

An Auto-Ethnographic Study of my Learning of English as a Second Language



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DECLARATION

I, **Andile Jideani** declare that

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ABSTRACT

This narrative and reflexive auto-ethnographic study was conducted to explore my learning experiences of English as a second language. The aim was to gain insight into my experiences and extract lessons from them, to understand my experiences and enhance my performance as an English teacher in the future. A reflective autobiographical story, conversations, images to trigger memory, and letter-writing were used to collect data for the study. Myself, two of my peers, my sister, and three critical friends participated in the study. Data was analysed through Critical Discourse and Thematic analysis. The study was underpinned by socio-cultural and motivation theories.

Interrogating my learning experiences of English as a second language revealed that acquiring a second language is a social endeavour and requires motivation on the part of the learner. This important insight will help me to be more empathetic to English second language learners who face challenges and to explore ways of supporting them. Additionally, I will be in a better position to motivate them to learn a second language, as it can contribute to their success in the future. My findings also highlight the need for teachers to continuously develop as this will enhance their ability to embrace contemporary teaching methods as well as to integrate technology in language instruction. Armed with the outcomes of this research, I understand my journey and the role that others played in it. This insight should enable me to be an effective English teacher to my learners in the future.

My findings indicate that examining and understanding my experiences has provided me the opportunity to gain insight from my experiences which I can use to be a better practitioner in the future. Findings from this study also show that auto-ethnography is one of the best methods teachers can use to reflect on their experiences in their different spaces as it places culture at the centre of learning. The socio-cultural theory helped me to broaden the scope of my study as I looked at my journey of learning English as a second language through all aspects of life such as my religious beliefs, play, and within the family. I also discovered that motivation plays a very important role in achieving success when learning a second language.

CHAPTER 1 : THE JOURNEY OF MY LEARNING OF ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE

1.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I first begin by presenting the focus and the purpose of the study, the rationale and motivation for the study, this is where I explain what made me conduct this study in the first place. I discuss my critical research questions and explain what I aimed to achieve through each research question and how I answered my questions. Then I move on to discuss two key concepts that underpin this research: socio-cultural and motivational theories. Furthermore, in this chapter, I give a general overview of each chapter and what each chapter will discuss and focus on followed by a conclusion.

1.2 Focus and purpose of the study

As an English educator, I have observed that knowledge of the English language is very important for many reasons, such as communicating with people from different parts of the world, especially if one wants to compete academically both nationally and internationally. In almost all countries of the world, the English language has been adopted as a lingua franca. Rao (2019) agrees that in the 21st century, the world has become so accessible and narrow to the point that all people in the world use English as a language of communication. Andrade (2016) notes that proficiency in English is a requirement for learners and students to succeed in educational contexts and that institutions need to make an effort for this to take place. Proficiency in English literacy is a prerequisite for academic English. My journey in learning English second language was fraught with challenges. As a result, I wanted to understand the factors that impacted my learning in this regard so that I could grow and be better at my job as an English teacher. This study therefore focused on what I as a researcher can learn from my personal experience in learning English as a second language. This auto-ethnographic study explored my experience of learning English as a second language to gain insights that could be used to enhance my capacity as an English teacher or make me a better teacher of the English language.

Learning a language is directly influenced by the society and the environment one finds himself in. Thus, learning a second language is likely to be influenced by societal beliefs and culture. That is where the concept of motivation comes in as one of the driving forces behind the ability to carry out a particular project. Considering that many things happen in the process of learning a second language, learning it may be a challenge for many people, in such cases motivation remains a vital element. Given that the study focuses on my personal experiences in this regard, I am hoping that through this personal reflection, I can gain some insights that will assist me to be a better English teacher. I trust that this study will also enhance the process of learning English as a second language in the field and how engaging in a self-reflective auto-ethnography study can help teachers improve and be better at what they do.

1.3 Rationale and motivation for the study

The motivation to pursue this research emanated from what I experienced in my journey of learning English as a second language when I identified a gap in my knowledge and understanding of the language at the time. When I completed my first degree in 2016, I decided to pursue an honours degree after which I proceeded to enrol for a masters' degree. It was only after completing my first degree that I felt unprepared to teach some aspects of the English language such as grammar for different reasons, I realised that my teachers did not prepare me enough to teach some of those aspects. I came to this conclusion when I was registered for a masters' degree, after many discussions with both undergraduate and postgraduate students who were registered for English as a major, they were also struggling to teach grammar in particular. These students realised that they struggled to teach the aspect of English grammar during their teaching practices as pre-service teachers. It is in this context that I identified this issue as a problem that needed to be investigated further. This explains the decision to pursue a Ph.D., where research could be conducted to explore the issue of teaching grammar and other related issues and English second language teachers. In the initial stages of the research, the purpose was to solicit the opinions and views of English language teachers on the teaching of English grammar. However, when I presented my thinking to my supervisor, she suggested that perhaps the problem was not the teachers themselves, but their past experiences in learning a second language. She then suggested that I should consider expanding the topic beyond grammar and reflect on my experience of learning English as a second language.

I decided to consult literature on the teaching of English grammar in particular and found that a lot has been written on the subject, many scholars raised concerns that the issue of grammar was indeed a problem for both teachers and learners. One of the reasons was the issue of apprenticeship of observation, where someone teaches the way she/he was taught.

In line with this, Teik (2011) asserts that one's competencies and practices are tracked back from his/her past experiences as a learner, which may be positive or negative. Furthermore, the apprenticeship of observation is synonymous with the claim that "teachers teach the way they were taught" (Smagorinsky & Barnes 2014, p.9). Teik (2011) notes that novice teachers view the impact of the instruction they receive as students as responsible for shaping the way they approach the teaching of grammar. Other issues identified include the gap between theory and practice, learners' negative attitudes, and the fact that teachers have the right strategies to teach the section but do not use them in practice. However, in the process of reviewing the literature, it was discovered that most studies were qualitative case studies, and very few looked at the teaching and learning of English as a second language from a reflective perspective. My research being an auto-ethnography, which is one of the self-reflective approaches intends to fill this gap. I intend to fill this gap by enhancing the understanding of researchers and practitioners of teaching and learning the language.

It is in this context that I decided to use my experiences in learning English as a second language and employ auto-ethnography methodology to help me do justice to the topic. My study does not only focus on English grammar as initially anticipated; the intention is to look at my journey in learning English as a second language holistically. Looking at my experiences as a whole was a good choice as it allowed me to explore other aspects of the language, including socio-cultural influences on learning a second language. Solely focusing on grammar, which is but one aspect of a language would have limited my scope given that a language is not learned in isolation, but together with other aspects. Choosing an auto-ethnography methodology to undertake this study made it possible for me to explore the learning of the language in the context of a person's cultural environment. Furthermore, reflecting on my experiences allowed me to learn from each incident that I recalled, which made me realise that every experience matters. Regardless of how inconsequential it might seem, there is always a lesson to be learned.

Furthermore, auto-ethnography as a reflective methodology helped me to examine my experiences in-depth while learning from each experience. As an educator I believe, reflection is very important in education because we get to improve by learning from our past experiences, we learn and unlearn and through that, we get to be better teachers (Wain 2017). In this case, what I hope to improve is my teaching as an English language teacher.

Reflection being the process of thinking about or reflecting on what one does is closely linked to the concept of learning from experience, in that one thinks about what he/she did, and what happened, and decides from that what one would do differently in the future (Loughran, 2013). Moreover, the relationship between time, experience, and expectations of learning are important elements of reflection (Killen, 2010; Loughran, 2013). I consider myself a passionate English teacher, and this study may help me to learn from good and bad experiences to do better in teaching the language. Moreover, with this research project, I hope to contribute to the academic fraternity, most importantly in the field of English education.

1.4 Critical Research Questions

1.4.1 What are my learning experiences of English as a Second Language?

I respond to this question in chapters three, four, and five. With this question, the aim was to understand all the experiences I went through in the process of learning English as a second language. This reflection enabled me to look back at my childhood from the first time I was exposed to English till this moment. I examined the first time I was confronted with the language and how that made me feel. I considered all formal and informal instances where I was exposed to English and subsequent experiences that followed as I advanced in my education. I recalled all the incidents that took place in my English classroom and how I learned and improved as the years went by. Responding to this question helped me to understand that learning is inextricably linked to one's surroundings and context and that what happens in one's space contributes positively or negatively to the learning process. At the beginning of my study, I used different artifacts that triggered my memory such as a hose pipe, diary, and a bell. These artifacts helped me to easily remember each experience.

1.4.2 What can I learn from my past experiences of learning English Second Language?

I address this question in chapters four, five, and six of the thesis. In the data analysis chapters, I used reflection to explain what I learned after the discussion of each theme and sub-theme. I used answers elicited from the first research question to reflect and discuss what I learned from the information, each theme, and sub-theme. Responding to this question helped me to pay attention to each detail and what it means to learn a second language in the context that I was in. Answers to this question helped me to look at education as a process that touches different aspects of a learner's life. With that, I am learning that as a teacher, learning is a rich, exciting, and sometimes emotional process.

1.4.3 How can awareness of my past experiences of learning English offer possibilities for my future teaching of English Second Language?

I address this question in chapter six. With this question, the aim was to discover how exploring my experiences of learning English as a second language can help me in teaching the English language in the future. For example, insights gained from this study will help me to change and improve as a teacher to ensure that I give my learners the best and not repeat the negative experiences I went through. I answer this question to discuss my findings and how they are likely to help me in the future.

1.5 Key concepts and theoretical perspectives

I have selected two concepts to underpin this study; the socio-cultural and the motivational theories. These concepts are relevant to providing the context to the study and guiding the development of different sections of the research.

1.5.1 Concept One: Socio-Cultural Theory

Socio-cultural theory explores the world's influence on the development of an individual and learning as a social process where development takes place through interaction with other people. According to Mahn (1999), socio-cultural theory concerns itself with important contributions that society makes to individual development.

This means that this theory emphasises the interaction between culture and the development of people in their environment. Socio-cultural theory is the belief that every function in an individual's cultural development is both social and individual (Pathan et al., 2018). The sociocultural approach originates from the work of Vygotsky and Cole (1978), who propose that learning is not an individual matter, but develops within the social environment (Shabani, 2016).

Socio-cultural theory relates well with auto-ethnographic research as it deals with the impact of a society's culture and its influence on my development as a second-language speaker of English through learning English as a second language. There is an interrelatedness between this theory and auto-ethnographic research as it also explores the researcher's experiences by examining and critiquing the culture of his/her community. Aimin (2013) alludes to Vygotsky when he claims that Socio-cultural theory is about the development of human cognitive as well as higher mental functions. This theory emphasises the integration of social, cultural, and biological elements in the learning process, which demonstrates that socio-cultural circumstances are central to human cognitive development. This theory is relevant to my study because it looks at how a new language other than one's native language is acquired in a social setting -i.e. inside/outside the classroom.

Moreover, socio-cultural theory is about the development of a human cognitive and higher mental function. The development of human cognitive and higher mental function comes from social interactions, participation in interactions requires cognitive and communicative functions. In line with this, Eckert (2016) points out that Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is one of the teaching approaches that can be used to promote cognitive and social interactions in the learning of a second language. Individuals are also drawn into the use of these functions that scaffold and nurture them. It is noted that socio-cultural theorists believe that children's early language learning comes from processes of meaning-making in collaboration with other members of a certain culture. The principles of the Socio-cultural theory also apply to second language learning and acquisition. This is because learning is rooted within social events and it occurs as individuals interact with objects, people, and events in their environments. Socio-culturalists attend to a broader social system in which learning happens when they try to interpret a learning situation. They believe that an individual's actions are influenced by the entire culture of the community (Mughal 2011).

The Constructs of Socio-Cultural Theory

The socio-cultural theory was developed from the work of Vygotsky, his co-workers, and successors, his body of work is acknowledged in the term Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT).

The socio-cultural theory focuses on children's cognitive development and emphasises the integration of social, cultural, and biological elements, and believes that sociocultural circumstances play a major role in humans' cognitive development. Also, the process of developing higher mental functioning is where people internalise and regulate what they learn from social activities through the zone of proximal development, during this process language develops from social speech to private speech, and lastly to inner speech or verbal thought.

Scott and Palincsar (2013) are of the view that the purpose of the socio-cultural approach is to explain how individuals' thinking relates to their cultural, historical, and institutional contexts. Furthermore, the sociocultural perspective suggests that social interactions and culturally organised activities play an important role in influencing an individual's psychological development (Mughal & Zafar, 2011; Scott & Palincsar, 2013). Eun (2016) asserts that Vygotsky and Cole (1978) sought to clarify mutual influences between individuals and their surroundings as well as the larger socio-cultural and historical contexts. Furthermore, the sociocultural approach to teaching and learning provides an all-inclusive analysis of the cognitive process involved in language learning than mentalist approaches that highlight universal rather than contextual-based and situated qualities of learning.

Vygotsky focused on the interrelationships that exist between individual mental functions and the social, physical, and cultural world (Eun, 2016). From this, I understand that to know an individual must be in the context of his/her community. If an individual's experiences are considered outside the society's context, we may miss important aspects of experiences in that person's life. By this, I mean that one's actions can be directly linked to their current or previous context. Moreover, the socio-cultural approach to teaching and learning places the social environment at the centre of learning. Language is the most significant socio-cultural tool as it is used to teach. This suggests that language takes a more prominent role in the socio-cultural approach than other mediation tools such as computers and other hardware resources that are used in language learning.

Mediation is defined as the process that helps individuals use different hardware, technological, and software tools to communicate content to students and the world at large. Mughal and Zafar (2011) state that the socio-cultural approach includes the “*communities of practice*.” The socio-cultural approach is an activity system that is about individuals who share an understanding of what they do and the meaning of what they do in their lives and their communities.

According to Panhwar et al. (2016), the socio-cultural approach creates links between culture and cognition through the help of situational and contextual activities and events. For one to understand a person and his/her experiences, one needs to examine and observe him/her in the context of the culture and the community. Therefore, in this study, my point of departure was that I wanted to understand myself within my context and examine my experiences and how I learned English as a second language in the context of culture and community.

Mughal and Zafar (2011) assert that the socio-cultural approach focuses on two key elements in communities, which are culture and language. Hence, collaborative knowledge of the experiences of the community tends to be better than that of individuals, although there is an important role individual experiences play in knowledge construction. Eun (2016) notes that even though Vygotsky claimed the social takes precedence in time and fact, he acknowledged the essential role of individual agency in human development. The socio-cultural theory emphasises the co-construction of development between the individual and his/her social world. As Scott & Palincsar, (2013) note, it is important to spend a sustained period building relationships with people from a certain community to understand how individuals and communities use language. The social constructs of the theory are mediation, regulation, internalisation, zone of proximal development (ZPD), verbal thought, and activity theory.

(a) ***Mediation***

Vygotsky and Cole (1978) introduced three major themes (mediation, activity, and the Zone of Proximal Development) that explain the nature of the interdependence between the individual and social processes in learning and development. According to Aimin (2013), mediation is the principal construct that unites all ventures of socio-cultural theory. It is rooted in the observation that humans do not connect directly to the world but their cognitive and material activities are mediated by symbolic tools and physical tools. Language is the most powerful symbolic tool

(cultural artifact) that humans possess to mediate their connection to the world, to each other, and to themselves (Panhwar 2016). This study explores how I learned English as a second language through formal and informal social interaction. This suggests that language instills in humans the capacity to free themselves from the circumstances of their immediate environment. It also enables them to talk and think about entities and events that are displayed in both time and space including those that do not yet exist in the real world (Nash 2019). In summary, human mental functioning is fundamentally a mediated process that is organised by cultural artifacts, activities, and concepts.

(b) *Regulation*

Aimin (2013) states that the original meaning of regulation is the controlling of an activity or process by man-made rules. In socio-cultural theory, regulation is one form of mediation that refers to children's capacity to control their activity through linguistic means by participating in activities (mental or physical) where their activity is initially subordinated or controlled by others. Furthermore, the process of developing self-regulation moves through three stages: Firstly, object regulation- this is where children are normally controlled by using objects in their environment to help them think. For example, children's use of objects during play helps them to have control over their world which helps them to make sense of their experiences through the environments they are in. These can be puzzles and online games, engaging in playing different activities, et cetera. Secondly, this regulation includes implicit and explicit mediation that involves varying levels of assistance or scaffolding with the help of the parents, siblings, peers' teachers, and so on. In this stage, learners improve their knowledge with the help of other people that surround them. Thirdly, self-regulation refers to the ability to accomplish activities with minimal or external support. Self-regulation is made possible through internalisation. This suggests that at this point, the child works individually to complete activities on their own without or with limited assistance from knowledgeable others.

(c) *Internalisation*

According to Aimin (2013), internalisation refers to the process of making what was once external assistance a resource that is internally available to the individual. Scott (2013) adds that Vygotsky captured the interconnection that is established by internalisation in his general law of genetic development; meaning that every psychological function appears twice, the first one is between

people on the inter-psychological plane and the other within the individual on the intra-psychological plane. Firstly, the origin of individual development comes from social sources in such a way that the function of the person's cultural development appears on the social and then on the psychological. The social part includes external physical and technological tools that improve the interaction between the individual and their environments in a way that mediates the teaching and learning process.

The tools include software (online content, theories) and hardware (computers, phones) resources amongst others (Eun, 2016). I believe the mediation process is in line with my study because my socialisation influenced my exposure to English as my second language, including how I learnt grammar. Panhwar et al. (2016) add that if a person is observed as an individual outside of his/her context, the most important part of his/her life would be missed. This means that it is better to explore and understand someone in the context of his/her community's culture. This is because if one is separated from their context there are things we would not know about them. Thus, the cultural context of every individual is crucial in case you want to explore and understand them in terms of their behaviour.

Hall (2007) alludes to the work of Vygotsky and Cole (1978) on the sociocultural approach when he argues that the learning of the child begins with his/her interaction with other people as they co-create knowledge through interaction with the social and internal worlds. In addition, an individual's mental and educational development is directly connected to the cultural, social, and historical contexts. Socio-cultural pedagogical practices transform power and authority from teachers to learners through cultural tools like artifacts (Martínez & Mejía, 2020). This suggests that learners get to construct knowledge on their own through communication by using language and computers to access modern resources for teaching and learning like authentic materials. Mediation that is done through symbols yields results in cognitive improvement in terms of critical reasoning and thinking.

(d) *Symbolic tools*

The next socio-cultural concept is symbolic tools and the use of signs; these are used within the interaction process that includes two or more participants. These tools include language that is used in communicating with others, calculators, and computers. Of all these tools, language is

more relevant to my study as I explore my learning of English as a second language. Calculators, computers, and other hardware resources do not directly link to my study, though some can be used in the mediation process.

Language distinguishes each community and culture and thus tends to be the most used and important tool in social interaction. Hence, this approach is relevant to my study, as I look at how my community's cultural context influenced my learning of English as a second language. Our context also plays a major role in building our identities. Language is cultural as it is one of the ways to distinguish an individual from a large group (Eun 2016).

Furthermore, Hall (2007) adds that language is the most significant socio-cultural tool as it is used to teach and develop higher psychological functions. This is in line with my study because I share my experiences and the influence of my community in learning a second language. Moreover, English is an important language of teaching and learning (LOLT) in South Africa (Ayliff, 2012).

(e) *Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)*

Vygotsky and Cole (1978) identified the Zone of Proximal Development construct as the potential level of development where individuals learn on their own and through the assistance of more knowledgeable others. This refers to the space where the individual and the 'more knowledgeable other' who may be a teacher/lecturer or parent intersect to assist the learner in the learning process (Scott & Palincsar, 2013). In the context of my study, I learned English as a second language with the help of family members, teachers, friends, and other role players.

Powell and Kalina (2009) state that Vygotsky's main theory relating to the socio-cultural approach is the Zone of Proximal Development. The Zone of Proximal Development has been described as a zone where learning takes place when a child is assisted in learning a concept in any learning situation or learning process (Vygotsky & Cole, 1978). The area where the instructor should be most sensitive to guidance is the Zone of Proximal Development. The Zone of Proximal Development connects the line between what the student already knows and a new concept he/she is unable to master without the help of the instructor. Bruner (2006) refers to Vygotsky and Cole (1978) Zone of Proximal Development when highlighting the social nature of learning, stating that

other people in an individual's environment should assist him/her in developing skills through the process of scaffolding.

(f) *Scaffolding*

Scaffolding refers to a variety of instructional techniques that are used to move students gradually toward stronger understanding and, ultimately, greater independence in the learning process Hall (2007). In line with this, Martínez and Mejía (2020) suggest that cooperative learning activities involve Zone of Proximal Development's scaffolding as a type of assistance from adults that enables learners to perform activities, solve problems, and accomplish what they could not have achieved without assistance. Moreover, Vygotsky supports and encourages interactive learning and rejects teacher-centred teaching and learning (Eun, 2016; Mughal & Zafar, 2011). This suggests the importance and significance of collaborative strategies that engage both teachers and learners with socio-cultural values, norms, and interactions. The sociocultural approach is suitable for the learning of language because it underscores interaction and mental critical progress (Mughal & Zafar, 2011). This implies that language learning allows learners to examine issues that include their community's culture as they tend to contribute information that they can relate to their everyday lives.

The social environment where the individual resides is foundational to the development of language (Eun, 2016). This implies that the language teaching process needs the teacher and learners to commence with the flexible mind of different learning communities that engage both teachers and students in pedagogical activities. Mughal and Zafar (2011) assert that the socio-cultural approach is appropriate to provide a surrounding structure to involve teachers and learners in different cooperative learning activities. In the context of this study, the different environments in which I resided are crucial because they all influenced my learning of English as a second language.

(g) *Activity Theory*

The next socio-cultural construct is activity theory. Socio-cultural activity refers to the contextualisation of the framework for interaction that creates new forms of reality that are driven by socio-cultural and physical desires (Eun, 2016; Panhwar et al., 2016). This involves putting the theory into practice such as using a class pedagogical task. The task needs to be applied in a

contextual structure with the needs of the physical environment, participants' roles, and socio-culturally accepted standards of interaction (Eun, 2016; Scott & Palincsar, 2013).

Moreover, according to Ayliff (2012), the process of activity theory allows learners to complete the task successfully with the guidance of the teacher and their peers. What is important is that activities that are used to engage learners should be based on the socio-cultural norms of the learners' contexts. In a township context, this can be applied by a teacher giving learners a task on authentic material like a newspaper to discuss a current political issue that learners can relate to. In such a newspaper, a cartoon may be used by looking at the language that is used in it and what can be learned by learners in general.

What is important is not to separate content from the context. In a constructivist classroom, teachers encourage learners to make this connection (Eun, 2016). Furthermore, Eun (2016) adds that in a constructivist classroom, teachers encourage learners to solve problems that are connected to their sociocultural circumstances. In such an environment, learners actively generate new ideas grounded on prior knowledge as they work in collaboration to solve the issues through critical reasoning (Panhwar et al., 2016). Classroom-based constructivist/socio-cultural processes are always structure-oriented as socio-cultural activities are process approaches to language learning and are interactive.

1.5.2 Concept Two: Motivation in Second Language Learning

Motivation refers to reasons for behaving in a certain way or the motive behind doing something (Gardner 2010). Johnson (2017) discusses the role of motivation as an important factor in the learning of a second language using Gardner's (1975) theory. Ortiz and Duarte (2019) note that Gardner's motivational model identified up to four factors that are involved in learning a second language. These are social factors that refer to the beliefs and behaviours of the society where the learner resides or comes from. The second factor is the cultural milieu, these are cultural beliefs that a second language learner may adopt in the process of learning the target language. An individual learner refers to a person intending to acquire a target language who has personal reasons why they are learning that language. The last factor is the setting and context, this refers to the place or the community where the learner is and if the learning of the language will apply to his/her context.

