students are not proficient in writing in general, because of sociocultural parameters, such as collectivism, weak uncertainty avoidance, a restricted code background, a culture of conserving knowledge, lack of discursive interaction, content orientation and first language literacy. Pedagogy also has an influence on competence, because of the way writing is approached in the learning/teaching situations. Learners seem to have a limited capacity in constructing sentences in the correct tense, use of both metadiscourse and cohesive devices.

The study indicates the need to consider learners' social identity as well as their environment as a way of illustrating the complexity and pertinence of socioculture. This recognition has been given assent through the intervention strategies that are explored and built into the recommendation. The recommendation is that the natural context in which the learners are immersed should be given clarity and should be explored in the English lesson. In this

regard, intervention approaches and strategies for learner activities are based on this schema and on collaboration between facilitators of English language learning and content and Mother Tongue facilitators.

KEY TERMS

Agency in the communication process; Argument writing in English; Collaboration; Discourse analysis; English as a second/foreign language; Literacy in English at FET level; Scaffolding in language learning; The Vhembe sociocultural context; Verbal and Written Communication; Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD);

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