Ortiz and Duarte (2019) report that learning another language is different from just learning any other subject like Mathematics, History, or any other subject. Johnson et al. (2020) add that learning a foreign language is more than a mere development of a set of skills, vocabulary, and grammar. Learning another language entails the adoption of new social and cultural behaviours and ways of being, and therefore has a significant impact on the social nature of the learner. Furthermore, Liu (2020) notes that learning another language is learning to be another person that characterises it.

Furthermore, Gardner (1988) as cited by Ortiz and Duarte (2019) adds that languages involve the acquisition of skills and behaviour patterns that characterise another community. This tells us that there is a lot that is involved in learning a second language such as society's culture and values compared to learning other school subjects. Therefore, learning a foreign language, second or third language is influenced by the attitudes of a particular community of speakers. Moreover, language learning is also affected by the context and the culture in which the learning takes place. I can relate to this because my context did not make it easy for me to learn English because of the societal beliefs and values of the community I came from. According to Kim (2012) in countries like Colombia and South Africa, speaking English is highly rated, it is regarded as an asset in the way that it benefits those who learn it. This is primarily evident in the way it enables access to the modern world that is characterised by technology, economic power, wider communication as well as scientific knowledge. Liu (2020) agrees that English is an important tool in fields like scientific communications, business, and politics as well as in cultural interchanges.

In addition, Lortie (2020) asserts that languages are unlike other subjects in the sense that they involve the acquisition of skills and behavioural patterns which are characteristics of a certain community. As a result, learning a foreign language is mostly influenced by attitudes towards a community of speakers that is being studied. For instance, if the attitude of the people in that community is positive, that would serve as a form of motivation to learn the language. On the other hand, if the attitude is negative, there is no motivation. Moreover, language learning is also affected by the context as well as the culture where the learning takes place. This is the reason I opted to use an auto-ethnographic study to explore my experiences with the help of people selected to participate in the study as well as people close to me to understand my context better.

Oroujlou and Vahedi (2011) state that motivation and attitude play a crucial role in sparking and cultivating interest in acquiring a second language, they often help individuals to withstand the challenging learning process. On the other hand, ignoring the significance of these factors could impact the ability to learn a second language. According to Guo (2018), the motivation and the will to learn a second language are considered more important than societal factors. Moreover, the core of the motivation is what may be called passion, which relates to a person's intrinsic goals and desires as successful language learning is linked to the learners' passion. Furthermore, motivation has been identified as a learner's orientation about the goal of learning a second language.

The theory of motivation in second language learning that was inspired by Gardner highlights two main types of motivation, which are 'instrumental and integrative'. Gardner and Tremblay (1994) identified integrative motivation as a personal interest in learning a second language to learn more about the people and culture of the target language. This suggests that the integrative learner in this sense has a desire to identify with the culture of the target language and know more about them. In contrast, the case where learners see the need and desire to achieve special goals or benefit from acquiring a second language is referred to as instrumental motivation.

Gardner and Tremblay (1994) state that other than learning the language to identify with the culture of the speakers of the language, studies reveal that students' motivation is also instrumental, which means they are also motivated by the desire to achieve special goals or benefits. This is because many of the students normally indicate that their motivation for learning English is to obtain better job opportunities and travel to achieve other goals. In addition, many students study English because of instrumental motivation and drive, where the motivation arises from external goals such as financial rewards, passing exams, promotion as well as furthering a career. This is because languages such as English are rated higher based on the assumption that they offer better possibilities for employment and travel (Beard 2018).

Oroujlou and Vahedi (2011) note that integrating culture into a foreign language can increase a student's motivation to acquire the target language. This suggests that individuals who learn a second language must adopt certain behaviour patterns that are characteristic of another cultural group. The attitude towards that group has a way of determining success in learning a second language.

1.6 Conclusion and overview of the chapters

In chapter one, I conveyed the focus and purpose of the study. I clarified why I wanted to explore my learning of English as a Second Language. I provided a relevant purpose and focus of the study, I also elaborated on the rationale and motivation behind conducting this study. After that, I presented three research questions that directed my research. I then discussed key theoretical concepts that underpin my study which are, the socio-cultural approach and motivation theories. In subsequent chapters of this thesis, I continue to weave in my thinking and learn about my study's concepts. The thesis does not have a separate literature review chapter. Instead, throughout the thesis I support, contextualise, and extend my discussions with citations from relevant literature. This is in keeping with the personal narrative style of the thesis (Nash, 2019).

In chapter two, I offer an in-depth look at how my auto-ethnographic research process unfolded. I explain my choice of an auto-ethnography research methodology. I discuss briefly how I plan to use letter writing to express emotionality in the research. I discuss the study's research participants (myself, my peers) and my critical friends. Moreover, I clarify how data were generated using diverse research methods. How I address ethical issues and validity are also discussed. Furthermore, I also explain how I addressed particular research challenges. I then described how data is analysed in this study and its trustworthiness.

In chapter three, I recount memories of my early learning of English as a second language. To elaborate on this, I wrote an autobiographical narrative story that I juxtaposed with the Bible character, Joseph to capture my experiences of learning a second language from birth to high school. I also present an autobiographical story of how I learned the second language through play. I shared letter-writing as a data generation source, I wrote two letters that describe my experiences to express emotionality in research. In this chapter, I respond to the question: *What are my learning experiences of English as a second language?*

In chapter four and chapter five, I respond to two of my research questions as I begin to interpret and analyse my experiences of learning English as a second language through different themes and by using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). In doing this, I am responding to the research question: *What are my learning experiences of English as a second language?* Moreover, at the end of each theme, I write a reflection on what I learned from each theme discussed, and in that

way, I am responding to the question: *What can I learn from my experiences of learning English as a second language?* In chapter four, I focus on my early and primary school learning of English as a second language, and in chapter five, I discuss my high school and university experiences of learning English as a second language.

In chapter six, I give an account of what I learnt in each chapter, and I give a summary of what was discussed in each chapter. This chapter answers the question: *What can I learn from my experiences of learning English as a second language?* In this section, I also answer my third research question: *How can awareness of my learning of English as a second language offer possibilities for my future teaching of English as a second language?* I also give an account of how pictures and words triggered my memory in the process of story writing and a comparison of each experience I faced with that of Joseph.

CHAPTER 2 : MY AUTO-ETHNOGRAPHIC RESEARCH PROCESS

2.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, I introduced the thesis as I conveyed the focus and purpose of the study. I clarified why I wanted to explore my learning of English as a second language. I provided the purpose and focus of the study, and I also elaborated on the rationale and motivation behind conducting this study. After that, I presented three research questions that directed my research. I then discussed key concepts that underpin my study and why they were chosen. In this chapter, I explain the research methodology that I adopted for my study. I describe the research participants (my peers, community members, and my sister) and my critical friends (my supervisor and a fellow PhD student). I provide an account of how data were generated and the way it was analysed. I also consider ethical issues and the validity of the study, and lastly, discuss challenges I encountered in conducting the research and how I overcame them.

2.2 Research Methodology

In this study, I adopted auto-ethnography as a methodology. Auto-ethnography is research that uses personal experience to interpret beliefs expressed in cultural texts and experiences, it came from the ethnographic discipline. This self-narration method recognises the research, the researcher, and the cultural audiences. As Ticozzi (2016) noted that auto-ethnography is an approach that aims to explain and analyse personal experiences to understand cultural experiences. Similarly, Liu, (2020) views it as a research method that uses a researcher's personal experiences to describe and critique cultural beliefs and practices. Dewey (2013) sees personal experiences as the true foundation of our learning. Auto-ethnography is also narrative as it focuses on the meaning of peoples' experiences and explores the meanings of personal experiences in social and cultural contexts (Liu, 2020). This suggests that the researcher's experiences should link and relate to community practises to reflect the society's culture. In this study, the relationship between my experiences and the culture will be achieved through engaging with participants who come from a similar cultural background as me (the researcher).

Pithouse-Morgan et al. (2012) assert that auto-ethnography can also be understood as researching one's life within a particular culture or social group. In my case, I am researching my learning experiences of English as a second language in a rural/township South African context. Moreover, in autoethnography, stories can either be critical, reflective, or multimedia tales. Through this research, I am reflecting on my learning experiences of English as a second language to learn how my experiences have shaped me and are likely to influence my future. Pithouse et.al (2012) also note that autoethnography gives the researcher the opportunity to journey back to remember past experiences that have shaped her/his life and destiny and share these with an audience. Auto-ethnography generally features concrete emotion, the embodiment of self-consciousness, action, and introspection (Custer, 2014). As a result of that, in this research, I purposed to critically reflect on and write about myself and my learning of English as a second language within the rural/township cultural context. Auto-ethnography is also characterised by believing that words matter, this method fits my study well as I used CDA for data analysis. As a result, I, as a researcher am expected to give context for and balance the inward focus at the same time point towards an outward political and social context. This suggests that I am expected to point out how my micro-environment is affected by the larger political and social context.

Abd Samad and Hussein (2017) add that autobiography is an autobiographical genre of writing that displays multiple layers of consciousness that connect the personal to the cultural aspect of human life. Auto-ethnography focuses on the self while ethnography focuses on the aspect of a generalised culture (Chang, 2016). This is because the self gets to be separated from pure culture. After all, it would be difficult to understand one's culture by just exploring one's personal experiences. This means that for culture to be understood well, it needs to be scrutinised independently before it is related to one's individual experiences. Abd Samad and Hussein (2017) assert that there is a notion that the self is usually connected to culture, thus auto-ethnography usually pauses and reflects on their personal lived experiences that are related to cultural events. In addition, they place greater emphasis on other peoples' experiences in relation to learning a second language that populated their world.

Auto-ethnography also helps to look into the issue of the identity of a second language learner at different stages of a learning process in different social-cultural contexts (Johnson et al., 2020). This suggests that this method helps the researcher to understand his/her identity concerning second/foreign language learning from different learning stages amongst other things. Understanding personal identity helps teachers to seek ways and methods that they can adapt to make them better teachers.

It also brings forward aspects of the self and creates ways to write about experiences in a broader social context. Auto-ethnography refers to writing about the personal and its relationship to culture as it includes cultural elements of personal experiences. Auto-ethnography also helps to describe and increase the representational richness of an experience from a personal point of view in a way that allows teachers to emphasise and relate in a manner that is meaningful to them (Adams et al., 2017; Ellis & Bochner, 2000). Auto-ethnography combines the characteristics of autobiography and ethnography. An autobiography is identified as a presentation of a true-life story of a person's life and is usually written by that person (Johnson et al., 2020). It is usually written in the first person; it is also the researcher's self-reflection and self-introspection.

On the other hand, ethnography consists of an inductive, interactive, and repeated collection of structured data and analysis to build local cultural theories. In ethnography, culture is used as a lens to understand and interpret results (De Beer, 2018). Auto-ethnography is a combination of autobiography and ethnography because it displays the life story of the researcher in terms of experiences and such experiences are analysed in the context of the community's culture (Adams et al., 2017; Liu, 2020). De Beer (2018) views auto-ethnography as a way to understand one's situation through an examination of personal responses within a specific cultural context. By this, I understand that my experiences should be analysed and presented in the context of the culture of my community which aligns with socio-cultural theory.

Jones (2016) asserts that the auto of auto-ethnography focuses on the author's personal experiences and reflections. Auto-ethnographers also engage in memory work as they reflect on events that took place in their lives as far as the phenomenon of the study is concerned.

Autoethnographic researchers use these memories to write their reflective diaries to record experiences that relate to the phenomenon of the study (Chang, 2016). In this research, I have used artifacts to trigger my teaching and learning experiences of English grammar to make my reflection rich.

The “Ethno” of auto-ethnography is where researchers use their experiences to describe and critique cultural experiences, beliefs, values, practices as well as identities (Jones, 2016). Moreover, auto-ethnography embraces the way personal experiences are imparted with cultural norms and expectations, they also engage in rigorous self-reflection which is referred to as reflexivity, to identify and question the relationship between the self and the social life. In the context of this study, I will critique the culture of my community using second language theories and examine instances that I went through during my primary and secondary school education as regards learning English as a Second language. Chang (2016) claims that auto-ethnography brings together personal and cultural traits to understand the experiences of an autoethnographic researcher. Therefore, for a project to be regarded as autoethnographic, it should demonstrate cultural traits and provide an understanding of social life. According to Jones (2016), auto-ethnography uses character development, the narrative voice, dialogue, and the techniques of being and showing to choose from, organise, and also to represent the experience.

According to Chang (2016), auto-ethnography helps us to focus on particular and subjective knowledge, it treats personal experiences as vital and also as valid data to provide deep insights that might be inaccessible to the people who are just observers. As a result, auto-ethnography allows us to learn deeply about the lived and day-to-day moments that are related to the research topic that seems complex, and messy in social life. Furthermore, auto-ethnography foregrounds the author’s ability to offer insight into the sensemaking process, especially looking at how researchers handle experiences that are uncomfortable to discuss and those that do not make sense. In addition, auto-ethnography invites us to some of the formative, challenging, and formative events, relationships, as well as social and political events we encounter throughout our lifetime. Auto-ethnographic research also looks at how researchers seek to make new contributions to existing knowledge on a certain topic and add to what is already known about that topic (Chang, 2016).

In the case of this research, I am looking at a topic that has been explored by different scholars such as Cakmak, (2013) and Castle (2010) in the past, the difference is that I am looking at it from my perspective. Furthermore, Jones (2016) asserts that auto-ethnographic research contributes to expanding what we know about how personal experiences are connected to culture. This further explores the unique ways auto-ethnography presents the knowledge that comes from their personal experiences concerning their cultural contexts. Adams et al. (2017) state that auto-ethnography also engages and encourages feedback and responses from the audience as auto-ethnographic researchers seek an active relationship with audiences marked by mutual responsibility and participation to compel reflection, action as well as reaction from their audiences.

Auto-ethnography is a qualitative research method that uses data about the self as well as its context to understand the connectivity between the self and others who are in similar contexts (Ngunjiri et al., 2010). There are three ways we can distinguish auto-ethnography from other qualitative methods: it is qualitative, self-focused as well and context-conscious (Adams, 2017). First, it is a qualitative research method as it takes a systematic approach to the data generation process, the analysis, and the interpretation of self and the social phenomenon. Furthermore, the systematic and intentional approach to the sociocultural understanding of self sets auto-ethnography apart from other self-narrative writings such as autobiography.

Secondly, Auto-ethnography is self-focused, the researcher gets to be at the centre of the investigation as a “subject” who is the researcher and also as an “object” who is investigated (Ngunjiri et al., 2010). Moreover, autoethnographic data allows the researcher the opportunity to explore the external world and understand it. In addition, auto-ethnography’s ability to access sensitive issues as well as inner-most thoughts makes this method a powerful and unique tool both for the individual and the social understanding.

Thirdly, according to Jones (2016), auto-ethnography is context-conscious in a way that it is rooted in ethnography (the study of culture). It also aims to connect the self with others, the self with the social, and the self with the context. This suggests that as the researcher explores his/her experiences, he works with the help of others who are from similar contexts and who share similar experiences. Participants' stories and narratives help the researcher to understand his/her experiences in a better way.

The focus on self refers to the variety of others who have similar values and experiences as those of the researcher (Ngunjiri et al., 2010). In this research, such people will be my peers, people I studied with who have the same background as me. In addition, other people who contribute to the self are people on the opposite side who have values that are different from the experiences of the researcher. In this case, such people will be my English lecturers, some of whom are participants.

Therefore, generating the data about the self joins with exploring how different contexts have influenced and contributed to the make-up of the self or the individual's identity. It also looks at how the self has responded and reacted to influences from these contexts. In addition, auto-ethnography is expected to pay attention to the socio-cultural context.

(a) *Purpose of auto-ethnography*

Wall (2006) states that the main aim of auto-ethnography is to acknowledge the link between personal and cultural experiences. Another aim of auto-ethnography is to gain understanding and insight into the context so that the researcher can get to understand who she/he is, why he/she acts the way she/he does, and why they or may also act differently in the future (Adams et al., 2017; De Beer, 2018). This is in line with the purpose of this study as I intended to understand my experiences of learning English as a second language, and to what extent my interactions (the culture) have influenced who I am as an (English language teacher). The aspects of self that I bring here are my attitude towards learning English as a second language and the role if any I played in improving my knowledge of English as a second language.

In the context of my study, I explore my learning experiences of English as a Second Language. Abd Samad and Hussein (2017) state that without an easy identification of a cultural component, a study cannot be called an auto-ethnography. In this study, the culture is the rural/township context where I started learning English as a Second Language and the societal views and beliefs of the community I come from, especially when it comes to learning English. The second component is an artifact, during my reflective diary writing, I used a hosepipe as an artifact. The hosepipe is mostly used in black township schools ¹as a means of punishment for learners. Black township schools refer to the schools that are populated by black learners who come from low and

¹ In South Africa, a black township school is one which predominantly admits black children that is located in a location usually referred to as an underdeveloped racially segregated urban area.

middle-income households. The last cultural component that I used is symbols, these are pictures that represent a television series I used to watch that exposed me to English language grammar. Culture refers to the characteristic features of everyday existence like different ways of life that is shared by people in a place or time (De Beer, 2018; Ellis & Bochner, 2000). One of the goals of auto-ethnography is to use one's life experiences to generalise to a larger group and culture. Ortiz and Duarte (2019) note that there is a long culture that deals with ethnic, national, or international ideas on the other hand, small culture refers to the behaviour or activities of small social groups. I approached my study from a small cultural point of view as I used my experiences of learning English as a second language in a rural/township context. The sociology of education is the study of how public institutions and individual experiences influence education and its outcomes. Scholars in this field such as Coffey, (2001) and Kim (2021) are usually interested in the relationship between educational institutions and society. This suggests that the sociology of education emphasises that the educational institution cannot be separated from the culture and practices of the community. Moreover, the beliefs and values of such a community have a major influence on the outcome of a learner's experiences. This is in line with what happens in my community as when one speaks English in a taxi, people regard that person as someone who portrays himself better than others, which may not be true. If that is how the community views indigenous English speakers, that would show that the teaching and learning of the English language tend to be negative.

Ortiz and Duarte (2019) state that there are many forms of auto-ethnographic work. They differ according to how much emphasis is put on the researchers' self, others, the interaction between self and the other, the culture, types of analysis, context of the interview, relationship between the researcher and participants as well as the writing style. Indigenous ethnography refers to the practice of studying one's own native country, society, or ethnic group, in contrast to the traditional role of anthropology, which is to study alien cultures (Ngunjiri et al., 2010). The interpretive biographical method involves the studied use and collection of personal life documents, stories, accounts, and narratives that describe turning-point moments in individuals' lives. Reflexive ethnography is a unique guide to ethnographic research for students of anthropology and related disciplines (Ortiz & Duarte, 2019). Auto-ethnography will help students use and understand ethnographic research practices and fully incorporate reflexivity without abandoning claims to develop valid knowledge of social reality.

(b) *Auto-ethnography as narrative research*

This study adopted a narrative type of auto-ethnography that provides sources of meanings that people attribute to their experiences. Hamilton et al. (2008) suggest that auto-ethnography studies should try to focus on making a difference in the world. Starr (2010) asserts that auto-ethnography and reflective research present a large component of the researcher's experiences to be used as data for analysis. This means that to recall experiences these two components (autoethnography and reflexivity) are crucial. Thus, my study is a reflective auto-ethnographic research, a reflective autobiography is one of my data generation instruments that assisted me in recalling my experiences of learning English as a Second Language.

In autoethnography, researchers describe the setting where they have direct access as active and primary participants as they become the centre of attention (Dyson, 2007). Moreover, in autoethnography, researchers carry out the narrative analysis of their experiences as someone closely related to the study's phenomenon. In this case, the phenomenon that is explored is my experiences of learning English as a second language

Fitzclarence and Hickey (1999) assert that autoethnographic narratives provide sources of meaning that people attribute to their experiences. This implies that as people tell their stories, they read meanings to experiences they narrate and explain the implications of such to their lives and the larger cultural context. Furthermore, stories not only express meaning that is given to experiences, but they also determine different aspects of experiences that get selected for expression. Therefore, the narrative provides the primary frame for the interpretation of experiences by storytellers.

(c) *Intersubjectivity and reflexivity*

According to Poerwandari (2021), intersubjectivity entails the interchange of thoughts and feelings between individuals. On the other hand, reflexivity refers to the researcher being aware of their effect on the process and outcomes of the research. Moreover, in reflective narrative research, the researcher examines the self and handles biases. Various data collection techniques can be implemented to minimise biases and to move from subjectivity to intersubjectivity (Stephens Griffin & Griffin, 2019). In this study, I adopted different data generation tools; reflective diary, document analysis, metaphor drawings, interviews, focus group discussions, and artifacts.

Furthermore, dialogical spaces are needed to minimise biases as we also need notes or documentation of meetings for the account of conversations and joint events as well as older records that can indicate dynamic discourses (Adams et al., 2017). Reflexivity is described as the period where researchers engage in explicit self-care, meta-analysis starting from the interpretation of self-dialogue that leads to new findings. Bochner (2017) notes that there is also ongoing reflexivity to monitor the research process and the researcher's need to ensure their integrity and the degree of trustworthiness of their findings through critical reflection.

Moreover, reflection as an intersubjective reflection focuses on the situated and negotiated nature of the research encounter. It also brings understanding, knowledge, transformation, and discursive deconstruction. Poerwandari (2021) notes that in auto-ethnography, reflexivity no longer involves keeping a distance to obtain objectivity, to reduce the biasness of the researcher. Rather, by being honest to reveal what is experienced and to be also critical of the researcher's self-awareness. Self-awareness refers to realising what is experienced, accepting it, viewing it as a whole experience and as a new way of learning, and accepting that expressing it may not be easy. This suggests that presenting this methodology is more concerned about the truth that is unfolded through sharing personal experiences rather than just ensuring objectivity while covering information/knowledge that is needed to enrich the study.

In addition, Abd Samad and Hussein (2017) note that critical reflection can be conducted by deconstructing, theorising, confronting, and challenging oneself to think differently from the dominant frames of thinking to make thinking and practices better. This implies that auto-ethnography allows researchers to critically reflect on previous experiences they have from the different spheres of society which gives them a platform to challenge dominant ideologies for better practices.

For instance, most people usually accept the ideologies and theories that are dominant in their society without challenging them, this method allows the researcher to challenge these stereotypes. In the context of this study, in many black township schools, learners have accepted the stigma that learning English grammar is difficult, and this study allows me to challenge this way of thinking or stereotypes related to the English language.

Auto-ethnographic research in education reveals three bridges that connect auto-ethnography to reflexivity, teaching, and learning (Hughes, 2008). The first bridge is that auto-ethnography is likely to teach one about self in a way that challenges the assumptions of normality, it also forces us to be more self-reflective about our profession. This suggests that auto-ethnography encourages researchers to reflect on experiences and practices as they look back to examine what happened in the past as far as the study's phenomenon is concerned. Furthermore, it would be impossible to conduct auto-ethnographic research without reflection as we look to reflect on past experiences and see what we can draw from them. In addition, reflexivity assists us to understand our profession better, in this case, teaching (Abd Samad & Hussein, 2017).

According to Hughes (2008), the second bridge is that auto-ethnography may teach one to write to practice well as to share emotions with audiences and also to improve our craft. This means that auto-ethnography alongside reflexivity leads researchers to the point where they share their personal lives as emotionally as they may be with peers and readers. It also helps them to improve their writing skills as they pass on the message creatively.

Thirdly, auto-ethnography may also teach one to instruct and model by demonstrating self-critical attitudes and offering self-disclosure in the teaching and learning process (Hughes, 2008). Reflection helps researchers to seek constructive criticism from others, they also do self-criticisms as they look back, and they see their shortcomings and areas of improvement. In this study, the reflective diary helped me to see so many mistakes I made as an English learner and has made me see how my perceptions have led me to experience what I went through. In addition, it also addresses issues like how might the experiences of one's class, race, or gender offer insights into the researcher's ability to address such issues in any given educational situation (Poerwandari, 2021).

Auto-ethnographic work acknowledges the researchers' subjectivity as an important meaning-making resource (Simpson & Archer, 2017). Thus, the researcher's involvement has the potential to strengthen and deepen the understanding of the phenomenon and become the auto-ethnographic method of research. Auto-ethnographers avoid acting like disinterested observers as they actively participate in the analytical frame, this means that they choose to fully participate in the study by engaging with participants when sharing experiences.

To ensure full participation in this study, I shared my experiences with my peers/participants since the study is about me, they were able to comment and add to what I had discussed. Furthermore, Saville-Troike and Barto (2017) assert that auto-ethnography blurs the lines between the personal and the social, the self and others, and between the individual and the cultural. This implies that the researcher's experiences are explored alongside other people who live around him/her. As a result, we understand our experiences better when we have a full grasp of our cultural and social context. Furthermore, Simpson and Archer (2017) state that autoethnographic studies range between evocative and analytical auto-ethnography. Evocative auto-ethnography has been majorly applied in the contexts of trauma and illness and deals with more personal and intense experiences. On the other hand, analytical auto-ethnography refers to the work where the researcher acts as a full member of the research, fully visible, and committed to the improvement of the broader social phenomena (Poerwandari, 2021). This study falls under analytical auto-ethnography as I planned to explore a broader social phenomenon that tends to affect the lives of other people in similar contexts.

Auto-ethnography changes time as it alters individuals' perceptions of past experiences, informs the present, and then reshapes the future if researchers are willing and open to the transformative effects (Custer, 2014). Time is referred to as the linear progression of the past, present, and future increments of experiences. On the other hand, Liviero (2017) states that space refers to all the elements that individuals use to construct their identities. According to, De Beer (2018) auto-ethnography promotes vulnerability, shame, and nakedness to heal the psychological and emotional wounds in the individual's life. This suggests that auto-ethnographic researchers get an opportunity to be open and share their embarrassing experiences so they heal from what happened in the past.

When applying this to my study, I shared painful experiences such as those I had with my grade five English teacher and how difficult it was to cope in school after my dad left us as his family. Auto-ethnography gave me a rare opportunity to share such painful experiences and heal through writing about them. In addition, auto-ethnography also fosters empathy through the personification of stories. The space-time dimensions of the movements between individuals and the self, form empathetic behaviours that bring transformation and healing. This means that as researchers share

their stories, the process fosters empathy from listeners, and that process helps researchers to heal from their wounds, they also get transformed after sharing their stories.

Custer (2014) notes that auto-ethnography expresses creativity and innovation. It stimulates creativity by enabling the imagination of the readers, it is also innovative by design as it focuses on unique individual experiences. This suggests that auto-ethnographers are expected to present their experiences uniquely, thus the need to think deeply arises. Moreover, auto-ethnography is regarded as an artistic and creative tool that is deep in inquiry, it is an innovative tool because it promotes reevaluation, and reinterpretation from the inside out (Custer, 2014). Furthermore, thinking out of the box about our lives in introspection fosters creativity and innovation, and these are social tools that are used to transmit our identities and social positions to others.

For this study, I discussed my experiences through a book that is very important in my life, the Bible. I used one of the characters in the Bible to share my experiences with the readers as I juxtaposed my experiences with those of Joseph. Creativity and innovation also inspire change, and transformation and offer multiple ways of seeing the world. Furthermore, I drew pictures that best described my experiences as triggers that I believe enforced change and transformation in my life.

Auto-ethnography eliminates boundaries as researchers use metaphors symbols allegories to communicate knowledge between cultures and individuals (Ngunjiri et al., 2010). This implies that in auto-ethnography, researchers are not limited to a specific way of writing that is too structural, however, they are free to use symbols, and figures of speech such as metaphors, et cetera. This makes auto-ethnography free and open to different styles and ways of communication.

This approach provides specific benefits as it is therapeutic and writing about one's self concerning a certain theory, experience or belief is also transformative (Custer, 2014). This is because people get healing from expressing themselves and their feelings more deeply and openly and most people usually keep things to themselves, autoethnographic research becomes an avenue for them to express themselves and share their pains and hardest experiences. Furthermore, great insight can be gained through the vulnerability that an individual places him or her to relive and share traumatic events from their private life. In dialogue with another person about this writing,

additional growth and healing can occur. In this study, my auto-ethnography was therapeutic as I shared my emotional experiences through a reflective diary and letter-writing.

Custer (2014) asserts that auto-ethnography is regarded as a transformative research method for someone determined and courageous enough to reveal him/herself to the world. This is also seen in the individuals who participate in the process of reflexivity, introspection, and contemplation with auto-ethnography. I engaged in revealing even my embarrassing moments of learning English as a second language, it was not easy but it allowed me to know myself better and to confront my insecurities. Moreover, auto-ethnography is seen as a transformative research method because it tends to change time in a way that determines the future of auto-ethnography (De Beer, 2018). This suggests that with its transformative nature, this method has the potential to emancipate the researcher from cultural and familial identity traits that would have structured one's identity personally and professionally. This refers to the auto-ethnographic power to help individuals find their new identities that are not influenced by society's culture but by what they choose to be as individuals.

For instance, in the context of this study, the views and opinions of the community I come from might have influenced me to look at English as a second language in a certain way. This study has the potential to transform the mindset that I already had in this regard. After sharing my experiences, my identity will likely change and be more independent from the views and practices of the culture of the society. Janes (2021) notes that one of the characteristics that bind all auto-ethnography is the use of personal experiences to examine or critique cultural experiences. The most important thing is that auto-ethnography intentionally highlights the relationship between personal experiences and cultural practices. Moreover, it makes contributions to existing research as the autoethnographic texts demonstrate the knowledge of past research on a certain topic.

In addition, auto-ethnographic work intentionally exposes vulnerable subjects where secrets are disclosed and histories are made known Wall (2006, p.19) states "We open ourselves up for criticism about how we lived". Chang (2016), an Associate Professor in Education at Eastern University USA raises potential pitfalls as he shares four areas to avoid that can easily be applied to the autoethnographic method. Firstly, autoethnographic researchers should avoid excessive focus on the self in isolation from others. This suggests that the assistance of other participants is important to make the research valid and trustworthy. For researchers to understand their

experiences, they need to engage in discussions with other people who went through similar experiences so that they can learn more about themselves (Liu, 2020).

In the context of this study, I shared my experiences with two peers and they were able to contribute by sharing their own. I also had two additional critical friends, my sister, and my supervisor. Secondly, Hyater-Adams (2012) as cited in Chang (2016) states that researchers need to avoid overemphasis on narration rather than analysis and cultural interpretation. Considering that auto-ethnography should include a cultural aspect, researchers should be careful to ensure that this is evident in their autoethnographies (Abd Samad & Hussein, 2017). To ensure the visibility of the cultural aspect in this study I interrogated cultural issues in my story throughout my study and I asked my peers to share their own experiences of the relationship between language and culture. The focus should not be only on narration as this might reduce the trustworthiness of the research. This suggests that in addition to narration, the cultural aspect needs to be clear to show that this is an autoethnographic study. It should be noted that if the cultural aspect is not noticeable or demonstrated, that study cannot be considered as an autoethnography (Johnson et al., 2020).

Thirdly, Hyater-Adams (2012) notes that auto-ethnographers should avoid excessive reliance on personal memory as the only data source. This means that triangulation is important in auto-ethnography as relying only on the researcher's memory may not be the best as it will make the study lack trustworthiness and validity. Personal memory cannot be proven or validated if it is used alone, thus autoethnographic researchers need to adopt different data generation methods such as document analysis, interviews, and focus group discussions to ensure that the results are valid and trustworthy. Collecting data in different ways helps us to get the information we would not find if we used only one method.

Fourthly, auto ethnographers should also avoid negative ethical standards regarding others in self-narratives (De Beer 2018). This suggests that researchers need to make sure that they follow ethical principles when it comes to self-narratives. Researchers need not mention the names of the people in the narration process, but rather use pseudo or fake names. Moreover, if possible, it is also advisable that they try to hide the names of the places where incidents took place just in case someone who was involved comes across the research. This is to make sure that the privacy of individuals is not violated or at stake.

(d) *Potential strengths of auto-ethnography*

Poerwandari (2021) lists different strengths of auto-ethnography. Firstly, if auto-ethnography is conducted in the right way, it is a good method to capture, analyse, and evaluate experiences. Moreover, autoethnography remains the best method for yielding in-depth data as the researcher speaks directly from the subconscious mind and with practicality, even though other methods can also work.

Secondly, autoethnography can be an effective way for researchers especially those from marginalised groups to get the opportunity to uncover the phenomena they have experienced so that the issue can be recognised by the public (Poerwandari, 2021). This suggests that researchers who come from disadvantaged backgrounds where they could not express themselves get a platform through (auto-ethnography) to express themselves by sharing their experiences regarding the phenomenon being studied. This applies to my study because I am a researcher who came from one of those marginalised societies where people accepted everything without question. My background is discussed in chapters three and four. Auto-ethnography is a platform for me to share good and bad experiences of teaching and learning English grammar.

Thirdly, auto-ethnography as a method of self-examination can present a better understanding of the phenomenon or issue for the interest of society. Thus, this method does not portray the self of the researcher as more important than the self of other people (Ortiz & Duarte, 2019). However, the self of the researcher is used to show the situation of the public regarding the phenomenon through the help of the participants while sharing contextual experiences.

Fourthly, Ortiz and Duarte (2019) add that the knowledge that is possessed by autoethnographic researchers is a privileged one because it presents accounts from insiders and people with direct experiences of the phenomenon under consideration, which can lead to a better analysis of the complexity of problems. Thus, the method allows theorising from the people who examine their experiences and interpretations of a particular phenomenon. Fifth, Poerwandari (2021) also notes that auto-ethnography has the potential to present experience-based theory or field-based practice theory for cases that are beyond the personal, such as those that are related to groups or community issues from the researcher's practice and reflection in the field.

The study focuses on the self and this point therefore does not pertain to my study. Sixth, Adams et al. (2017) state that auto-ethnography is recognised for being unique in its flexibility more than other qualitative research approaches. This suggests that this method is most appropriate for this study because the aim is to reflect on past experiences, as reflexivity is crucial in education for the improvement that leads to better performances. Thus, it has the power of the reflexive connection that is between the researcher, the story, and the text (Poerwandari, 2021). It also helps to connect the stories of recipients and evoke flexible moments for the readers.

Seventh, the data becomes rich when the researcher as an insider shares experiences with participants (Poerwandari, 2021). This is a strength because the relationship between the researcher and participants becomes strong when they share similar experiences. There are no dominant-subordinate power relations, they are all on the same level. In this research, I am the main participant and I discuss my experiences with my peers who have the same background as me. We shared our experiences through conversations and learned from one another, and I got to understand the implications of our experiences to our profession.

Dyson (2007) states that different autoethnographic experts show that the subjective is legitimate and that nothing can ever be impersonal and independent of the writer. Therefore, auto-ethnography is a personal and powerful method to explore one's experiences. Auto-ethnography has become the term of choice to describe studies and procedures that connect the personal to the cultural (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). Moreover, Dyson (2007) states that auto-ethnography is an appropriate methodology and the only way that one can present a cultural phenomenon in a meaningful and mindful way.

In addition, Poerwandari (2021) notes that auto-ethnography resides in their self-awareness and the reporting of their experiences as the primary source of data. This method is more authentic than ethnography and the voice of the insider is assumed to be truer than that of the outsider. As a result, auto-ethnography allows the researcher to reveal his/her voice upfront (Ellis & Bochner, 2000).

The goal is to enter and document concrete details of life as an important way of knowing. Moreover, auto-ethnography provides an avenue for doing something meaningful for oneself and the world. All knowledge is socially constructed and writing is not just a time representation of an

objective reality, however, language creates a particular view of reality. Furthermore, auto-ethnography is one person's view of reality that is constructed around and through other people (Poerwandari, 2021).

2.3 Critical friends

In this study, I was both a primary participant and a researcher, but this does not mean that I did everything in isolation from others. Auto-ethnography encourages researchers to engage in discussions with other people who went through similar experiences so that they can learn more about themselves (Liu, 2020). To align with this thought, I did not depend only on my personal experiences but also on my peers, family members, and critical friends who contributed to this study. I selected my critical friends purposefully as each participant was chosen to play a particular role, for instance, my peers played their roles, my supervisor did the same thing and my sister did as well.

2.3.1 My sister, and my peers

In this study, I worked with six critical friends in different sessions. Pithouse-Morgan and Samaras (2015) indicate that critical friends in reflective research are important as they serve to develop a productive and well-informed research study that would enhance knowledge and enable the researchers to develop themselves. Thus, self-reflexive research such as auto-ethnography values the voices of those who share the same interest in improving professional practice as those who are willing to give their sincere and constructive contribution to the work of the researcher.

After writing my autobiographical story, I engaged in a conversation with two of my male peers (fellow postgraduate students), after they had read my story, and based on what they read they shared experiences that are similar to the ones I discussed in my story. Besides meeting them in the focus group, I also made arrangements for us to meet on a one-to-one basis to have conversations. It was interesting to note that we shared similar experiences as it was not strange for them to learn of my experiences, they could relate to what I went through. They could relate to my experiences because they come from similar backgrounds, even though one is Indian and one is Black, the conversation was amazing.

It is also worth noting that through conversations I had with my peers, I learned a lot from their experiences too, some of the things they discussed reminded me of some experiences I had not included in my writing, so I had to update my story.

My sister was happy to participate in my study as she was a big part of everything that I went through, she and I shared most of the experiences I recalled about learning English Second Language from primary and high school. I had many interesting conversations with her discussing how we felt in those years when we were confronted with English. She contributed letters that I wrote to my teacher and my dad because she was directly involved and shared her emotions about the experiences we went through at that time as young girls. I am happy she participated with pleasure because the study serves as a means for us to understand and begin to heal from what happened to us in our formative years. A positive that came out of this experience is that we got to appreciate all that happened because our English is better now than it was at that time, we had an opportunity to discuss each experience that we faced. Thus, my sister played an important role in this study.

2.3.2 My supervisor and two fellow postgraduate students

My supervisor also served as one of my critical friends as she looked at my ideas critically and gave constructive feedback and suggestions. She is a reflective researcher in the area of self-study and research practice, and I take her as one of my More Knowledgeable Others (MKO). In line with this, Stolle et al. (2018) add that as one of the critical friends, there should be someone or people who have a deeper understanding of the method that is adopted and my supervisor is one of those. She suggested the idea of letter writing which worked very well in my study. Working with an MKO is very helpful in a study such as this. Two of my critical friends were former fellow students, one of them has a Ph.D. and another is pursuing a Master' degree. Their input was very useful as I emailed most of my sections to them for comments before I finalised them, their feedback was constructive and thought-provoking. For example, after writing letters to two people, I sent them the letters and they gave comments that were helpful to me. I can summarily say that having critical friends enriched my study as I was not the only focus.

Stolle et al. (2018) suggest three theoretical perspectives that can be used to examine and reflect on the role of critical friends; (1), enforce Vygotsky's social constructivism, (2), Dewey's concept

of reflective thinking, and (3), a collaboration that happens in a certain community. All these were observed through the critical friends that I used, and the knowledge that I later came to conclude was socially constructed through conversations that we had. For example, my supervision meetings were longer as my supervisor also played the role of critical friend, I was learning through those conversations. With my two other critical friends, we engaged in reflective thinking and came to some conclusions on different matters, and these conversations took place in the same community of English specialists who understand the value and importance of the study.

TABLE 2.1: CRITICAL FRIEND'S TABLE

Participants	Qualifications	Profession	Gender	Race
Paul (Peer 1)	New PhD holder	English teacher	Male	Indian
Sizwe (Peer 2)	Honors	English teacher	Male	African
Nonto (My sister)	Honors	BCom	Female	African
Myself	Masters	English teacher	Female	African
C1(Supervisor)	PhD holder	English Lecturer	Female	White
C2 (Colleague)	New PhD holder	English teacher	Male	Indian
C3 (Colleague)	Honors	English teacher	Male	African

2.4 Data generation

In this study, I generated data using four data generation methods, namely: a) A reflective autobiographical story; b) Conversations; c) A letter-writing process; and d) The use of images as memory triggers. The data generation sources are written in their order as I generated them in this way. The four data generation practices that I applied in my study were used to capture and prompt reflection on my learning experiences of English as a second language.

2.4.1 Reflective Autobiographical Story

Linguistic autobiography assisted me in writing my autobiographical story. Autobiography write-ups give writers opportunities to see their actions and their journey through life under certain circumstances (Ortiz & Duarte, 2019). With this, I was able to reflect and write the story of my experiences of learning English Second Language. I divided my story into different age groups

and grades from before and when I started school to when I reached high school, this includes incidents that took place in each grade as far as the learning of English as a second language is concerned. I wrote about my playful years as a child and the games I played. After reading Nash (2019) book on the power of personal narratives, I decided to make my story a narrative which helped me to have a focus. Furthermore, I also used Joseph's life, a Bible character to explain my experiences by exploring similarities in our life experiences, in my case the learning of English as a second language. To juxtapose my story with that of Joseph made me stand outside of myself and look in. To remove myself in this way made it easier to share my experiences, particularly those that were painful.

For clarity, I am giving the background to the sections and characters of the Bible to which I refer. From the Bible, I used a character in the first book that is believed to be written by Moses, Genesis. I refer to chapters 37, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45 and 47. In Table 2.2 below, I give a brief description of the content of each chapter.

TABLE 2.2: BACKGROUND TO SECTIONS AND CHARACTERS IN THE BIBLE

Genesis 37	Genesis 39	Genesis 40	Genesis 41	Genesis 42, 43 and 44	Genesis 45 and 47
-Joseph dreams of greatness. He tells his brothers and they get jealous of him and plan to kill him but later decide to sell him.	-Joseph is sold as a slave to Egypt.	-Potifa's wife falsely accused him of rape and he was arrested. While in Prison, he interpreted prisoners' dreams.	-He gets to interpret Pharaoh's dream and the whole country was saved from famine.	-Joseph's family had famine in the land of Canan and his brothers were sent by their father to buy food in Egypt.	Joseph reveals his identity to his brothers and he cries because of what they did to him. They felt embarrassed as they bowed to him and asked for forgiveness. He forgives them and tells them not to worry about what they did.
-The names of his brothers are Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Dan, Naphtali, Gad, Asher, Issachar, Zebulun, Joseph, and Benjamin. However, Benjamin was not part of the plan.	-His master's name was Potiphar. His wife tried to force Joseph to sleep with her, but he fled.	-Chief butler, two other prisoners. He later came out of prison because was needed to interpret Pharaoh's dreams.	-Pharaoh promotes Joseph and he becomes his deputy. He made decisions on behalf of the King.	-All the brothers went there, and they could not recognise Joseph as the man in authority. Joseph recognised them and commanded that their sacks be filled with food.	-Joseph's father, Jacob is told that Joseph is alive and travels to go and see him in Egypt. All this while he believed that his son was dead. -Joseph as Pharaoh's deputy is respected in the whole nation of Egypt and is used to deal with famine in the land of Canan too. His dreams came to pass.

King James Version (KJV) Holy Bible

2.4.2 Conversations

I used focus group conversations with my two peers. After I had written my autobiographical story, I gave the story to them to read and then we had conversations based on what I wrote in my story. I allowed them to share their own experiences about their learning of English as a Second Language as they come from contexts that are similar to mine with people who share similar views on the English language. From this conversation, I realised that we share similar experiences, and they could relate to almost everything I shared in my story. Through their questions, they even added things I had forgotten or overlooked, and it helped me to go back to my story to add the necessary information. Their comments revealed additional comments which added to the analysis of my story.

After that, my supervisor had questions based on what I noted from group conversations and advised that I needed to go back to participants and probe more issues identified. I then met with focus-group participants for one-on-one conversations. I think it is worth noting that when I went back to discuss with my peers one-on-one, it was more engaging because I went deeper into what they had said or mentioned before and they seemed more open and honest without their peers in the room. Keçe (2015) notes that deeper exploration of responses by participants – probing and exploring emerging dimensions that may not have been previously considered helps to get richer data which was the case for me.

2.4.3 Letter-writing process

In this study, I adopted letter-writing which revealed the emotionality I experienced when encountering difficult situations in my life. According to Camiciotti (2014), letters are regarded as important data for different purposes or any type of investigation. Letter writing has been used as a qualitative method for self-reflection to generate data that is used for oneself and one's lived experiences. This suggests that letters can be used effectively to achieve certain goals as they are taken as valuable data for reflexive and socio-linguistic research. In line with this, Pithouse-Morgan et al. (2012) note that emotionality in social sciences research draws attention to the importance of the researchers' self-reflexive inquiry into the relationship between research and emotions. This relationship can include emotional relations from different forms; like the emotional relationship between the researcher and the researched, the emotional impact of the

research on the researcher and the researched, also the emotional impact between the researcher, and the researched on the research process. This suggests that the research process can stir up emotions in different ways and in different people who are involved in the research process; thus, letter writing helps to express such emotions. In my research, being a self-reflexive study, I looked at the emotional impact of the research on me. Furthermore, my research looks at my learning experiences of learning English as a second language; and obviously, there are painful experiences that I had to write about. This is discussed further in chapter three.

2.4.4 Use of images as memory triggers

Images were used as memory triggers to remember my experiences of learning English as a second language. I used both pictures and words to prompt certain instances that took place in the process of learning the language. For example, I used the word fear to explain how fearful I was in the classroom, where I was beaten for not knowing some English words. Also, the picture of a hose pipe reminded me that we were beaten for getting the English spelling words wrong. I used different pictures and words that helped me to remember experiences. I analysed the pictures and words and juxtaposed this with Joseph's life as a Bible character. What I learned from these prompts is discussed in detail in chapter six.

2.5 Reflection on my Auto-Biographical Memories

At the beginning of my study, I used pictures to prompt my memories of learning English as a second language. I described what each picture reminded me of and analysed these memories in juxtaposition with the story of the Bible character Joseph that I discussed in my autobiographical story. According to Van Schalkwyk (2010), the teaching of one's life story has become a key feature of narrative therapy and inquiry. My study started as an inquiry and then became therapeutic as I revisited processed and shared painful memories.

Reflecting on my painful memories was not easy but the process was cathartic as I got a deeper understanding of my experiences of learning a second language in relation to my socio-cultural and economic experiences. Life storytelling is a mechanism where experiences are rendered meaningful within some form of structure.

The individual gets to engage in conversations with multiple voices inside of self and from others in the outside world (internal voices, ideology, culture, et cetera.) to tell a life story where different positions find expression in the same person. In my study, I engaged with myself through self-introspection where I thought about my past experiences and I had to decide whether to share all my experiences including painful ones. I had two options, to share them or not, to share them as they evoked sadness in me, but later I decided to share everything that relates to my learning of English as a second language. Externally, I had conversations with my peers and critical friends based on the issue and I also considered culture as an important external factor in this study as it contributed to my learning of the language. In the process of developing identity, the person dialogues with a wide range of different and conflicting self-positions and relationships to integrate past events with present experiences.

According to Hatton (1995), reflection scaffolds the process of narrating life experiences using different modes of expression that include both language and non-linguistic action. Self-reflection is a valid social action, a representation or narrative performance that involves what we think and say in the form of dialogue that is below the level of awareness. Scaffolding refers to the system or the process of supporting life story remembering and narrative performance.

Narrating one's life story is the process of making sense of past stories, past events, and past circumstances within the context of social categories and in social interaction through verbal conversations and interviews, written texts, or non-verbal presentations. It also provides a channel for making sense of the past and integrating these experiences with the present and an anticipated future, it provides a valuable mode for eliciting and exploring autobiographical memories.

2.6 Ethical considerations

2.6.1 Quality, rigor, and ethics in auto-ethnography

Johnson et al. (2020) propose five ways to judge the quality of autoethnographic studies. Trustworthy and authentic data is dependent on generating authentic and trustworthy data from self and others. This can be achieved by using several data sources like personal memory, reflective diary, interviews, or document analysis. In this study, this was achieved by using a reflective autobiographical story, letter-writing, images as memory triggers, and focus group conversations. Secondly, the researcher's self-reflexivity and transparency about the research process, the

researcher is expected to clearly describe the process that was followed to arrive at the results (Johnson et al., 2020; Liu, 2020). That I did in the letter-writing process and other sections.

Thirdly, the researcher in auto-ethnography is expected to protect the rights of other people involved in his/her research. Participants should be given consent letters to agree to participate in the study (Johnson et al., 2020; Liu, 2020). To comply with this principle, I obtained permission from the university through gate keeper's letter to conduct this study. I also gave all participants consent letters which highlighted the fact that their decision to participate is voluntary and that they have a right to withdraw from the study at any time. To respect them further, I did not use their real names but pseudonyms such as Nonto for my sister, Paul, and Sizwe for both of my peers to refer to. Consent letters were translated into the mother tongue. I also let them know that they should take me as their peer and friend. As Tolich et al. (2015) assert, respect for persons is one of the moral principles that guide research from the beginning through to its completion and publication of results.

The fourth principle is socio-cultural analysis and interpretation- this means that the study should go beyond the researcher's personal experience to provide a socio-cultural interpretation of the experience (Johnson et al., 2020; Wall, 2006). This suggests that the researcher's personal experiences should link to the sociocultural context, and the experience should link to the cultural beliefs and practices of the researcher's surroundings as well as the greater society. In this study, I ensured that my socio-cultural context, the township I grew up in, and how the community members view English serve as an aspect of culture in this study.

Lastly, Johnson et al. (2020) state that researchers need to make their studies transferable to the researcher's wider communities. He also emphasises the importance of connecting the researchers' experiences to the literature and the broader research community. Moreover, auto-ethnography should have the ability to emotionally connect with the reader and offer empathy to people who might find themselves in a similar situation to that of the researcher. This research is transferable to a similar context and with similar participants as found in this study. For example, I gave my critical friends letters to read and they were emotionally connected to my experiences, One of them even said he could relate because he has similar experiences.

2.7 There are different challenges and limitations to auto-ethnographic research

Firstly, in reflecting on one's own life, it is usually difficult to avoid the communicative death of solipsism (Ticozzi, 2016). This means that auto-ethnography always risks becoming confessional tales that take the author as subject matter and by and large bypasses what it is that the author knows because of fieldwork. This does not apply to my study as I did not concentrate on subjects in the field but on the self. Secondly, auto-ethnographies are also constitutive of identity, as a result, autoethnographic self-narration may be risky to self-identity (Johnson et al., 2020). This suggests that as researchers share their experiences, their reputations might be affected. For instance, if the researcher shares embarrassing experiences others could undermine him/her rather than take a lesson from what he or went through before.

Thirdly, Poerwandari (2021) states that intended audiences for autoethnographic representations, compared to other types, are often multiple and difficult to engage simultaneously. This suggests that academic researchers need to shape their self-representations to draw the attention of people they research in the field such as colleagues, friends, family members, and students. This implies that autoethnographic researchers need to strategically and effectively communicate to a variety of audiences. This communication becomes necessary as it influences our constitution as researchers and the knowledge that we produce in ways that we are not aware of.

Poerwandari (2021) discusses ways that can be used to minimise risks of biases and maximise the potential of the auto-ethnography method. Firstly, Poerwandari (2021) notes that people may conduct research using tools such as interviews, questionnaires, et cetera. However, the data generated might still be limited compared to experiences that are stored in the psycho-social constellation of the people who experienced the phenomenon and who are also in the midst of the situation. This suggests that one advantage of the autoethnographic method is that individuals get to share their experiences practically as they find themselves in those situations, rather than just distributing questionnaires across a large population. This method allowed the research to produce in-depth results which is what is expected in interpretive qualitative studies.

Secondly, Starr (2010) states that when auto-ethnography is well understood and carried out properly, it tends to strengthen qualitative research and can contribute significantly to psychology

and other human sciences in general. This implies that auto-ethnography is highly recommended as it can yield good results if it is used in the right way. Ticozzi (2016) lists different criticisms of the autoethnographic methodology. Firstly, researchers might be biased and use their perspectives and the conclusion might not represent the reality of the participants' lives. Poerwandari (2021) responded to this critique by stating that all knowledge is socially constructed, one way or the other people are subjective by nature no matter how hard they try to remain objective. In this study, to ensure that stories portray participants' lives, I documented all the processes that took place in the data generation and analysis to enhance trustworthiness.

Secondly, in autoethnography, the story might uncover the things that are not intended to be shared with the public, although openness is important to provide further understanding (Ticozzi, 2016). In response to this critique, one of the purposes of this method is to uncover the truth about what has been uncovered for a long period.

Furthermore, researchers willingly share information that will help readers understand the phenomenon being studied. Researchers get to open wounds and share their pain just to share knowledge that would best portray the experience in a particular context as well as the implications of such experiences. Reed-Danahay (2021) notes that the danger of auto-ethnography is that it causes researchers to focus on their problems and become selfish. In response to this critique, Poerwandari (2021) states that autoethnographic researchers are not selfish when focusing on themselves, they represent participants who share similar experiences. Moreover, stories help in exploring the phenomenon that is being studied and what can be done to address the issue for the benefit of society.

Fourthly, a researcher might choose auto-ethnography not because he/she has a lot of stories to share to construct knowledge, but because they are lazy or not willing to do his/her best in generating a large quantity of data (Ticozzi, 2016). To respond to this critique, researchers who use this method might have generated data previously and believe that sharing their experiences would enhance the understanding of the topic and yield a better outcome. Moreover, Ph.D. studies are all about originality and uniqueness, and I was not going to opt for shortcuts.

2.7 Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness ensures that the research process is truthful, careful, and rigorous enough to qualify to make the claims that it does (Denzin & Giardina, 2016). Moreover, Dodge et al. (2005) assert that relevance refers to the study's ability to enable the researcher to make certain informed choices on solutions to the problems that may occur in the study. Relevance also means the extent to which the research addresses challenges that practitioners face in their work. Fidelity is another measure of trustworthiness that refers to the researcher's act of faithfulness and integrity to preserve and protect the worth and dignity of the tellers in the study. In addition, researchers are also concerned with rigor which refers to the accurate and systematic application of the theory/conceptual framework selected for the study and the method (Cohen et al., 2007).

Triangulation can convince the readers of the validity and value of self-study research. Jwan and Ong'ondo (2011) affirm that triangulation is the application of multiple perspectives in data generation. Qualitative researchers are interested in the diversity of perceptions and the multiple realities within which people live and, triangulation helps to identify these different realities (Jwan & Ong'ondo, 2011). This study ensured triangulation as I used several data generation tools (autobiographic reflective stories, conversations, letter-writing, and images as memory triggers). These data generation tools enabled me to ensure validity and quality in my study.

In auto-ethnography, validity refers to the narrator's credibility to see if his/her experiences have been clearly described (Abd Samad & Hussein, 2017). Validity in auto-ethnography seeks verisimilitude which means the appearance of being true and real as it evokes in readers the feeling that the experience described is lifetime, believable, and possible. A feeling that what has been represented could be very true and real. In auto-ethnography, the focus of generalisability moves from respondents to readers as they determine if the story speaks to them about their experiences or about the lives of people they know. One way is to provide a clear and detailed description of how the data was generated and discuss the details of the research methods used. In chapter three, I provide details of my data generation process and a clear and detailed description of how I constructed the representations of data.

Relevance in this study is ensured as the study touches on one of the most important prominent topics in education which is proficiency in English and how English is taught. In line with this

Teik (2011) notes that an effective teacher is one with the ability to reflect on his/her beliefs and practices, especially concerning teaching and learning a second language. This study allowed me to reflect on my experiences of learning English as a second language.

Thick description is a term used in qualitative research that refers to the depth or "thickness" of the description needed by a researcher to report (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014). A tape recording was used during interviews, and verbatim transcriptions were done from the field text collection instrument to ensure that a thick description was achieved. Cohen (2013) suggests that verbatim expressions provide more details and allow the reader to assess if the findings can be transferable to a different context.

2.8 Data analysis and interpretation

I analysed my reflective writing and letters using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) which enabled me to generate themes and sub-themes. I also analysed the data in cycles using themes.

2.8.1 Critical Discourse Analysis

Critical Discourse Analysis was adopted as a method to analyse data in this study. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is a type of discourse analytical research that studies the way social power abuse, inequality as well and dominance are enacted, reproduced, and resisted by text and talk in the political and social context (Van Dijk, 2015). This suggests that critical discourse analysis aims to understand, expose, and resist social inequality in different aspects of life. Furthermore, Breeze (2011) adds that CDA is an entity and a recognisable approach to language study or program. This also tells us that CDA analyses the use of language by different people in different spheres of life. In the case of my study, I used CDA to analyse the data collected from me as a researcher.

CDA examines the form, structure as well and content of the discourse starting from the grammar and words that are employed and their interpretation by a wider audience (Fairclough, 2013a). According to Breeze (2011) the purpose of CDA is to analyse transparent structural relationships of dominance, discrimination, and power as it is manifested in language. Furthermore, it looks at the relationship between language and society, discourse analysis is also the study of language in

text and conversations and is a term used for several approaches to analysing written and verbal language (Chebitok, 2021). Furthermore, discourses operate independently of the speaker's participants and writer's intentions as ideas not only reflect the social world but also serve to construct it (Parker, 2002).

CDA is an important characteristic of economic, social as well and cultural changes of late modernity that exist as discourses and processes that happen outside discourse (Van Dijk, 2015). In addition, Fairclough (1992) asserts that discourse and social change sketch a three-dimensional framework in analysing discourses: The first dimension is discourse as text which includes the linguistic features and organisation of certain instances of discourse choices and patterns in grammar, vocabulary, and text structure. This means that the analysis dwells much on the choice of words and how that text is structured. Parker (2014) states that the second dimension is discourse as a discursive practice, as something that is articulated, produced, distributed, and consumed in society. This suggests that to approach a discourse as a discursive practice means to look at the creation and production of a certain product that is used in society. The third dimension is discourse as a social practice where the ideological effects and hegemonic processes in which discourse is a feature. For this study, the first dimension was adopted where I analysed my data through the structure of texts and the choice of words used.

The current focus of CDA is on language and discourse and its counterparts in critical development in the social sciences and sociolinguistics dating back from the 1970s. Fairclough, (2013) also notes that CDA is also seen as a reaction against the dominant formal paradigms of the 1960s and 1970s. It aims to offer a different mode or perspective of theorising, analysis, and application throughout the whole field.

Moreover, CDA contains two essential elements: A political concern with the workings of ideology and power in society. The more explicit definitions all emphasise the relationship between (text and discourse) power (political structure, inequality), and dominance (Van Dijk, 2015). Fairclough (2013) adds that CDA takes a particular interest in the relationship between language and power. CDA also involves a principled and transparent shifting backward and forward between the microanalysis of the text using valued tools of linguistic, semiotic, and literary analysis and macro analysis of social formulations, institutions, and power relations that these texts index and construct. Furthermore, CDA is socially embedded as it plays a role in

constructing and perpetuating social structures and relations. This suggests that CDA helps to understand the relationship between the use of language and power in certain institutions of society such as schools, classrooms, parliament, et cetera. Van Dijk, (2015) also notes that CDA declares itself to be socially committed to raising its readers' consciousness of how language contributes to the domination of some people by others. This domination can take place between groups or between individuals where there are superior and subordinate individuals.

In this study, the analysis of critical discourse will be taken as an appropriate tool to show clearly and systematically my constructions of the process of learning English as a second language. According to Stubbs (1997), critical discourse analysis is the analysis of public discourse to identify constructions, assumptions, and beliefs coded implicitly behind explicit propositions that are generated in social interactions. I decided to adopt CDA as I believe it would be useful in my study in the sense that it helped me to undertake a close inspection and reading of my autobiographical story in learning English as a second language, transcribed interviews, and focus group discussions. In this way, the benefits of critical discourse analysis were in line with the qualitative research design chosen for this study.

According to Guba and Lincoln (1994), a qualitative research design involves the analysis of naturally occurring language used in structuring everyday realities in any social context. In this regard, one significant advantage of critical discourse analysis that was undertaken in this study was that unlike the thematic analysis that focuses on the identification of central themes and trends in a given textual data, or more general approaches to discourse analysis, a critical discourse analysis from Foucault's perspective went beyond this to enable the researcher, like me, to undertake a close reading of the textual data arising from the study to interpret the deeper layers of language in my voice and other voices (in the form of participants' opinions and propositions), representation, (claims to) knowledge, and their implied meanings embedded in the spoken text (transcripts) (Parker, 2014).

According to Huckin (1997), critical discourse analysis acknowledges the fact that authentic texts are not produced or read in isolation but in a real-world context with all its complexity. Fairclough (2013a) claims that CDA focuses on the relationship between language and society. This suggests that whatever is produced in texts is related to the larger society and what happens in it; thus, analysis is done within the same context. In addition to this, Gale (2010) notes that

CDA is highly context-sensitive as it aims to consider the most relevant textual and contextual factors including historical ones that contribute to the production and interpretation of the given text.

Secondly, Huckini (1997) states that CDA is a highly integrated form of discourse analysis because it tries to unite three different levels of analysis: the text, the discourse practices (the process of writing, speaking, and reading) that create and interpret that text; as well as the larger social context that bears upon it.

CDA also aims to show how these three levels are interrelated. In my study, the writing is the autobiographical text that I produced to conduct my autoethnographic study. The second level in my study I considered to be a detailed description and explanation of my experiences of learning English as a second language that I shared through the interaction I had with my critical friends and peers, which also enhanced my understanding of the text I had previously produced. The last level was to interpret my story through the larger social context to see the influence of the social and political context in my learning of English as a second language.

Thirdly, CDA is concerned with important societal issues (Van Dijk, 2015). This means that context also refers to not only the immediate environment where the text is produced but also the larger social context that includes the relevant political, cultural, and/or social factors. For example, looking at the political or economic situation in the country during the time the events happened as recorded in the text. Also, CDA worked perfectly well with the methodology I adopted for my study.

Fourthly, when analysing texts, CDA analysis takes an ethical stance that draws special attention to power imbalances that include social inequalities like abuse of power and authority, gender, race, discrimination, and other injustices to lead readers to corrective action (Gale 2010). CDA does not only describe unfair social or political practices but it is also clearly critical of them which gives us a reason why the term critical is used. Looking at the experiences I have concerning my learning of English as a second language and how social practices played out, CDA remains the best method of data analysis for my study.

Fifthly, CDA assumes a social constructionist view of discourse (Chebitok, 2021). This suggests that CDA practitioners assume that people's notions of reality are constructed mostly through

interaction with others as mediated using language and other semiotic systems. In this study, that is done through the interaction I had with my critical friends and peers to understand my experiences better; thus, the use of social constructivism.

As a result of this, reality is not seen as immutable but as open to change as knowledge is socially constructed through interactions between individuals. Furthermore, critical discourse analysts try to make their work as clear as possible to a broad, non-specialist readership. To ensure this, I explained the whole process that I followed while I conducted this study.

2.8.2 The process of analyzing texts through Critical Discourse Analysis

Huckin (1997) notes that not every concept found in a linguistic text is equally useful when it comes to doing CDA. In my study, I selected phrases and words that I think are relevant to the study and approach. Moreover, Fairclough, (2013) and Huckin (1997) assert that the first step in approaching a text is the general strategy: In this step, a text should be approached in two stages. The first one is for the critical analyst to approach the text uncritically, and the second step back from the text and look at it critically. This process involves revisiting the text at different levels, for instance raising questions about it and imagining how it could have been constructed differently. Also, mentally comparing the text to its related texts and always keeping ordinary reading in mind while critiquing the text. In this study, I followed this process as I went back to read a smaller portion of my text and asked myself some questions like how each phrase relates to the larger social context. What do word choices reveal about each experience and what are presuppositions attached to each text?

Huckin (1997, p.14) notes that critical discourse analysts start by recognising that every text belongs to a certain genre that manifests a characteristic set of formal features that serve a certain characteristic purpose. For example, an advertisement is a genre that is normally recognised using attention-grabbing language and visual aids. This helps to identify what could have or has not been said. In my study, the type of genre used is narrative text, which is known for incorporating aspects such as characters, plot, conflict, climax, denouement, et cetera. This is obvious in the autobiographical text that I analysed, it helped me to think of how sentences could have been phrased or written.

Framing refers to how the content of the text is presented, for example, a narrative or story, one powerful way of framing a text is using visual aids. It also refers to the way the text is framed such as a simple confrontation between individuals. In this study, I used a narrative style and some pictures to share my experiences. Foregrounding- refers to the writer's emphasis on certain concepts and deemphasising others. Moreover, the ultimate form of backgrounding is omission which refers to certain things completely out of a text. In my study, I focused on the points and concepts that relate to my learning of English as a second language. For example, I did not mention all the plays I played as a child but those that contributed to my learning of the target language (Huckin, 1997). Foregrounding is the most powerful aspect of textualisation because the writer does not mention something, it does not enter the reader's mind, nor does it subject it to his/her scrutiny. This is because it is not possible to raise questions about something that is not there. Presupposition according to Van Dijk, (2015) is the use of language in a way that appears to take certain ideas for granted as if there were no alterations. For example, ask yourself what is presupposed by each phrase or sentence or what each of them implies.

Another effective way to analyse a text is to read sentence by sentence after one has noticed the general framing of the text. Topicalisation- looks closely at individual sentences (Fairclough, 2013). For example, in a certain text, do sentences support the learner or the teacher? The reader proceeds through it sentence by sentence. In addition to constructing the simple meaning of each sentence, the reader might notice that certain pieces of information appear as grammatical objects of the sentence and thus are topicalised. The sentence topic is the meaning of what the sentence is about. Furthermore, Parker (1992) adds that presupposition also occurs at the sentence level. For example, if the sentence says, "We cannot continue imposing language of instruction to South African learners". The writer is supposing that learners in South Africa should choose their language of instruction. Agency refers to the subject that is topicalised in the text but not endowed with power (Huckin 1997).

Insinuations refer to comments that are suggestive and difficult for readers to change. These are suggested word meanings and the frequent use of words or phrases in a certain context, they may have positive or negative connotations. Huckin (1997) notes that word and phrase meanings derived from the frequent use of a word or phrase in a certain type of context refer to connotations.

For example, the use of the word grammar has negative connotations for some people with unpleasant memories of being embarrassed in school by a certain grammar teacher. Moreover, someone who opposes immoral living would likely be called “holier than thou.” Register refers to the text’s level of formality or informality and its degree of technicality. Omission refers to determining what has been left out, like asking yourself, what could the writer have said in a certain instance and so on. Modality refers to the tone of statements as regards the degree of their authority and certification. It is mostly carried by words like ‘may, might, could, will, must, without a doubt, et cetera.

(a) *Discourse analysis and society*

Fairclough (2013b) summarised the main tenets of CDA as follows: it addresses social problems; as power relations are discursive. Learning English second as a language is a societal issue because individuals who learn a second language are part of a society that is driven by certain beliefs and values. For example, someone can be in a society that believes that there is no need to learn a second language for different reasons, and that may affect the learner who is interested in learning the language. Discourses constitute society and culture, discourse is historical, the link between text and society is mediated, discursive analysis is interpretive and extraordinary, and discourse is a form of social action (Fairclough (2013b)). The typical vocabulary of many scholars in CDA features notions such as power, dominance, hegemon, race, class, and discrimination. I can relate to this because, in my autobiographical story, I discovered that when I got to the primary school, in a rural township, there were power relations at play as I was discriminated against because I could not speak English. Also, power relations played out between my classmates and me as they were viewed as intelligent because they understood English. Power imbalance also played out between myself and my English teacher because he made unpleasant comments about me that I could not challenge because of the power that he had in the class as a teacher and leader in the teaching profession. In the community as well, there are beliefs, views, and perceptions about learning English as a second language that I could not challenge at that time because I did not have the power to do so as a child.

(b) *Critical Discourse Analysis: macro vs micro*

Van Dijk, (2015) notes that language use, discourse, verbal interaction, and communication belong to the micro level of the social order. Concepts like power, inequality, and dominance between social groups are terms that belong to the macro level of analysis. This suggests that CDA must theoretically bridge the gap between micro and macro approaches. In everyday interactions and experiences, macro and micro levels form one unified whole. For instance, something that happens in the parliament of social interaction is a discourse at the micro level of social interaction.

There are different ways to analyse and bridge levels and arrive at a unified analysis: (1), member groups: language users engage in discourse as members of social groups, organisations, or institutions. (2), Actions process: social acts of individual actors are a constituent part of group actions and social processes such as legislation, news-making, and reproduction of racism. (3), Context-social structure: situations of discourse interaction are part or constitutive of social structure such as press conferences, local and more global contexts are closely related and each exercise constrains the discourse. (4), Personal and social cognition: language users as social actors have both personal and social cognition, knowledge, and opinions, and those shared with members of the group or culture. Level four is the level my research employed as I shared my experiences from a personal level and analysed them to understand what they meant within a social context.

(c) *Context and control*

Fairclough (2013a) notes that context is defined as a mentally represented structure of properties of the social situation that are relevant to the production or comprehension of discourse. It consists of such categories as the overall definition of the situation, setting (time, place), ongoing action, social or institutional roles as well as their mental representations goals, knowledge and opinions, attitudes, and ideologies). Controlling context involves control over one or more of these categories, for instance, determining the definition of the communicative situation, deciding on times and place of the communicative event, what roles, knowledge, or opinions they have, and which social actions may or must be accomplished by discourse. The critical CDA approach normally focuses on forms of context control that are in the best interest of the dominant group.

(d) *The context of the text and talk*

Crucial to the enactment or exercise of group power is the control over the situations of text and talk (Fairclough, 2013a). In terms of relating text and context, we understand that members of powerful groups may decide on the possible discourse, genres, speech, or acts on occasion. For example, a teacher or judge may require a direct answer from a learner or suspect, and not a personal story or an argument. Therefore, more critically, we may examine how powerful speakers may abuse their power in such situations. Another example is where the teacher uses a stick or pipe to force learners to speak the truth.

According to Gale, (2010), all levels and situations of context, text, and talk can be controlled by powerful speakers and such power may be abused at the expense of other participants. Talk and text do not always or directly enact or embody overall power relations between groups. It is always the context that may interfere, reinforce, or transform such relationships. The theory of the relationship between discourse and social inequality outlined above allows us to examine and evaluate contemporary research that is carried out in the framework of critical discourse analysis. Most discourse studies that deal with any aspect of power, domination, and social inequality have not been explicitly conducted under the label of CDA. To fill this gap, my autoethnographic study uses CDA to analyse the data looking at the use of language from the data that has been generated.

(e) *Discourse and power*

Fairclough (2013a) states that some researchers analyse ways power and domination in areas of gender, race, media, politics, and other social domains are expressed, enacted, and reproduced by text and talk. This suggests that there are many areas and domains that researchers can choose to explore while using the CDA. However, in my study, I looked at language discourse and power as I explored my experiences of learning English as a second language. Language is socially constitutive and socially formed; thus, language use constitutes social identities, social relations, and systems of knowledge and belief (Parker, 2002).

2.8.2 The journey of the thematic data analysis

Braun and Clarke (2006) define thematic data analysis as a method that helps to identify, analyse, and report themes within the data. It is a method that reports meanings, experiences as well as the reality of participants, it also examines how meanings, realities, and experiences occur. It is a method that works both to reflect reality and also to unpack the surface of reality (Braun & Clarke, 2012). Furthermore, thematic analysis can also provide a more detailed account of one particular theme or the groups of themes that are within the data that has been generated (Braun & Clarke, 2012). I adopted a thematic analysis in line with the narrative autoethnographic research employed in the study. I wrote an autobiography of my teaching and learning experiences in English grammar.

The data received from participants form part of themes that support the ideas that I listed in my reflection. Also, considering that this is an autobiographic study, it is a story that reveals the reality of my experience. Thematic analysis can also be referred to as inductive analysis where the data are coded without trying to fit them into an existing framework or theory, it is data-driven as the themes come from the data that has been generated. Bertram and Christiansen (2014) describe qualitative inductive data analysis as an approach that starts with raw data that has been generated and thereafter begins to detect patterns in the data and formulate themes that we can explore, which might end up developing general conclusions and theories. The advantage is that the researcher can code individual extracts of data in as many different themes as possible that may be coded many times.

In contrast to inductive analysis, deductive analysis works from the general to the specific, deductive reasoning starts with the general and ends with the more specific (Soiferman, 2010). This means that the researcher uses a certain theory that already has concepts and analyses his/her data and then in the process begins to be specific. The deductive analysis did not work for me because this is an autoethnographic study wherein I worked with storytelling where the data was socially constructed, and participant responses were important in the process of analysis. Therefore, in this study, I adopted inductive reasoning which starts from the specific to general, meaning that themes will be generated from raw data, I decided to allow the raw data to speak by itself.

Information that is generated through interviews and focus groups needs to be summarised and described further. Braun and Clarke (2012) list steps that may be used by qualitative researchers during the data analysis process. These steps are; transcription, familiarisation with the data, organisation, and indexing of data, coding, anonymising of the sensitive data, identification of themes, refinement of themes, development of the theory, and lastly, report writing including excerpts from the original data

On the other hand, Creswell and Creswell (2005) as cited by Soiferman (2010) also outline six qualitative analysis steps that could be followed by the researcher in his/her data analysis process. These steps include generating a large, consolidated picture of the raw data. Secondly, analysing data during the data generation process.

Thirdly, the researcher also moves back and forth between collecting data and analysing, fourthly, qualitative researchers analyse their data by reading it over several times and conducting an analysis each time. Fifthly, analysis comes before data generation, and lastly, the researcher makes personal assessments of the data descriptively.

I decided to arrange the steps of my data analysis process in a way that suits the nature of my data and these stages include, familiarisation with the data, collating the codes into essentialal themes, searching for the themes from codes, identification of the themes, reviewing themes and lastly report writing that included excerpts of the original data and quotations from the interviews.

I adopted six steps that I took from different studies and organised them in a way that worked for my study (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2012; Lacey & Luff, 2001). The first step for me was to familiarise myself with the data that I had gathered. To action the first phase, I transcribed the data, which consisted of conversations with my peers, sister, and critical friends. I also read and re-read, noting down all the ideas that came up from conversations. My main data source was my autobiography/reflective diary which focused on my experience in learning English as a second language. As a way of familiarising myself with the data, I created codes that I extracted from tables that I made to identify recurring categories.

In the second phase, I collated codes into potential themes and gathered all categories that came from codes that were relevant to potential themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Visual representations assisted with sorting out different codes into themes.

In this case, I did that by using mind maps as well as tables. This assisted me in gathering similar ideas from different participants, looking at the number of times each code appeared from the raw data. The third phase was where I searched for themes from codes that would have been created in phase two (Braun & Clarke, 2012). By looking at these codes, I was able to see some possible themes when I went through the tables I created and counted the number of times each code appeared to see if it was qualified to be a theme. Those that did not qualify to be themes were included as subthemes under main themes. I wrote down words and phrases that kept on appearing so that I would easily remember them in the next phase.

The fourth phase was to identify the themes, during this stage, I carefully went through transcriptions and the codes that I had extracted from the data in the previous stage. I also identified themes or emergent concepts and engaged in re-coding to develop more well-defined categories. This helped me to reconsider recurring concepts that I later identified as themes because I had to count how many times each concept appeared in conversations. I also used my reflective diary as the first point of contact, where concepts are first found, and then participants just added in support to what is in the reflective diary. Furthermore, I also looked through my list of codes and identified those that would inform different categories in my study. I also looked back through the interviews and saw if there were any other references that I had missed (Braun & Clarke, 2012).

The fifth phase was reviewing themes where I checked if the themes worked with coded extracts as well as the entire data set which meant deciding which themes related and linked to extracts that were coded earlier in phase two. After I went through the themes I had previously created, to check if some were like one another or if some did not have enough data, I would consider making them single themes. In the case where I noticed that some themes were too wide and rich, (consisting of different ideas that I had stated in my reflective autobiographical story), I then broke them into separate themes. Braun and Clarke (2012) stated that the researcher is expected to go through the entire data set for two reasons, first, to determine if themes worked with the data set, and second, to code any additional data-written themes that were inserted during earlier stages of coding.

In the last and sixth phases, I produced a report where I related the analysis to critical research questions as well as the literature that I had explored in the study. The final step was the write-up step which Braun and Clarke (2006) state includes extracts and provides an interesting account of the story the data tells.

2.9 Research challenges

The first challenge I faced in my study was that it took me and my supervisor a long time to settle on a topic and an appropriate methodology, as a result, it was a frustrating experience. I even had to apply for ethical clearance twice after we decided to change the topic, which delayed the study, I was not able to finish in three years which is the minimum time prescribed.

I also spent time writing and re-writing my autobiographical story, I would write and send it to my supervisor, but I would know something was missing and my supervisor saw it too. My supervisor then suggested I read Nash (2019) titled *Liberating scholarly writing: The power of personal narrative*. I read about the 10 guidelines that one needs to follow to have a rich story. After a detailed reading of the book, I made sure I rewrote my story using the guidelines.

Something that concerned me about this type of research is that it gets personal. When my supervisor suggested that we should go this route, I did not want to because I felt like I would be forced to share experiences I am not proud of with the public. Initially, I wanted to study English second language but later realised that I needed to know myself and understand my experiences before I could move to the next step. It was a big challenge for me to relive past experiences because incidents that took place when I was trying to learn English as a second language were not pleasant, so I buried them and moved on with my life. Therefore, it was a challenge to go back to them and look at each experience and how it influenced my learning of English as a second language. This is because I felt like I was reliving a past I did not even want to remember. Such incidents affected my emotions in different ways because I started to think about all the people who hurt me during that time. In line with this, Nelson and Fivush (2020) add that the process of writing an autobiographical story in an auto-ethnographic study may make researchers feel emotional about some of the experiences they discuss in their stories.

At the beginning of the study, it took me some time to understand how auto-ethnography works. When I did literature a search on the topic, it was difficult to find a similar study. This meant that I struggled for a long time and even generated data that I ended up not using because it was not needed anymore looking at the nature of my study. It was later when I realised that all of the data needed to come from me and my experiences, then other people like participants and critical friends extended what I had written. I had to find a way to progress with my studies and it was

very stressful. Although auto-ethnography belongs to the family of reflective research methods alongside self-study and narrative inquiry, its distinctive and unique nature demanded a deeper understanding of the approach, which further complicated the research process.

Another challenge I had with this study is that some of my critical friends and participants took too long to respond whenever I sent them something that I needed input on, that was very frustrating. Considering that they were participating voluntarily in the study, I needed to be patient and accommodate them. I also had to reckon with the fact that I had to write about my dad, who passed away in 2012 after being absent from my life for a long time. Writing about him from the beginning when he was still with us was very hard. I remembered how happy we used to be as a family until he left, and things started to change. It was very hard and challenging in the family. Also, the fact that he died after I had not seen him for many years hurt me a lot, I had to recall all that happened when he was there and in his absence. It was not an easy study to conduct, but it was cathartic for me.

2.10 Conclusion

Chapter two offered an in-depth look at how my autoethnographic research process unfolded. I explained my choice of an auto-ethnography research methodology. I discussed briefly how I plan to use letter writing to express emotionality in the research. I also discussed people who participated in the study (myself, my peers) and my critical friends. Moreover, I clarified how data were generated using diverse research methods. I also addressed ethical issues and validity. Furthermore, I explained how I addressed particular research challenges. I then described how data was analysed in this study. I then addressed ethical issues and trustworthiness. In the next chapter, I discuss my memories of learning English as a second language through the autobiographical story where I used one of the Bible characters, Joseph as a metaphor. I present a measure of my letters and my story.

CHAPTER 3 : MEMORIES OF MY LEARNING OF ENGLISH SECOND LANGUAGE

3.1 Introduction

In chapter two I presented the methodology employed to conduct the research and the people who participated in the study. I also clarified how data was collected using a variety of research methods, and ethical and validity issues were addressed. Furthermore, methods used to analyse data and the process followed to validate the results through trustworthiness, as well as issues dealing with ethics were also presented. I also include how I addressed challenges encountered when conducting the study. In writing Chapter Three, I was responding to my first research question: *What are my experiences of learning English as a second language?* My autobiographical story which is represented in this chapter is associated with one of my favorite Bible characters, Joseph found in the book of Genesis. I used the King James Version (KJV) of the Bible, I gave background information about him in the previous chapter, refer to pages 37 and 38. When I looked at my experiences of learning English as a second language, I noticed similarities between my story and the life of Joseph from childhood until adulthood. I also discussed my letter-writing process to express emotionality in research.

I started writing my autobiographical story where I began to learn English in school. I noticed that it did not help me as there was no focus and proper presentation of my experiences. The initial story I composed focused on how I was not properly taught English grammar both in high school and at university, I also noticed that I was just focused on playing a ‘blame game’ on who was responsible for the challenges I encountered. I was not looking at myself critically. As a result, I struggled to start my story, what I wrote initially seemed to me to be shallow and uninteresting. I remembered that Canagarajah (2012) mentioned that auto-ethnographers need to demonstrate creativity in their stories to stir interest in the readers. I then started thinking about the unique way of writing to get the English second language teachers interested in my story. I, therefore, kept asking myself how I could be creative in the presentation of my experiences. I kept reading and drafting some ideas until I stumbled upon Nash (2019) titled *Liberating scholarly writing: The*

power of personal narrative which emphasised that a good autobiographical story should be narrative and should follow a certain pattern.

I then asked myself what interests me and what I would like to explore that can best present my experiences. I then started reading the story of Joseph once again and refreshed my memory of it. While reading, I realised that his life experiences were fraught with challenges similar to my journey, and I decided to juxtapose the two stories. I used Joseph's story to write and expand on my experiences of learning the language. I started arranging how I would write it in a narrative style, I then compiled incidents that would fit in the first aspect of the setting, the aspect of characters, plot, conflict, climax, and resolution. I then started writing the first part of my story and I linked it to Joseph's story which was the setting and continued to other sections of the narrative like that. The reason why I decided to use the Bible character Joseph to explain my story is that I see a lot of similarities between his life story and mine from a young age to adulthood. His character is interesting to me because he faced so many challenges in his life from a young age but in the end, he succeeded. Through the hardships he faced, he did not give up but held on until the time came for him to reach the top as predicted in his dreams (see chapter two for a detailed explanation of how I plan to use his life to juxtapose with my experiences of learning English second language. I look at my experiences the same way, from childhood until now, the difference is that it is through the lens of learning English as a second language.

In this chapter, the tone is more informal because it is in keeping with the narrative and reflective nature of my study. The critical friends' feedback is based on the verbatim transcripts of the interviews.

3.2 An account of my journey of learning English as a second language: The use of the character of Joseph from Genesis chapters 37, 39, 40-41,42-43, 44,45 and 47

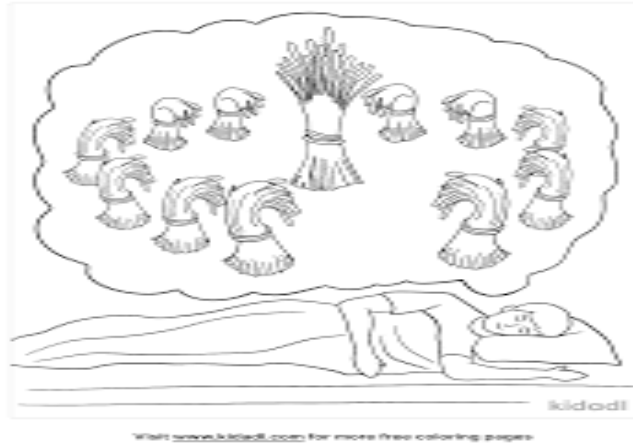


Figure 3.1 A picture that shows Joseph's first dream

Setting: Home

I originally come from a family of four, being the second born of my parents. I was born in a small town called High-Flats on the South Coast of Kwa-Zulu Natal in South Africa. My dad was illiterate, my mum did grade 7 as the last grade and went to work at a young age. I am sure that fellow learners who came from different contexts better than mine and who came from families where there are literate people had better chances of learning English and even occasionally using it at home. I am saying this because I noticed the way they spoke the language and used it comfortably as their own when we met in varsity. My dad left us when I was five years old, thus my mother took the initiative to raise us alone. From 0 to 6 years old, I was a very active child who liked playing a lot with my neighbourhood friends. I would go from morning till afternoon playing with my friends. So, as you might have guessed, we played in Zulu as that is our mother tongue. At that time from 1994 to 1998, I had not seen anyone in our community who would speak any other language other than IsiZulu.

EXTRACT 3.1. WHO IS ANDILE?

In addition to the above extract, I noted in my story that I was born in St. Faith's, high flats on the South Coast of KwaZulu-Natal province, where I went to primary school and did grades 1 to 4. I am the second of four siblings and was always interested in education. Before I started school, my aunt offered evening lessons for all the children in my household, I joined even though I was regarded as young. I liked and enjoyed the lessons to the point that I used to look forward to the

evenings. All my cousins hated the lessons because they used to cry whenever we had to attend classes. I was the only one who enjoyed the sessions, I did very well and understood what my aunt was teaching. When I was still too young to attend school, I used to cry when others went to school. My mother decided to ask the grade 1 teacher to accommodate me in her class, surprisingly, I understood everything that the teacher taught in the classroom.

As discussed in my story and the setting of my family,

The bible character Joseph was the 11th of the 12 sons of his Father Jacob from the land of Canaan. His brothers were working in their father's field in a far place. Joseph being a respectful and good boy, was their father's favourite to the point that on his 17th birthday, the father gave him a beautiful coat of many colours. As a result of that, his brothers hated Joseph as they were jealous of him being the father's favorite, it got even worse when he was given a coat of many colors as a gift. Joseph had a dream about sheep and that all the brother's sheep bowing down to his. He told the dream to one of his brothers Simeon who was bitter at Joseph and said to him mockingly, "Keep dreaming, you think we will bow to you"? and everyone did not like that (Genesis 37: 3-9 KJV).

In my case, although I did not have a specific dream as Joseph did, I knew I was going somewhere, and I was passionate about studying and enjoyed it. I was mistreated because of that by my cousins. They noticed that I had a passion and ambition, from the time we started having family literacy sessions with my aunt, they saw that I was enthusiastic to attend each session and I was the only one who was able to recall most of the things that were taught. Moreover, when I started school, they noticed that I used to have stars in my books which symbolised excellence in each activity that we did in class. The below extract gives details of how I was treated by my extended family members:

(a) Characters- rejection

There was my grandmother, my aunt (mom's younger sister) who used to teach us basic language literacy. My cousins according to their age (Nosphiwe, Nomvuselelo, Phumlile, and Neliswa) came after Mbali, and my younger sister Khulisile. My first three cousins did not like me because I was doing better than them in school, although my mother was not working and I did not have a father. Whenever we went to the bush to fetch wood, they would beat me and take the wood that I worked hard for just because they wanted to hurt me. The most painful thing is that my grandmother used to side with them whenever they did anything to me and my sister, that is how we were treated. At that time because my mother was not working, we did not even have money to buy exercise book covers, they on the other side had everything, stationery, and new school uniforms every year. Sharing this story makes me appreciate those evening lessons with my aunt, at that time I did not realise the impact they would have on my life. I am also just realising that by the way from a very tender age, I always had an interest in learning, but of course, different factors influenced the challenges that I faced and that I continue to face today. As much as I did not have fancy book covers when one opened my exercise books, they would see comments: like "*excellent and very good*". Even now I am the most educated among all of them, a lot of them did not finish grade 12 even though they had the privilege of having working parents. My situation did not hinder me from performing well in school. Sometimes together with the grandmother, they would send us to the river while they ate food in our absence. When we come back the food will be finished.

EXTRACT 3.2. TREATMENT FROM EXTENDED FAMILY MEMBERS

Concerning the extract from my story above, like Joseph, my cousins became my enemies just because I liked learning and I was enthusiastic and positive about knowledge. Like me, his brothers hated him because he was passionate and had goals that he wanted to achieve. He was later sold and went through a hard time as a slave but that did not hinder him, he achieved success regardless.

In obedience to the father's command to go and check on his brothers, Joseph went to the field where his brothers were working. His brothers' names were Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Dan, Naphtali, Gad, Asher, Issachar, Zebulun, and Benjamin the last born who was at home with his father. When Joseph was approaching his brothers, they saw him and

started to talk about him. One of the brothers said ‘Here comes a dreamer and they started planning how they would kill him’ as they hated him and the fact that the dreams meant he was going to reign over them. Reuben, the eldest brother rejected the idea of killing their brother, knowing that the rest of the brothers were angry, he said they should put him in a ditch which they did. However, later Levi suggested that he should be sold as a slave to the Egyptians so that instead of killing him they sell him to make some money for themselves, and they did.

(b) Plot-The process of achieving the goal

When I got to the new school in Pietermaritzburg after we had registered and waited for schools to resume for grade five. There was this girl who was our neighbour, my sister and I were in the same class with. She used to come to our house and start telling us that in grade 5, there was a Mr. Shelembe who taught English, and he used to beat children who did not understand English. I was so frightened because I had never been taught by a male before, in fact in my previous school we only had female teachers. So, I was so afraid for 2 reasons, first, I would be taught by a male, and I feared males, let alone being taught by him. Secondly, the girl told us that he always held a pipe in his hand and would beat you if you did not know the answer to his questions. As a result, when schools finally resumed, I was afraid to the point that I was shaking in the school assembly and when they introduced all the teachers to us, I was filled with fear when I heard his name. The extract below captures my feelings of fear.

When schools finally resumed, I was afraid to the point that I was shaking in the school assembly, they introduced all the teachers to us when I heard his name I was finished with fear. Now that I think about it, this whole idea of having to fear male teachers comes from cultural and family backgrounds because I remember when I was young. When as a kid you do something naughty, the mother would say I will report you to your dad and fear comes in. As a result, I saw men as people who beat very well and I was not comfortable around them, it got even worse that I was in a strange environment and I had to face a male teacher. When I first got to that school, you could tell that I was so intimidated by the environment, having to see many children in one school and serious teachers. During breaks, I did not play with anyone, I just used to stand in one spot with my sister. To be honest, there was not much playing during breaks, learners used to go and buy

food and eat together and just discuss. When his (Mr. Shelembe's) time came, he entered the class started introducing himself, and told us that he was going to teach us English. I was shaking and it was so obvious that I even wanted to cry, he asked all of us to introduce ourselves, and when it was my turn my voice was shaking and he even made a comment that he did not know my surname and where was I coming from, I told him.

EXTRACT 3.3. INITIAL EXPERIENCE IN A NEW SCHOOL

The following day he came to class and started teaching natural sciences. He was teaching about water, and he started by asking, "What is water?", unfortunately, I did not know what water in English was. Some learners raised their hands and started giving definitions like, "Water is a clear liquid..." and there I was sitting not even knowing what water was in Zulu. He saw that I was confused and pointed at me and asked me what water was, I pretended as if I was looking somewhere, and he told me that I was looking somewhere else, and all the eyes were on me. I just kept quiet and looked down. He then said I should stand up, I did, and he said, "*Look at a grade 5 learner who does not know what water is, did you even go through grade 4*"? I was embarrassed when the whole class started to laugh at me after he said that.

There was a poem that he taught when he came to class during the English period, the title of that poem was "*I Wonder*". When he mentioned the title of the poem, learners who did their grade four in that school began to recite it and the teacher was so happy and commended them. He told them to stand up so that we could see them and clap for them, then he said, "*See children who did grade 4, very good Nokulunga, well done Nhlakanipho*" and I was just looking at how learners fluently recited an English poem without any struggle. In my mind, I was feeling lost, surprised, and challenged at the same time when I witnessed that, which made me determined to aspire for such compliments. Honestly, after hearing him say that, and seeing how he praised and commended them for speaking English well, I made up my mind that I was going to be one of those getting compliments in the following year. I already knew at the back of my mind that I was going to have to repeat that grade, so I was going to have enough time to learn this poem, memorise it, and be able to recite it. Other learners from other classes who did not know me started pointing at me and calling me "*a girl who does not know even 123*". That made me think that I was useless, it seemed like every learner was mocking me, just because I did not know the English word 'water'. I hated going to school because of all these experiences but deep down I knew that I liked learning, I only

hated the school environment. I felt threatened, fearful, and intimidated as I realised that I did not understand much English. I used to struggle a lot when there was a spelling exercise that was given by the teacher because I did not know the spelling of most words. There was a day when my teacher gave us words that we needed to spell in our books, the first word was “*teacher*,” and the teacher would give a word, and go around to mark it before moving on to the next one.

Joseph faced so many things after he was sold as I note:

After his brothers sold him as a slave to the land of Egypt, he was bought by a rich man whom he served faithfully in his house. Unfortunately, the master traveled, and Joseph was left with the master's wife who wanted to force him to sleep with him, but Joseph did not want to do that because he was a man of integrity. The wife kept pestering him to yield but he would not yield until she decided to catch him with his coat, and he decided to flee. Unfortunately, the woman cried and accused Joseph of wanting to rape her and the master was angry and put Joseph into prison. So, he was arrested for something he did not do, and he stayed in prison until he was released. After he was released he was hired to work for the president of the country and later he became a prime minister. All the dreams that he had when he was young took a long time to come to pass, he had to pass unpleasant experiences and later in life, they came to pass. The story can be found in (Genesis 39-40).

Just like Joseph who was sent to Egypt to be a slave in a strange land, when I relocated from our village to Pietermaritzburg, everything felt strange and new, it was not easy to adjust to the new environment. I faced some difficulties, especially with my English in the classroom and it took a while for me to adjust and understand things that were taught. Just as I explained, being in the school for the first time made me feel as if I had been thrown into a bush, and it was difficult to figure out how I was going to survive in the new place.

(c) Conflict- difficulties in a strange land

Firstly, I had an *internal conflict* because, with all that was going on, I had many thoughts such as should I drop out of school because of the English teacher I was afraid of who usually made nasty comments about my poor English. These thoughts were going on in my mind every night when everyone was sleeping: Should I just change school because I fear this teacher? If I change where will I go because other schools are far away? Even if I change to another school, my mom is not

working, who will pay my school fees because in this school we do not pay anything? How will my siblings and cousins look at me If I drop out of school at such a young age? My mother would not agree. Funny enough, I never told anyone about the thoughts I used to have at that time. When it was a Friday, I used to be happy knowing that I was not going to school the following day to face that teacher. I saw going to school as a burden, I hated it passionately, but I loved learning, I just hated going to school and there was no way that I would learn without being in school. I imagine that I felt like Joseph in the passage below

When Joseph was taken to Egypt, I can imagine that he might have been having so many thoughts running through his mind if he was not going to be killed or abused in that land and how was he going to survive in that foreign land. When they arrived, he was afraid to see a crowd of people who were his potential buyers. This was an internal conflict going on in his mind as he was wondering what would become of him. Fortunately, they later sold him to a rich Potiphar who admired Joseph a lot. Thankfully, he found favor in the eyes of Potiphar (Genesis 39).

Secondly, I also had an *external conflict*- the new environment was a threat to me, I felt like I was thrown into a big sea, and I had to find my way out. The environment was strange to me, having to interact with a crowd of learners every day was a big problem for me because, in my previous school, there were only a few of us, and as a small community we knew every family. I also struggled with the fact that I had to be taught by male teachers, I did not even know a male could be a teacher because, in my previous primary school, all my teachers were females, and to make things worse there were no males in our home, we were all females. Another conflict was between myself and Mr. Shelembe, the English teacher, he noticed that every time he taught, I would shake, that is how scared I was of him. It was even difficult to concentrate during his class because of the fear I had, I even saw him struggling as a boy just because he did not keep his exercise book well, and I pitied the boy. For me, that was an even worse case because I saw him as someone who had anger issues. Another conflict was between myself and my classmates; they bullied me a lot because I was new in the school, but mostly because Mr. Shelembe's comments towards me made them look down upon me. During the break, they used to take my food, beat me, and laugh at me. Some would take my desk and chairs, and a lot happened. There was also conflict between me and other teachers as I did not read their notes, not knowing that we wrote notes to be read as it was

my first time having to write notes. Bridging the gap from my previous school to the new one was a challenge that took a long to overcome, but in the end, I was grateful for everything I went through. The below shows Joseph's external conflict as found in 39 to 40 chapters of the KJV Bible.

Joseph faced external conflict with the wife of his master and when he came back had a conflict with him and ended up in prison. His fellow prisoners were in prison but God gave him favor before the ruler of the prison, after interpreting the dream he got released (Genesis 39-40).

(d) Climax- servanthood

Grade five is not perceived to be a difficult grade such as grade nine, but because I was trying to bridge the gap between my previous school and the new one, and all the other problems I encountered in the new school, I experienced real hardships in that grade. Questions that were going on in my mind were, 'Was I going to make it and pass grade five to be promoted to the next class?' Was this the end of my education journey? Did I see a possibility to proceed to the next classes or did I just need to forget and give up my education at that time? At the end of that year, everyone including my aunties, cousins, and neighbours were looking forward to seeing if I would go back to school or not.

The answer was a big 'No', seeing that my sister passed and went to the next grade I needed to go back to school and find a way to master the things we did in the previous year so that I would not have problems again that year. I was also telling myself that in the following year, everything was under my control, to decide if I would succeed or fail. I gathered strength from the fact that my elder sister had been promoted to the next class, I needed to man up and face challenges with a positive mind.

As I stated, the climax of my story is when I was going through a period of not knowing whether I was going to scale through grade five and continue school or drop out in grade five.

In Joseph's life, we see the climax when the brothers plan to kill him, as readers we were wondering if that was the end of his life or not. Even after they had decided to put him in a ditch, as readers we find ourselves wondering if he was going to survive that and who was

going to help him out of that ditch. He was later sold, 'How was he going to make it in a foreign land knowing no one was there?' (Genesis 37).

I had no choice other than to be strong and swim along with others. I decided to work diligently and very hard so that I could pass the grade without any hindrance. I intentionally sought help from neighbors with homework and at the end of the year, finally, I got promoted to the next grade very cleanly.

This part reminded me of the bible verse that says, *"I have set before you, life and death, therefore choose life"* (Deuteronomy 30: 19). In this case whether I was going to press forward and work towards passing this grade or just drop out, it was going to be my choice. That decision would have to come from me, whether things turned out, for better or worse I would only have myself to blame or appreciate. At that time, I was just ten years turning eleven, if I decided to drop out, it would have been a personal decision having considered everything that was going on around me at that time. My mother wanted us to finish school and be successful in life, although I had seen children younger than me in our community refusing to go to school, I decided that I was going to continue but do things better this time around and it worked. I can say that indeed one's future lies in their hands, not someone else's.

(e) Resolution-palace

When I got to grade six, I had already learned from the previous grade that for me to pass very well, I needed to work hard and be intentional about my studies. In grade six, I had a passionate English teacher who exposed us to English writing by encouraging every learner to write daily journals about their activities each day. In the class of sixty learners, I used to be among the few who were diligent and very consistent in writing in my diary. Every evening I would ask for help on words I did not know from my elder sister and with that, I was able to maintain my writing, that exercise alone helped me to develop my understanding of English and writing skills. In grade six I worked extremely hard to the point that I was consistent with my daily journal, and I became my English teacher's favorite girl in the class. She used to make encouraging comments to the rest of the class about me like *"Look at Andile, a very good and hard-working girl, she does not skip her daily writing, why don't you learn from her?"*. For the first time in my life achievements were recognised. To be honest, such comments used to encourage me to do even more. We did prepared

and unprepared speeches and comprehension, I was not the best in English but I worked very hard to understand and follow the teacher's lesson. I improved a lot during that time. The fact that I struggled when I was in grade five did not mean that I was a weak learner, but that I needed to focus and work extra hard. In grade seven, I was also taught English by the same teacher, so things were not that hard, I just needed to work harder because the higher you advance in grades, the greater the work becomes, and so on.

Similar to my case, when Joseph arrived in Egypt, we see that he found favor in the eyes of Potiphar because he worked hard and was diligent in his work as a servant. This is the same way I found favor in the eyes of my grade 6 English teacher Ms. Masondo because of my diligence hard work and good behavior. Potiphar was so impressed with Joseph's work that he put him in charge of his belongings in the whole house. Unfortunately, Potiphar's wife told lies against him that led him to get arrested. Even when he was in prison, he found favor in the eyes of the head of the prison which led him to be released and interpreted Pharaoh's dream and later because of assistance to the king of Egypt. He ended up at a palace, respected and honored by the citizens of Egypt. The journey was not easy for him but at last, it ended well. Even his brothers who sold him bowed down to him asking for food because there was a famine in their land. The things he saw in his dreams when he was young later came to pass (Genesis 39, 40-45).

I also used a letter-writing strategy to answer the first question as I wrote two letters to my grade five English teacher and my dad because the experiences I had with them had a profound impact on my learning of English as a second language. The reason for writing these letters was to express the emotionality of the research and also to use this study as a process of healing. The extract below presents some parts of the letter to my English teacher.

You asked me about the school we were in, and I told you everything and how it was a disadvantageous rural school which I believe should not have been a surprise for you to see us lacking some English knowledge. I thought opening up to you about our previous school would make you even more understanding and patient and even for you to go the extra mile to see how you can help us cope in your class. I expected that you would show concern and be more inclusive in your class. Unfortunately, you are the one who referred to us as kids who did not do grade 4 in

front of everyone in the class, when you gave us spelling exercises and we got some words wrong, you would broadcast to the whole class that we failed to spell simple English words. I understand that we were expected to know some things to an extent at that grade, but I do not think there was a need for you to tell the whole class that we did not know those words as that embarrassed us even to the point of being taken for granted by other learners. You told my sister that even a grade R learner would know better than her and all other shameful things to us, a good teacher would not say all those things but find ways to help the kids. After they recited a poem or answered a question, you made statements like “See kids who did grade 4”. That statement alone implied that my sister and I did not do grade four which was an assumption. You even said they should stand on the desks so that everyone will see them. Whenever they raised their hand and or answered any question in class you used statements like “very good, excellent, good girl” which is not bad but compared to what you did to us, you made it look like we were hopeless and very dumb. You make it look like knowing English is equal to wrong intelligence, English is not a measure of intelligence.

You used to beat us with a pipe just because we did not have an answer for you, I do not think that was fair because when someone does not know something it means he/she is ignorant and needs to be taught or learnt but what you used to do was to beat us because we got some English words wrong. You already knew that my sister had a hearing problem but you used to beat her for not hearing what you said that was very wicked of you. You used to say we should stand up so that other kids would see us and that we did not know simple words and you used to say in front of the class that we will fail grade 5, we should just try next year. You made us respond to the questions we did not know just because you wanted to show us off in front of the class. Your attitude towards us made other kids in the class take us for granted, you said things that made them laugh at us and even told us that we knew nothing and we were dumb girls. I am very sure that even though we lacked English knowledge if your attitude towards us was not that ill, those learners would not have taken us for granted. We were quiet in class and never participated because you always held the pipe in your hands and we were afraid that you would beat us, we also lacked confidence and you used that to say. “There are some people that I don’t even know their voices, you will even have a smelling mouth, say something” All this was rude and made other kids laugh at us. Because of all the things you used to do in class learners told other kids in other grades and it was like

almost all the school knew about the 2 dumb girls. We did not even play with other kids during breaks because they isolated themselves from us because of the stigma you gave us “girls who do not know even 123”, you made our lives miserable, and honestly, I hated you for that.

EXTRACT 3.4. DEAR TONENTOR

The analysis of this letter is done towards the end of this chapter where I expand on the emotionality of the letters with the help of my critical friends. I reflected on what I learned from the whole process. Below is a short extract of the letter I wrote to my Dad as one of the people whose actions influenced my learning of English as a second language.

My mother had just given birth for God’s sake, and you left her in that state and you knew exactly that you were the breadwinner in our family, my mother was a full-time housewife. We were in a village; she had just given birth and there was no food anymore at home. If you can imagine the kind of stress you caused in my mother’s life because we were all young and needed food. How do you think she was going to survive with the kids in the first place when you decided to leave us? Because we lacked food and as young kids, we could not do without it, my mother decided to go back to her mother’s house. At that time, I was only five years old and my elder sister was seven years old. The following year I had to start school, hence I needed a new uniform and stationery, my sister had to start a new school too so we needed several things to enter school.

Then I started school but deep down I also wanted a new school uniform being my first time in school I understood the situation and acknowledged that my mother had no other choice since she was not working and not educated in the village for that matter. In my grandmother’s place, things were not nice at all as my mother was mocked by almost everyone in the community because of her situation and she was abandoned by her husband with children. Fortunately, my sister and I were brilliant in school so we passed each grade and made progress but my mother had to start selling clothes and meat just to have a small income for us to survive because her goal was to build her own house close to my grandmother’s place. After all, we received unfair treatment from my grandmother and my cousins. When I look at all these things, they were not necessary as you were alive. If you were dead, it would have been a different story but being alive and you decided to be absent from your family’s life. My grandmother used to abuse us

we would go to the river without eating and fetch water to fill big containers just me and my sister. Other cousins were not doing anything because their parents were working and had money. It was so painful because even in winter we would go in very cold weather and fetch water and we had no choice but to do that because if not, we would not get food in the evening. When people saw you in Durban, they used to tell my mom in the village and you would complain that you were not working and so did not have money to come back home, even though she did not have a proper job, my mother tried to send you money to say at least come home and let us be together as a family, you would take the money and use it God knows for what. What a nerve! Using your wife's money that you abandoned with children.

EXTRACT 3.5. HEARTBROKEN

In an attempt to answer the first question, I also discuss how I learned some English vocabulary through play as a child. I also discuss how incidental learning played a role in my learning of English as a second language. The extract below gives a summary of the plays that led to some of my learning of English words.

At this stage of my life as a child, I used to play mostly in IsiZulu games such as umasgcozi (family play), 3 tins and robe, umacashelana (hide and seek) the songs that we used to play such games were mostly in Zulu. The reason why I played mostly in isiZulu is because of our environment and the people around me at that time.

The only time I remember we said some English words was when we played the jumping robe, and we sang the months of the year in English. At that time, I did not know them in English but only in Zulu, and when we sang them, I became so happy that I knew them in English. For that play specifically, we were with the kids that were in higher classes and then us that is why we had some little English there and them. Another play that I remember in English was when I was in grade 1 my aunt was teaching us different parts of the body in isiZulu through a song, and she also made us say it in English. For example, "*head and shoulders, knees and toes, knees and toes, knees and toes.*" That was the first time I knew what these parts of the body were in English, and I made sure I did not forget it because I was too happy to have known the parts of the body in English and not have to forget again and be confused when we sing the song in the future. Then later in the next grades, it was taken further by my teachers to properly teach all the parts of the human boy and at that time I remembered some of the body parts that we sang

about when my aunt taught us as children in the informal way. We sang this in the form of a playful way and it was so interesting.

Another incident that I remember was when we were playing the jumping robe with elder kids, and we sang the months of the year in Zulu. They started singing them in English and it was the first time hearing them in English. I was so happy, and I kept singing them in English so that I would not forget, in school, we later learned the months of the year in English, and for me, it was like a recap because I had already known them.

EXTRACT 3.6. LEARNING THROUGH PLAY

3.3 Letter-writing and emotionality in research

According to Camiciotti (2014), letters are regarded as important data for different purposes or any type of investigation. Letter writing has been used as a qualitative method for self-reflection to generate data that is used for oneself and lived experiences.

This suggests that letters can be used effectively to achieve certain goals as they are taken as valuable data for reflexive and socio-linguistic research. In line with this, Pithouse-Morgan et al. (2012) note that emotionality in social science research draws attention to the importance of the researchers' self-reflexive inquiry into the relationship between research and emotions. This relationship can include emotional relations from different forms; the emotional relationship between the researcher and the researched, the emotional impact of the research on the researcher and the researched, also the emotional impact between the researcher and the researched on the research process (Pithouse-Morgan et al. 2012). This suggests that the research process can stir up emotions in different ways and in different people who are involved in the research process. Therefore, letter writing helps to express such emotions. In my research, being a self-reflexive study, I look at the emotional impact of the research on me. Furthermore, my research looks at my learning experiences of English as a second language. There are emotional and painful experiences that I had to write about.

3.3.1 Phase one: What is the general use of letters in self-reflexive research

To do this, I first wrote down the questions I will be trying to answer through letter writing as a guide using a template adopted from Pithouse-Morgan et al. (2012) study on emotionality and

research. I also emailed letters to one of my critical friends to read and comment on the level of emotionality each letter carried, and if and how the process of letter writing yielded any positive output. I did this to get her input and learn from her if there is any question she has that can prompt more information from me so that I can consider it and add more information.

The questions below are taken from Pithouse-Morgan et al. (2012) to guide me as a researcher as I explore emotionality in research.

- What is the personal and scholarly value of paying attention to my emotions and then generating and interpreting research data in my learning experiences of English as a second language?
- How might an increased awareness of the emotional dimension of such research enhance the preparation of more novice researchers?
- In what way has this letter-writing process helped me to communicate my learning experience of English as a second language?

3.3.2 Phase two: Letter writing process

The questions below are there to guide my letter-writing process. As I was writing the letters, I had these questions in mind (Pithouse-Morgan et al. (2012)

- Describe emotionally challenging experiences I encountered while learning English as a second language.
- Explain how those experiences have made me feel.
- Discuss what I have learned about myself as a researcher by revisiting and engaging with all these experiences.
- What have I learned about my research topic by revisiting and engaging with all these experiences?

3.3.3 Phase three: Writing a reflection on the letter-writing process

Stage three was to write a reflection on how I felt while writing the letters, to do that I decided to answer these guideline questions.

- Explain how I experienced the process of thinking and writing my letters

- Talk about interconnecting with the previous emotional experience that I might not have thought about in a long time or even recognised as an emotional experience at the time.
- Talk about the embodiment of emotions and reliving such emotional experiences.
- How long did thinking and writing about the letters take me?
- How slow or fast did I remember the previous experiences?

3.4 Letter feedback from my critical friends

In this section, I present the direct responses from the critical friends in response to the questions that were asked. My critical friends' transcripts are verbatim. All that is written in the letters is my opinion as it is my story.

3.4.1 Critical Friend 1

Look at the letter and give me feedback on what you learned about the emotional experiences I shared from the letter.

- The letter made me feel emotional, it made me imagine what these learners went through, and also since I also did not have a smooth journey in learning the language, it took me back to those moments when I was also made to feel ‘‘dumb’’ in my school just because I did not have English knowledge. I can relate to what the writer wrote in the letter.

How did you feel while reading the letter, what came to your mind, after reading the letters, and what do you think about me?

- I learned that the success of an individual is shaped by how one responds to situations faced in life. The learners in the letter faced a harsh situation at the foundation phase of their schooling. The situation could have easily made them stop believing they could successfully learn English or achieve anything in life. Imagine being discouraged by a teacher in a new environment.

How do you feel towards the person I wrote the letters to?

- After reading the letter, I felt emotional on behalf of the learners and angry at how the teacher abused his powers by bullying small kids instead of teaching them what they did not know. I think the writer is strong, motivated and intelligent despite what the teacher thought of her because of her lack of English knowledge.

How do you feel about the process I went through as indicated in the letters capturing my journey of learning English as a second language?

- I think the process is normal for anyone who has to learn a new language. It is expected not to know till someone who knows teaches you. What is wrong is the way the teacher made the learner/ writer feel dumb because she did not know English at that time.

Do you think there is a lesson that can be learned, and how do you think those situations shaped me looking at where I am today?

- The main lesson is that English is just like any other language out there. You must be taught to learn it. The situation in the story shaped the writer to be strong and face adversity. It made the writer understand that people treat you based on their learned perspective, for example, the teacher treated the learners like that because He was made to believe that English is a measure of intelligence.

3.4.2 Critical Friend 2

Look at the letters and give me feedback on what you learned about the emotional experiences I shared from the letter.

- This is a very emotional letter, I shed a few tears while reading it. This teacher in question was abusive to the 2 learners, according to his behavior, it is like he had a personal vendetta against them.

How did they feel while reading the letter, what came to your mind, after reading the letters, and what do you think about me?

- This behaviour is typical among most old school teachers especially in rural areas and townships, instead of teaching learners who are falling behind in class they humiliate them. It seems like the English teacher was comparing the learners in his class.

How do you feel about the person I wrote letters to?

- According to the letter he did not expect to see improvement in his struggling learners as a result of his teaching. The teacher classified his learners' level of intelligence using English. In my opinion, this teacher is so wrong on many levels, first English is not a measure of intelligence, second comparing learners is not good, third classifying level of intelligence is also not good. I think this teacher in question, did not receive enough training on how to lead a class in an equal manner without prejudice.

How do you feel about the process I went through as indicated in the letters capturing my journey of learning English as a second language?

- As the letter stated I understand the learners were supposed to have a certain degree of English knowledge in that class level. People are not the same, the teacher in question was mean and judgemental, instead of seeking progress and improvement in his learners. The teacher was ignorant even about one of the learners' hearing impairment disability and made fun of my inability to pronounce English words.

Do you think there is a lesson that can be learned, and how do you think those situations shaped me looking at where I am today?

- Even though the experience was painful, some good lessons were learned, and it made the learners stronger and more resilient. However, there should be a program to teach teachers how to treat learners who are falling behind in class, they should be compassionate and patient. This typical behaviour has caused learners to drop out of school and give up on life. The teacher makes learners believe that they are helpless failures.

3.5 Using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to analyse letters as data generation sources

After writing the letters, I sent them to my critical friends to look at them and give me feedback from their perspective. As I mentioned earlier, for this study I employed CDA to analyse my data and the feedback I received from my critical friends. I went through the letters highlighted words that appear frequently, and organised them into sub-themes, and from then, I created themes, and

themes were deduced from the letters. Themes came directly from the data and in this section, I use sentence by sentence and phrase by phrase to answer the questions I designed for data generation.

3.5.1 Describe the emotionally challenging experiences I encountered while learning English as a second language under the teaching of Mr. Shelembe.

- **Teacher's negative attitude**

In the letter that I wrote to Mr. Shelembe, I listed several emotionally challenging experiences that I encountered in his classroom at that time. Firstly, the teacher's negative attitude towards us after knowing our previous situation in the village. The use of the phrase *I thought opening to you about our previous school would make you even more understanding and patient*, suggests that I was disappointed with the attitude my teacher gave in response to our situation. I also noted that *'Unfortunately, you are the one who referred to us as kids who did not do grade 4 in front of everyone in the class*, these words tell us that the teacher did not empathise with us and our situation, instead of getting support, we were embarrassed by the teacher. In addition, I noted in my story that *'you told my sister that even a grade R learner would know better than her and all other shameful things to us, a good teacher would not say all those things but find ways to help the kids'*. The utilised words he used to my sister were embarrassing and humiliating, I also noted in the letter that *you already knew that my sister had a hearing problem, but you used to beat her for not hearing what you said that was very wicked of you*. Because of the comments he used to make, our classmates began to take us for granted and mistreated us during breaks, I noted in my letter that *your attitude towards us made other kids in the class take us for granted, you said things that made them laugh at us and even told us that we knew nothing, and we were dumb girls*. This phrase tells us that what he said affected the relationship between us and our classmates negatively as even during breaks, they told their friends that we were girls who knew nothing, not even 123. This suggests that his attitude towards us was negative, which contributed to the whole class mistreating us. I also noted in the letter that *when you gave us spelling exercises and we got some words wrong, you would broadcast to the whole class that we failed to spell simple English words*. This sentence suggests that the teacher was surprised by us not knowing English words, by announcing it in the class it made other learners view us negatively. When looking at the teacher's

words, it may not have been his intention to shame us but surprisingly, he responded that way. When the teacher initiated the bullying, my sister and I were further bullied and mocked by learners, and as a result, we lost self-confidence.

- **Names attached to us**

I continued to remind the teacher of the unkind words he said to my sister as I noted that *you told my sister that even a grade R learner would know better than her and all other shameful things to us, a good teacher would not say all those things*. Telling her in front of the whole class that *even a grade R learner would know better than her* tells us how low the teacher rated us, that was very shameful.

Had he called us aside and spoken to us privately, I would not have minded, the problem is that you called us all such names in the presence of our classmates and because of that we were taken for granted by our peers. I also noted that *we did not even play with other kids during breaks because they isolated themselves from us because of the stigma you gave us “girls who do not know even 123”*, *You made our lives miserable and honestly, I hated you for that*. Now looking back, there was no need for that as we were not stupid, we needed time to adjust to the new place, which we did in higher grades and we improved. I also stated that because of what took place in class, *we did not even play with other kids during breaks because they isolated themselves from us because of the stigma you gave us “girls who do not know even 123”*, *You made our lives miserable and honestly, I hated you for that*. This is because outside the classroom we were given silly names. After all, everyone knew us as dumb girls.

- **English equals intelligent**

I also noted in my letter that *you made those children look like they were the geniuses in the class just because they could speak and write English well. You even said they should stand on the desks so that everyone will see them*. These two phrases tell us that he equated speaking English with intelligence while those who struggled remained and felt hopeless. To be honest, I grew up thinking that knowledge of English was equal to being intelligent because my English teacher treated us differently based on our understanding of English. In support of this, Wakeman (2019) notes that the value that is attached to English knowledge is enough to render some people

successful and some unsuccessful, and yet in an actual sense English is not a measure of intelligence. Also, I noted in the letter that *'After they recited a poem or answered a question, you made statements like "see kids who did grade 4". That statement alone implied that my sister and I did not do grade four which was an assumption'*. Also, highlighting the point of equating the knowledge of English with intelligence, I noted in my letter that *'whenever they raise a hand and or answer any question in class you used statements like "very good, excellent, good girl" which is not bad but compared to what you did to us, you made it look like we were hopeless and very dumb*. This made me ask myself if I would ever get to the point where you also complimented me in the classroom and, to be honest, I was in a dark place on my side as I did not have any hope at that time. In line with this, I also noted in the letter that *'you make it look like knowing English is equal to intelligence, which is wrong, English is not a measure of intelligence'*.

However, it was later in life that I realised the fact that you cannot measure one's intelligence based on how one speaks English. To be honest, we received such negative comments, that it was overwhelming. I noticed the teacher created levels in his class, as I noted in the letter that while you exalted and uplifted learners who were fluent in English, it demoralised other learners who were not at that level. This tells me that he judged us according to what he saw and observed at that time, he should have given us time to adjust first and see if what he saw was true or if it was just because of the influence of factors like background and so on. In support of this, Eun (2016) notes that socio-cultural theory points to the relationship between individuals and the social environment. Hence, consciously or unconsciously, we are influenced by the social environment.

- **One word wrong, one stripe**

Normally when learners come to school, they are there to learn because they want to build on the existing knowledge from outside the classroom. I noted in the letter that *you used to beat us with a pipe just because we did not have an answer for you*. This suggests that if I got 10 words wrong, I got ten stripes, as I mentioned in my letter to him that *I do not think that was fair. When someone does not know something it means he/she is ignorant and needs to be taught or learned but what you used to do was to beat us because we got some English words wrong*. When someone does not know something, it may be because of many factors, that pained me and made me hate coming to his classes every time. In line with this, I also added in the letter that *'you always held the pipe in*

your hands and we were afraid that you would beat us'. What the teacher did made me angry because I did not have answers for him, getting stripes was not going to help me get the answers.

- **Cruelty and wickedness**

I noted in my letter that *you already knew that my sister had a hearing problem but you used to beat her for not hearing what you said in class*. If you ask me, those are signs of wickedness and being heartless. Firstly, it was not her fault that she had a hearing problem and he was told at the beginning about her problem but he still went ahead to beat her because she did not hear what you said. Also, I stated that *you used to say we should stand up so that other kids would see that we did not know simple words and you used to say in front of the class that we would fail grade 5*. As a teacher, he should have known that some actions can lead to bullying but he still did that and unfortunately, it contributed to my bullying because they saw the way you dealt with us in the classroom and they used that against us. Moreover, I noted that *you said things that made other learners laugh at us and even told us that we knew nothing and we were dumb girls*. Furthermore, I asserted that *I did not enjoy going to school because I knew it was another day to be humiliated in front of everyone*. It was not nice to be in his class at that time as you showed signs of being heartless and did not care about our well-being. I also stated *I did not think there was a need for you to tell the whole class that we did not know those words as that embarrassed us even to the point of being taken for granted by other learners*. As I stated in the letter, *'you would broadcast to the whole class that we failed to spell simple English words*. The use of the words *my life was miserable* suggests that he succeeded in frustrating me and my sister and that he is the only one who knows if that was intentional or not.

- **Proud and short-tempered**

I noted in my story that *you used to talk as if stationery was bought with your money whereas it was from the government*. I remember he used to say that we are given stationery for free, why are we not buying covers after we have been given everything for free? Truly, I understand his point, but he should have remembered that some of us came from poor families where even buying a book cover was a problem, you did not understand that. Also, I stated that *I remember there was a boy called Sanele who could not keep his exercise clean, and you strangled him in our presence and that incident made me even worse because I thought I was the next one*. This suggests that you

could not manage your temper and that traumatised me to the point that I was no longer paying attention in class. I was constantly shaking and fearful because I did not know if you were going to do the same to me. I also noted that *you were so short-tempered and aggressive, and you used to look down upon less privileged people*. I picked that from what you used to say, things like “*You are being given all these for free, you don’t pay any cent, but you fail to buy a cover to cover your books.*”

(i) Explain how those experiences have made me feel.

The experience I faced with the teacher’s negative attitude toward us made me feel so bad to the point that I did not see myself improving. Also, I felt that did not belong in the class, being new in the school I felt so unwelcome and unloved. Also, the teacher’s attitude was very discouraging because one thing about him is that he could embarrass someone, he did that to us as he used to say mean things to us and we would be a laughingstock in the class. I did not like him and I hated being in his classes, I had no choice but to be in school and be in his classes because, after his period, I would feel so bad and so miserable because of what I had faced in the classroom. However, I had the drive and motivation to endure and that kept me going, this was because I knew that needed education to reach my goals and I did not want to be uneducated like my parents.

In the experience I shared about names being attached to us, I felt so stupid and with no hope because I knew it all started in the English class and escalated outside the class. That stigma made me angry because I knew those names did not define me. Names like *a dumb girl, a girl who does not know anything, a girl who does not even know 123, the girl who does not know even A*. One thing about school children is that they would always be a mockery and all that, but when everyone calls you stupid names, it becomes so unbearable because what they were saying kept getting to me and exacerbated my misery, I knew that it all started in the classroom, so I hated everything about English classes with all my heart.

With the experience of getting the idea that knowing English equals intelligence, I felt worthless and very dumb during English classes, especially when my teacher elevated the kids who knew English very well. I felt that on the other hand, I could not make it to that level because I saw the situation as pointing to the fact that I was on the lower level and other kids who were fluent in English were high up there. Because of how my teacher portrayed learners who were fluent in

English, I used that to my advantage and worked towards improving to the point where I also got compliments from the teacher as well. I want to say that all that I faced during this experience yielded positive results in the end. After all, I improved my knowledge and understanding of English because I needed to fit into the class, especially the following year when I repeated the grade.

With the experience of ‘one word wrong, one stripe’, I felt very angry that he hit us because we got English words wrong, for me it was not our fault but evidence that we were ignorant and needed to learn and improve. As kids, we feared being beaten, that is why we did not misbehave in class, but to be beaten because you do not know was unfair to me.

In this experience I spoke about the teacher’s cruelty and wickedness, I felt hatred and animosity towards him because I felt like he mistreated us and made us feel useless. I saw him as a teacher who did not have love and patience for his learners and I hated the thought of him. But at the back of my mind, I knew that he could teach because other kids were making progress in class.

I concluded that the teacher did not want to see anything good coming out of me because of what this is because even though I progressed to high school and was doing well, he never commented or apologised for what he did. These experiences made me disheartened and hopeless about myself. The actions of the teacher made me think that there was no hope in me and that I was just a useless person who would not make it in life. I realised that I needed to understand English so that I could do well and be promoted to the next grade. I can say all the experiences I had were enough to make me want to give up, but I told myself that it was up to me to pull up my socks, work hard, and become a better person. I equated knowing English to becoming a better person because that was what was modelled by my teacher. I realised that self-motivation helped me to overcome that phase of my life.

(ii) Discussion of what I have learnt about myself as a researcher by revisiting and engaging with all these experiences.

What I have learnt as a researcher is that it was difficult to see how much I had improved in aspects relating to English before I started engaging in reflective activities. By revisiting these experiences, I learnt that I have improved so much in my knowledge of English, although I still have a long way to go. Even though it was not easy to engage in the process of letter writing, I am happy I did

because I got to see the positive side of everything that happened. I noted in the letter that *I believe you are very good at teaching and I used to praise you before my mother and she also used to praise you during the parent's meeting and tell everyone that when we came from the village you worked on us and made us who we are today*. Even though my teacher mistreated my sister and me, he was good at teaching generally, passing information to the learners.

This suggests that reflection made me realise that there was some good in the teacher and that made it easy for me to forgive him. I also stated in the letter that *I think it was a blessing in disguise to have been taught by you and to have passed through those experiences, maybe it is something I needed but I did not realize*. This tells us that even though all that I went through was not easy, it might have been something I needed to develop myself and be responsible for myself. I learnt that the letter started on a very bad note when I was noting all the experiences we went through because of the teacher, but in the end, interestingly, I ended with a thank you note. As I stated *when everything was happening, I was frustrated and resentful, I never thought I would get to the point where I sent a "Thank You" letter to you*.

(iii) What have I learnt about my research topic by revisiting and engaging with all these experiences?

What I have learnt is that the journey of learning English as a second language was not an easy one. Now that I reflected, I have realised that lessons are often learnt under difficult circumstances, and easy victories rarely build character. I also learnt that how a teacher behaves in addition to the way English is taught can have a detrimental effect on learners. This points to the fact that teachers have roles and responsibilities and what they do may make or mar the learners. At the end of the day, I passed that grade and finished matric, still the journey continues.

3.6 Reflection activity1: Mr. Shelembe

I also wrote a reflection on the letter-writing process to my former English teacher. These are the questions that came to the fore in my reflection: When my supervisor who is one of my critical friends advised that I should write a letter to my Primary school English teacher, I felt tears in my eyes. When at home, I always tell my sister that I wish to meet him one day and discuss with him my experiences. When my supervisor suggested that I got very emotional because I had many things to talk to him about in that letter. On the other hand, I felt I did not want to dig into the past

but just forget about it and move on with my life. I did not even know where to start as there were so many incidents, and I wanted to remind him of all of them, I then just started to reflect on the first day I heard about him and saw him, the first conversation we had, and what impression I had about him and as I went on, I began to remember all other incidents that took place.

3.6.1 Explain how you experienced the process of thinking and writing your letters

It was not an easy process as I struggled to revisit and write about emotionally challenging experiences that were heartbreaking to me at the time. If it were not for my thesis topic I would not have to think or write about it anymore but bury it and move on with my life. So, it started as a big mountain I needed to climb, but as I started the process it became a bit doable and manageable. When it comes to remembering experiences, it was not a problem at all because I have a very good memory. Also, at the beginning of my study, I had some artifacts that I drew that reminded me of what happened in the past regarding my learning of English second language. The artifacts reminded me a lot about my experiences. I discussed this in detail in the letter.

3.6.2 Talk about interconnecting with the previous emotional experience that I might not have thought about in a long time or even recognised as an emotional experience at the time.

Interconnecting with past experiences brought about pain as if it was something that just happened yesterday even though these incidents happened a long time ago. I felt the pain again and I was just managing to hold myself and continue, as it opened the wounds afresh. However, the whole process was a healing one for me because I always wished to have an opportunity I meet and tell him how I felt about all that he did and what I experienced in his classes. Therefore, the process was therapeutic, and after writing that letter, I felt relief as if a burden had been lifted off my shoulders, I was able to open up and write from the bottom of my heart. So, the process was very useful for me.

3.6.3 Talk about the embodiment of emotions and reliving such emotional experiences.

I felt like I was reliving emotional experiences again because it felt so new, it evoked painful emotions and opened wounds that had healed. Thinking about all painful experiences was not a pleasant process I must say; it brought discomfort and uneasiness as I was thinking of a fitting

narrative to describe how I felt about each experience. I saw the process as a way to help me deal with the past, especially when it came to unpleasant experiences in learning English as a second language.

I always knew that the journey was not an easy one as I had to recall memories from childhood and adulthood related to my learning of English second language. Reflecting on each experience in the process of learning English as a second language made me realise how they affected me, and how difficult it was to get to the point where I was comfortable in using the English language to express myself reflectively, it was like climbing a mountain, it was not easy.

3.6.4 How long did thinking and writing about the letters take me?

Incidents that happened in my life at a very young age, I still remember as fresh as if it was yesterday. Furthermore, how traumatic the experience was made it easy for me to remember and I felt that I needed to deal with it. When it came to preparing to write these letters I must say, it took me a while to think through and decide on the order or framework to use to discuss the incidents. I would write something and leave everything and come again later, so it took me about a week or two to think through and start writing. The reason behind this is that I did not want to engage in letter writing. After all, I did not want to dig into the past and hurt myself again, so I tried to avoid the whole process, even though I knew from the first day, that my supervisor suggested that this method was a very good idea. I kept avoiding the start of the whole process because I knew things I was going to discuss were personal and would not like to share them with people outside. At the same time, it was an opportunity for me to express myself and be open about how I felt while learning English second language.

3.6.5 How slow or fast did I remember previous experiences?

In the beginning, the process was quite slow as I was thinking of appropriate words to describe my feelings and experiences. However, as I started writing, words just kept coming. The second phase of my writing was where I went back and edited, it was easier because I became accustomed to the process. Another thing I noticed is that I did not struggle to recall incidents that took place. Also, I realised at the end that the letter-writing process helped me to see the positive in every negative experience, and writing about these experiences was cathartic for me.

3.7 Using CDA to analyse my letter to my dad using a set of questions as a guide.

Below I discuss the themes I identified concerning the letter to my Dad.

3.7.1 Describe the emotionally challenging experiences you encountered at home and in school after your dad left.

- **Sadly, things changed**

The choice of words I used *sadly; things changed* explains how the situation suddenly changed for the worse when my dad left us in 1998. This suggests that before that, things had been good and we were happy. I noted in the letter that *my mother had just given birth for God's sake, and you left her in that state and you knew exactly that you were the breadwinner in our family, my mother was a full-time housewife*. The choice of words I used in the phrase above expresses how pathetic the situation was after my dad left us, with my mother being a single uneducated parent with a newborn baby and no source of income. The anger that I feel is evident.

I also noted in the letter that *because we lacked food as young kids and we could not do without it, my mother decided to go back to her mother's house*. This tells us that it was a big burden to my mother because she did not have a means of income and she had kids to feed. She decided to go back to her mother's house to stay and figure out what to do with the situation at hand. Also, I noted that *we were in a village*, which suggests that in the village things get even worse because there is no place to go and there are no jobs, life was just tough for us and my mom. I also noted in my story that sometimes we would be without food and still have to go to school on an empty stomach. I also noted in the letter that *If you can imagine the kind of stress you caused in my mother's life because we were all young and needed food. How do you think she was going to survive with the kids in the first place when you decided to leave us?* This phrase shows the frustration that was in the house when my father left, I am expressing myself by asking how he thought we were going to cope without any income. The main issue for us was how not having proper meals can affect a child's concentration in class. In support of this, Taylor and Yu (2009) note that learners who come from poor households may find it difficult to concentrate in class,

especially if they lack food. However, in my case, I thank God that the government's feeding scheme had started, and we could have lunch in school.

- **Starting school, no new uniform**

It is always a special time for every child to start school for the first time as it counts for good memories. However, in my case, I was not as happy as expected because I did not have a new uniform, I started school with someone's old uniform. I noted in the letter that *the following year, I had to start school, hence I needed a new uniform and stationery, my sister had to start a new school too so we needed several things to enter school.* Unfortunately, there was no new uniform as we would have wished if my dad had been around. In line with this I also noted in the letter that *my mother had no choice but to ask for my cousin's old uniform was no longer good shoes.* As a child excited to start school, I wore the uniform and went to school without any problem. I also noted in the letter regarding this that, *When I started school deep down I also wanted a new school uniform being my first time in school I understood the situation and acknowledged that my mother had no other choice since she was not working and not educated being in the village for that matter.* This suggests that I wished that I had both parents with my dad providing everything we needed, but I had to cope with the situation. It was when I got to school when *other kids looked at me weirdly that I was wearing an old uniform being a new learner, I started feeling sad.* That affected my self-esteem a bit, but as a child, I quickly forgot about it.

- **Mistreatment by grandmother and cousins**

Mtshali (2015) asserts that in South Africa it has become normal for grandparents to take part in raising their grandchildren and, children face different experiences such as rape by uncles or abuse. In some cases, they do a great job of raising children in the absence of deceased parents. It is very sad to note that even at my grandmother's place, we were not treated fairly by her and our cousins. It was not only the socio-economic circumstances that affected me negatively but also the conflict that arose between me and my grandmother and between my grandmother and my mother. These are some of the factors I had to cope with outside the classroom. Family is always expected to be one's number one supporter and encourager when one is facing challenges, unfortunately, that was not the case with us. I noted in the letter that, *my cousins had parents who were working, so they had all the uniforms you can think of and stationery, and because of that, they used to look down*

upon us. When we borrowed something, they would say It's not their fault that my dad abandoned us. For me what they said made me feel so bad because I knew that we could not control the situation, it hurt me deep down inside because I knew that my dad was still alive. What they said was very painful as it reminded us of why in the first place we had to move in there. I also noted in the letter that My grandmother used to abuse us we would go to the river without eating and fetch water to fill big containers just me and my sister. Other cousins were not doing anything because their parents were working and had money.

What hurt me the most was the fact that we did not have to go through all this had my dad been around, but the situation was what it was. Also, I noted that *It was so painful because even in winter we would go on very cold water and fetch water and we had no choice but to do that because if not we would not get food in the evening.* I also noted that *after we moved to our house as a family we could not stand my grandmother in her house. Sometimes we would be without food and we still had to go to school on an empty stomach.* It was a painful experience that I did not want to remember because I had forgiven all these people, but thinking back, it was fresh in my memory as if it just happened yesterday. The circumstance that took place at home affected my self-confidence which in turn affected my self-esteem as a learner in school.

- **A selfish and irresponsible man**

When my mother heard that he was somewhere in Durban without a job, with the little money she made from selling, she sent him some money to come home but he never did. I note in the letter that *When people saw him in Durban, they used to tell my mom in the village and he would complain that he was not working and that he did not have money to come back home. Even though she did not have a proper job, my mother tried to send him money to say at least come home and let us be together as a family, he would take the money and use it God knows for what. What a nerve! Using your wife's money that he abandoned with children.* The choice of words I used such as *What a nerve* shows that I am unpleasantly surprised that he decided to take the money and use it for selfish reasons. For me, that is a high level of selfishness because he knew that my mother had children to feed and she was not working but despite that, he used her money. I also noted that *If it was not for a responsible mother that God blessed us with, I do not know where we would have been as he ran away from his responsibilities as a father and husband.* To be honest, that made me so angry, I did not want him to come again because for me that was a sign that he had

become a man we did not know. Even the fact that money was sent to him and he did not come back, made us a laughingstock in the community because people talked and it was a pathetic situation.

- **Mocked by community members and school kids**

When we all moved to my grandmother's place, I noted that *things were not nice at all as my mother was mocked by almost everyone in the community because of her situation that she was abandoned by her husband with children*. This phrase suggests that people started talking about our family situation and they were laughing at us because of our unfortunate situation. I also noted that *we were a laughingstock in the community and school because some women in the community would tell the teachers in the school all about us and how we struggled to live as they left us*. People used to ask us stupid questions when we got to the river, as I noted in the letter that *people used to ask us if we had anything to eat the previous day*. This also made children mock us in school I noted that *we were not comfortable in school because even kids would be laughing at us, they did not even want to play with us because they thought they were better than us*. Even teachers used to ask my mother stupid questions when she was selling in school after being told about our situation. Generally, it is not nice to see your mother being taken for granted.

3.7.2 Explain how those experiences have made me feel

In experiencing the sad change that happened, I can say that it was a difficult time, as much as I was very young I could relate to my mother's pain. Our family changed from being a united happy one to being poor and broken after my father left, and it affected us. Things changed for the worse, we ended up leaving our house to stay at my grandmother's place. So, as a child, it was not a nice thing to see my mother stressed and struggling to provide food for us. My father's absence affected us badly, but I thank God for giving my mother grace and strength to raise us, we are all grown up now.

Due to my experience of starting school without a new school uniform, I learnt to understand that my mother did not buy new school uniforms for us because of the situation she was in. I was grateful that even though I had to wear an old uniform, she washed and ironed it nicely for me,

and I was very grateful for that. I was just unhappy that the father who was supposed to buy me a uniform was not even in the picture and there was no communication. However, being a child at that time, I did not pay too much attention to the fact that I did not have a new uniform. It was when I reflected later that I noticed that it was not nice and it would have been better if things were different. The experience of being mistreated by my grandmother and my cousins, I can say that it hit me hard because I did not understand how a mother mistreated her child. I am saying this because my grandmother used to say painful things to my mother as if it was her fault that my dad left and all the nonsense. I even asked my mother if she was her mother and she said yes, then I knew that she was a wicked woman. However, over the years, I had forgiven her and everything was normal, but having to write about what we faced when my father left brought me back to painful memories when we received unfair treatment from my grandmother. Also, the way my cousins mistreated us was not nice, and in my mind, I imagined if my dad had been there, we would not have gone to live with them, so it all comes back to my dad's absence. However, what I noticed was that even though we did not have stationery and a new uniform, we performed far better in school than expected and that made us succeed.

From there, I learnt that one cannot have it all. When I said that my father was selfish and irresponsible, I felt anger in my heart that he took the money that my mother sent him to come home and used it for himself after abandoning us like that. I wish I had the opportunity to talk to him and tell him how I felt. But this reflection is allowing me to heal because this letter-writing process is healing me inside.

On the experience of being mocked by community members and school kids, it was painful and it made me to not enjoy going to school. I thought in my mind that it was all my dad's fault because if he had been around we would not have gone through all that. But now looking back, we are even far better than all the people who used to mock us. They did not even finish school, so it is all in the past. All these experiences made me feel sad and emotional because being mocked by the whole community was not a nice feeling and being isolated in school because of the situation at home made us feel less important. Also, the fact that my dad was alive all the years we were facing such treatment made me even more sad because he ran away from his responsibilities. Another thing that affected me was seeing my mother so stressed, there was nothing she could do about the

situation. One thing I hated was to see my mother sad and being treated unfairly, but I had to live with that. Even today, I do not understand how a mother can mock her daughter about an unpleasant experience she is facing. I expected that of all the people she would support and comfort her daughter, unfortunately, it did not happen, so that made me so sad.

3.7.3 Discuss what I have learnt about myself as a researcher by revisiting and engaging with all these experiences.

At first, I did not see the need to discuss experiences I faced in my dad's absence as a child and learner in school. It was after I discussed this with my supervisor, one of my critical friends that she made me realise that such experiences indirectly affected me even academically. Honestly, when I started writing about it, I saw the link and why it was important for me to write about it. What I learned is that as a reflexive narrative researcher, when writing my story, it is important to write everything I remember as different experiences help the work at the end. I also learnt the importance of honesty and realised that revisiting such experiences makes me vulnerable.

3.7.4 What have I learnt about my research topic by revisiting and engaging with all these experiences?

What I learnt about my research topic is that experiences of learning English as a second language revolves around other aspects of life. For example, at the time, what was the situation at home, were we comfortable or were we struggling to survive? I learnt that experiences I faced at home, in the community, and even in school in one way or another affected me. Furthermore, these circumstances formed part of the sociocultural factors, which influenced my feelings as a young girl, as I witnessed unpleasant situations between my mother and my grandmother and that was a lot to take in as a child. It further influenced my values, beliefs, behaviors, and attitudes concerning the learning of English as a second language, as people's attitudes regarding learning the language made me think that it was unnecessary to learn it after all. It also affected my interactions in school with other learners as I would be embarrassed because of my situation at home which resulted in me isolating myself. As a result, writing this letter was worth it, and allowed me to see the impact of each life experience on my education journey.

Furthermore, these circumstances formed part of the sociocultural factors, which influenced my feelings, values, beliefs, behaviors, attitudes, and interactions in terms of my interactions at school with others.

3.8 Critical Friend 1

3.8.1 Look at the letter and give me feedback on what you learned about the emotional experiences I shared from the letter.

This story resonates with me because I come from a similar experience. My dad was an alcoholic who abandoned us many times until he died in 2012. I learnt the power of forgiveness and the grace of God. Most of all I learnt the value of a resilient mother and a united family. Your story is important to remind those us of who have forgotten to be grateful for the little we have. I learnt about the emotion called love which we have ignored for a long time.

3.8.2 How did you feel while reading the letter, what came to your mind, after reading the letters, and what do you think about me?

I saw you as a little girl, I imagined your mom and how she may have slept at night. How she may have smiled or laughed. If she ever did. I think I see why you are a good person. Your mother is a hero. I think you are favoured and blessed and have a lot more in store for you. Strong people make stronger people and that's who you are.

3.8.3 How do you feel towards the person I wrote the letter to?

I feel sympathy because he did not get to experience your beautiful mother completely. I also share your sentiments of forgiveness and peace. I hope he realises he was wrong and that he repents one day. But I also feel sad because in searching for a life elsewhere, he had lost life itself. That life was you, your mom, and your sisters.

3.8.4 How do you feel about the whole process I went through as indicated in the letters of my journey in learning of English as a second language?

I think learning is a process. Learning a language is also a process that you have to go through. Like everything in your life, it was not easy, but you overcame and continue to do so. Your language has developed well as seen from your letter. But when language meets emotion, it becomes a different process. It moves to communication and relations. This is a highly cognitive process.

3.8.5 Do you think there is a lesson that can be picked, and how do you think those situations shaped me looking at where I am today?

I think you are resilient. I know the lesson is the importance of family and the hope of a mother who stayed despite those who left as you stated that she did not make bad decisions. I think you too will be a great mother and are a great person who fears God and loves her family. You appreciate the man in your life because you saw one leave your life. Let go of the scars and the pain, and say hello to love, hope, and joy. It is a new horizon for you.

3.9 Critical friend 2

3.9.1 Look at the letter and give me feedback on what you learnt about the emotional experiences I shared from the letter.

I learned that the writer was left by her father when she was young, and she grew up in a disadvantaged background. According to the letter the family struggled a lot when the father left and the mother had to step up and provide for the small children the best she could.

3.9.2 How did you feel while reading the letter, what came to your mind, after reading the letters, and what do you think about me?

The letter makes me emotional especially when the writer had to start school with an old school uniform given by her cousin and having people mock their struggle by asking what they ate the night before. I think the struggle made the writer determined to change the situation at home and take what happened as one of life's challenges and forgive and forget. The writer sounds like a strong-minded young woman, who is hardworking and smart.

3.9.3 How do you feel towards the person to whom I wrote the letter?

I feel he was wrong to leave his wife with small children like that knowing they depended on him as the sole breadwinner. Whatever happened he should not have left them without backup.

3.9.4 How do you feel about the whole process I went through as indicated in the letters of my journey in learning English as a second language?

The process of learning English was normal for anyone who needed to learn a new language outside of her native language, the problem was that the teacher took English as a measure of intelligence. He made his learners feel not smart because they had no prior knowledge of English.

3.9.5 Do you think there is a lesson that can be picked, and how do you think those situations shaped me looking at where I am today?

There are several lessons in this story. The first one is to let go of the past so that you can focus on the future with a free heart because you have forgiven whatever went wrong in your past life as the writer did. The second is to take your struggle as your motivation and work hard for your future. The third one is to never relax and depend on anyone, it's better to work for your money so that when things go wrong you will be left standing and continue providing for yourself.

3.10 Reflection on letter 2: my dad

3.10.1 Explain how you experienced the process of thinking and writing your letters

When I was writing a letter to my dad at first, I did not realise how badly this experience affected me and us as a family. I knew we were affected but I did not realise that it affected me in other areas like my education. It was when I was thinking and started writing that I realised that his absence affected my education a lot. There are some things I went through that I would not have gone through if he had been present in my life, such as mistreatment by my extended family members and the ill-treatment from learners and teachers in school. Seeing all that my mother went through affected me because she faced the most, we were just children.

3.10.2 Talk about interconnecting with the previous emotional experience that I might not have thought about in a long time or even recognised as an emotional experience at the time.

It was not easy to interconnect with previous experiences because they were very emotional, having to think about how community members looked down upon us and mocked us because of his actions, made me even more emotional, I shed tears while writing about all the incidents that happened to us in that village especially. I realised that what we went through was not easy at all because even learners in school who form part of the community laughed at us and did not want to play with us because of our situation. Having to reconnect with these experiences was very emotional.

3.10.3 Talk about the embodiment of emotions and reliving such emotional experiences

Having to relive the emotional experiences I faced because of my dad's absence was like torture, especially because I had been trying to forget the past and look into the future, but then I realised that such experiences contributed to who I am today. I had no choice but to dig them out and interrogate them, but honestly, it was not an easy thing to do because normally I would like to forget about unpleasant experiences, but in this case, I had to uncover them and discuss them, it helped to enrich my study because every incident in life contributes to who we become eventually.

3.10.4 How long did thinking and writing about the letters take me

Well, thinking and remembering previous experiences was not a problem, I did not struggle to remember all that happened in his absence. I believe it is because I already had artifacts that reminded me of all the incidents that took place in my life at that time. Thinking about incidents that happened in my family because of him did not take too long as I remembered everything. I just had to recount incidents chronologically as they occurred. As soon as I started writing, I was able to remember all the incidents that took place.

3.10.5 How slow or fast did I remember the previous experiences?

I can say the process was fast because I had just finished writing the first letter to my English teacher. Also, naturally, I am someone who remembers the past easily, so the process was fast, the

issue is that it was painful and emotional to confront incidents that took place and interrogate them through self-introspection.

3.10.6 Conclusion

In chapter three, I recounted memories of learning English as a second language until high school. I wrote an autobiographical narrative story using the Bible character, Joseph as a metaphor to capture my experiences from birth to high school. I presented an autobiographical story of how I learnt a second language through play. I used letter-writing as a data generation source, I wrote two letters that describe my experiences to express emotionality in research.

CHAPTER 4 : INTERPRETATION OF MY EARLY AND PRIMARY SCHOOL EXPERIENCES OF LEARNING ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE

4.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, I presented an autobiographical story of my learning experiences and juxtaposed it with the Bible character Joseph. I also discussed letter-writing and emotionality. Through CDA I analysed the themes that were derived from both letters. In this chapter, I present an interpretation of my early and primary school experiences of learning English as a Second Language. The themes I derived from the data are taken from the autobiographical story that I wrote. The autobiographical story reveals that I learnt English as a second language in different ways at different times, I highlighted words in my writing and then highlighted words that were occurring and identified sub-themes. I then developed a table with a column for sub-themes and another for words and phrases. There were several sub-themes and from these, I developed themes. In this section, I discuss the themes that emerged from the text. I discuss the themes of the *incidental play and its sub-theme: incidental learning through television*. The theme of *social and economic marginalisation, its sub-themes: change, and contexts in learning English as a second language*. Lastly, I discuss the theme of *self-motivation and curiosity*.

I further discuss themes of *cruelty and non-inclusive education, bullying with its sub-theme of fear and intimidation*. The theme of *social currency of English with its sub-theme of the English language and stigma*. This section answers the first question: *What are my experiences of learning English as a second language?* It also answers the second question: *What can I learn from my experiences of learning English second language as a second language?* This section answers the first question: *What are my experiences of learning English as a Second Language?* Also, at the end of each theme, I answer the second question: *What can I learn from my experiences of learning English as a second language?* Other participants contributed to this study such as peers, family members, and critical friends. Some of their responses that are related to the themes that emerged

from my data will be critically discussed in support of or in contrast to what I wrote as a primary participant.

- *What are my experiences of learning English as a second language?*

In this section, I discuss the theme of the incidental play. I look at how play contributed to my learning of English as a second language. Most of the games I played in my childhood did not lead to my learning of English, I am therefore discussing the two games that I played that led to my unconscious learning of English as a second language. Even though I spoke isiZulu when playing, as it was the only language I spoke at that time and many of the games I played did not help me to learn English vocabulary, they taught me other life lessons such as social skills, and that facing challenges as nothing comes easy in life, in play, to win one needs to put in the effort and work hard. These stood me in good stead in my learning of English and when I went to institutions of learning in which English was the medium of instruction. In line with this, Phewa (2021) notes that play helps learners gain and accumulate knowledge of different spheres of life. In this context, plays are like different parts of the body and how they work together. At the end of the theme of the play, I also discuss incidental learning through television and then give a reflection on what I learned from play and incidental learning. I have my sister Nonto, and my two peers Sizwe and Paul who contributed by sharing their experiences similar to mine in the themes and sub-themes I discussed.

4.2 Theme one: Incidental learning through play

Roussou (2004) states that current studies on how learning should take place emphasise the constructivist approach which points to the learners' need to actively construct knowledge by drawing it out of meaningful life experiences that are important to them. This points to Vygotsky's sociocultural theory where life experiences are constructively learnt through interaction with others in the same cultural environment. People who participate in activities construct their knowledge by testing concepts and ideas based on prior knowledge with pre-existing intellectual constructs which is a process that is familiar to real-world situations. Play can be imagination and intellect in more than one way and can help children discover things in their own way and at their own pace (Hulstijn, 2013).

According to Lawrence and Lawrence (2013), children prefer learning through play, so instead of having mechanical lessons, teachers need to adopt play as a pedagogy to stir up interest in their learners' lives. Hedges (2000) adds that children's play creates an opportunity for a rich environment for learning, as a result, it needs to also provide a rich context for teaching. Theories of social constructivism are based on a complex model of teaching and learning that values both teacher-initiated and child-initiated learning experiences and interactions. Phewa (2021) notes that normally in early childhood, learners are expected to be enthusiastic, be willing to add to their knowledge, and be able to reflect on their teaching. Play is important to this study because my autobiographical text reveals that some English words were heard for the first time and learnt through playing with other kids. As a child engaging in play, I did not see it as learning, it is now through reflection that I noticed that it was informal learning. Games that are played by children have a way of helping their English language skills (Chik, 2014). Lawrence and Lawrence (2013) state that through games the English language, especially grammar teaching is made interesting and effective. This means that there are specific games that help English second language learners learn English. In writing my story, what I discovered was that my learning of English through play was incidental (refer to chapter three).

- ***Jumping Rope game***

The jumping rope game is used for exercises and children's games that involve jumping over the usually twirling rope each time it reaches its lowest point.

I noted in my story that the only time I remember we said some English words was when we played the jumping rope and we were singing the months of the year in English. We were playing with kids who were more mature than us in terms of age and grade. So, when we made mistakes and skipped a month, they used to correct us. I was happy to learn the months of the year in English that day, even though the motive was to play but I incidentally learned them in English that day and I kept singing them in my mind so that I would not forget.

The use of the words *played the jumping* suggests that it was purely a play that we did as kids in the community after school, however, that play yielded the incidental learning process. Alemi and Tayebi (2011) assert that incidental learning means 'picking up 'structures and lexicon of language by getting engaged in a variety of communicative activities.

In my case, we were just playing and I found myself learning a lot in English. Moreover, I noted that *for that play specifically, we were with the kids that were in higher classes than us, which is why we had some little English here and there, I was happy when I learned that in English.* The use of the words *in higher classes* suggests that these kids who taught us that English song of the month or the year had some knowledge that we were able to pick up on. This suggests that we picked up those English words from the more knowledgeable others, the kids who were in higher classes than us.

- ***Body parts play***

The body parts game is another play that I did with my aunt at home during those evening home literacy activity sessions.

I noted in my story that another play that I remember in English was when I was in grade I my aunt was teaching us different parts of the body in isiZulu through a song, and she also made us say it in English. For example, “head and shoulders, knees and toes, knees and toes, knees and toes.” We were pointing to these parts while we were singing and in that way, I got to learn them in English that day. That was the first time I knew what these parts of the body were in English, and I made sure I did not forget it because I was so happy to have known the parts of the body in English and not have to forget again and be confused when we sing the song in the future.

The use of the words *I was happy* also suggests that as a child I just got excited to learn a lot in English but did not realise the importance of what I had learnt that day. In line with this, Alemi and Tayebi (2011) note that many vocabularies are learnt incidentally through extensive listening and interaction with others. I agree with this statement because many of the English words I know, I did not learn in school or the classroom but outside through play with other kids or just by the random picking of words from watching television. This learning was intentional even though we did it in the form of a play because she started by telling us about body parts in Zulu and switched to English. Hulstijn (2013) states that whether the learning process is intentional or incidental depends on the motive. This is in line with what my aunt did, as she intended to teach us those English words but in an informal way and that is how we learnt them.

I can say that my aunt's teaching was very revolutionary as I noted that *later in the next grades, it was taken further by my teachers to properly teach all the parts of the human body and at that time I remembered some of the body parts that we sang about when my aunt taught us as children in an informal way.* The use of the words *my teachers to properly teach* suggests that at a later stage, the teacher taught the same parts of the body but in a more explicit way. In line with this, Marsick and Watkins (2015) note that the terms incidental and intentional learning are occasionally used in connection with implicit and explicit learning. Therefore, the teacher taught explicitly while my aunt taught us implicitly because we were also singing and in the process of learning other things at the same time *We playfully sang this and it was so interesting,* this phrase shows that learning through play can be fun but informative at the same time. In addition to this, Schröder et al. (2022) assert that play is children's favorite activity, as a result, the belief that learning occurs more readily in a fun environment is true. Below I discuss the sub-theme of incidental learning of English through television.

4.2.1 Sub-theme: Incidental learning of English through television

Television is one of the artifacts that helped to trigger memories of my learning of English as a second language. In support of this, Marsick et al. (2017) note that informal and incidental learning is at the heart of education because of its learner-centred focus and lessons learnt from life experiences. This speaks to my experiences as I incidentally picked several English words through watching the television. I noted in my story that after school, *I used to come home and watch Television every day.* Also, I used to watch some South African shows where they would use subtitles when a local language was spoken, I used to learn the meaning of some words in English. I considered the television as one of the important tools that helped me to learn English.

Furthermore, while reflecting on my past experiences, I noticed that television played a major role in learning most English words that I now know and understand. According to Fisch (2014) learning through television is one of the informal modes of learning for second language learners. This suggests that learning through this mode informally takes place because one may pick words randomly from watching a show, with no prescribed content aimed at learning, but one picks words while they are being used. I noted in my story that:

I was also consistent in watching an American TV show named 'Passions' and that is where I learned to pronounce most English words. I also watched Some South African TV shows like Generations, Scandal, 7 de-Laan, and Isidingo where I used to read the English subtitles whenever someone spoke a local language and that helped me to know most Zulu words I did not know in English. I can say that it was through Television that I got to know most of the Zulu words in English.

The use of the words *helped me to know most Zulu words I did not know in English* suggesting that many of the English words I know today are because I learnt them from watching television. Also, the use of the words where I learned to pronounce most English words suggests that through watching *Passions*, an American television show, I learnt to pronounce the words in English because I was listening there rather than reading subtitles. The use of the words *to pronounce some English words* tells us that I did not learn only to spell the words through subtitles, I also learnt to pronounce the words as they were spoken.

During the conversation that I had with my peers, I noted that I consider television as a strong reason why I know most English words. In addition to what I said, my peers also shared their experiences in this regard Sizwe stated that *I would come from school and watch TV, and English channels through cartoons, movies, and so on, and in some cases, I would learn a word from TV.* In line with this Paul also added *how I speak is directly influenced by Television; I advise people to learn through Television.* The use of the words *learns a word, directly influenced by the television* suggests that by watching any television show there is a possibility that one would learn one or two words that help to improve one's fluency in the language.

Further to this, Butler (2018) reveals that television plays an important role in learning a second language. This suggests that it is an important tool for one to develop him/herself in acquiring a second language. In addition, AlZboon et al. (2011) in a qualitative study that was conducted to understand the influence of television on learners' language acquisition asserts that a notable difference in second language achievement is ascribed to how long television is watched. This means that learners' watching of television is not bad but depends on the motive why they watch it, either for educational purposes or entertainment. I also noted in my story that sometimes I watched television to entertain myself but I would incidentally learn one or two words from that. Nonto also added that *TV helped me to learn to speak and write in English.*

- *What can I learn from my experiences of learning English as a second language?*

Firstly, in the theme Incidental learning through play, I learned that learning English as a second language cannot be limited to the classroom environment. (Yahya & Wood, 2017)) notes that learners get to pick the language through the social interaction that happens between them during play. This tells me that incidental learning plays a major role in learning a second language. Moreover, play is important and should be incorporated into the curriculum as it has some benefits (Lawrence & Lawrence, 2013).

What I learnt from the sub-theme: Incidental learning through television is that in the journey of learning a second language informal learning plays a big role. It is interesting to note that a large percentage of the English words I know currently were learnt informally through watching television. Also, when I was watching the television, I did not plan to learn English from it at the initial stage but as time went on and I noticed that I was learning, I began to pay attention to what was being said and to the subtitles on the television screen. This tells me that learning happens mostly incidentally and when we begin to take note of what is happening, we get to be intentional and pick from what we watch. I also learned that hearing people speaking the language has a way of affecting one's pronunciation. For example, there are some words I knew in English but I did not know how to say them through watching 'Passions' I learned to pronounce most English words. Hulstijn (2013) also adds that incidental learning is more prominent in the learning of a second language compared to planned intentional learning.

Most of the time, people blame watching the television for the way young people have gone wayward and I understand that watching television can corrupt young people depending on what they watch. However, I have learnt that there is nothing that is completely bad or negative, there are always advantages and disadvantages attached to something. What came as a surprise was that surprised me was that even my peers and critical friends had similar experiences with learning English through television. Hearing from them gave me the assurance that to most of us who took English as a second language, television played an important role in our learning. The next theme I discuss below is economic and social marginalisation, its sub-themes of change, and the context in which the learning of English takes place.

- *What are my experiences of learning English as a second language?*

In this section, I discuss the theme of social and economic marginalisation. I look at how the marginalisation affected my learning of English as a second language both socially and economically. Secondly, I discuss the two sub-themes that are related to this theme, change along with the context in the learning of English as a second language. Critical Discourse Analysis is used to make sense of each discourse that relates to the theme in consideration. I draw on evidence from what I discussed in my autobiographical story that I discussed in chapter three to substantiate my discussion of each theme. I then offer a reflection on what I consider my key learning from deliberating on these themes.

4.3 Theme two: Social and Economic Marginalisation

Marginalisation takes place when someone or a group of people are not fully able to access services or opportunities needed. In line with this, Taylor (2009) asserts that the level of poverty of a learner and his/her location within a disadvantaged community is strongly linked to opportunity and attainment in education in society. This suggests that the socio-economic level of each learner has a way of affecting his/her chances of getting the opportunity to access proper education and other important services in society. For example, a group of people can be identified as socially marginalised because of the place and environment they find themselves in, like villages where they do not have access to proper education or health systems or find it hard to enjoy necessities of life such as clean water and electricity. I noted in my story that:

I come from a community called High-Flats on the South Coast of Kwa-Zulu Natal. This is a black rural area that was intensely affected by the apartheid regime, also characterized by poverty and a lack of good education. My community had been intensely affected by the previous apartheid system. As a result, that had an impact on the lives of the community members in my area as they had negative perceptions of the English language because of what they faced at the hands of the oppressors.

The use of the words *intensely affected by the apartheid regime* indicates that it was a socially marginalised community and at that time, the country still needed to recover from the apartheid system. In line with this, Klug (2000) notes that the country was still in a democratic reconstruction

stage as the government was in the process of trying to reconstruct the country. Moreover, the use of the words *characterised by poverty and a lack of good education* suggests that my community was marginalised both socially and economically because our parents could not afford to pay for proper education for us. For proper education, I refer to the type of education that children in private schools receive. To explain this further, I noted in my story that:

At that time, I remember we used to go to school without shoes and there was nothing wrong with that as it was a normal thing in the community. In my school, we did not pay school fees but still, there was no money to buy stationery. When it comes to English teaching, teachers showed signs of incompetence as they just gave us activities without explaining anything to us. Like in the fill-in-the-missing word, when do we use she, they, is, and are in the sentence? We just wrote and they never even marked, things were just too bad in that school. Also, I think because our parents were not educated themselves they never checked our books or asked questions.

This extract explains what I faced as a person who was marginalised, it is unfortunate that I was in the foundation phase of my education. Aspects like grammar and spelling are so important as they were critical for moving to higher grades and yet they were not prioritised, hence I was not exposed to English up to grade five. Jansen (2004) states that during this time, the country was still trying to recover from the apartheid system which had negative effects on the country. In addition to this, Smith et al. (2011) note that learners who are in the lowest Socio-Economic Status (SES) group mostly attend schools in rural areas and this explains the lack of access and opportunities to learn a second language.

This means I was one of the learners who was not only marginalised, I also did not have an opportunity to learn English. To explain this further I noted that:

I was privileged to move to a township school in Pietermaritzburg where things were far better in terms of education and I progressed and improved. However, I was affected by my poor English background even at the point of the varsity as after my first degree I did not feel ready to teach English in high schools, especially grammar because that aspect was not properly done from a young age.

However, it is interesting to note that my use of the words *in the hands of oppressors* gives the idea that I blamed apartheid for the challenges I faced in that school. In hindsight I realise that is not the case, the issue of apartheid came up because I am discussing experiences of learning English as a second language and I happen to have lived in one of the communities most affected by the system. Another reason this came up is that an individual's life is often influenced by external factors in the macro environment such as economic conditions and politics. In line with this, Burns et al. (2015) note that in Bronferberner's ecology, the macro system is considered the outermost layer in the child's environment, as it includes cultural values, customs, laws, politics, et cetera. This suggests that the effects of larger principles have an influence throughout interactions of all other layers, which means all other levels such as micro are differently affected by this larger layer in the society. Moreover, the use of the words *in my area as they had negative perceptions of the English language* tells us how the whole system affected the mindset of community members about learning the language, pointing to the socio-cultural theory. Such perceptions affected me as I thought English was hard and not very important, it was later in life that I realised that I was wrong. Also, I stated:

My background and societal surroundings made me think that I was not capable of achieving anything in life, especially when it came to knowing and understanding English second language. Some parents would even say, 'When you come here know that it is a Zulu family, make sure you leave your English at the gate before you enter. My mother used to say English is 'ulimi lokucela itiyе,' which means English is a language of trading or business or working class.

The use of the words *not capable of achieving anything in life... knowing and understanding English second language* tells us that the situation in that place seemed hopeless. At that time, even when one tries to speak the language, people would say one is trying to make oneself a white person. They would say things like stop it before you bite your tongue just speak your language. Also, the use of the words *When you come here know that it is a Zulu family, make sure you leave your English at the gate before you enter* tells us that the system made them hate the language to an extent. In support of this, Munir (2019) notes that the influences of the mother tongue are most prevalent in the teaching and learning of English as a second language. This indicates that the negative effect of the mother tongue is mostly observed in learning a second language. This may

be because of cultural values and beliefs that are attached to the language. Hence, in most cases African parents want kids to speak English outside the homes and stick to a native language at home. Hence there was no chance to practice the language at home. They also saw it as the language of trade and business, all these perceptions had a way of affecting my learning of English as a second language. Moreover, Denizer (2017) notes that mother tongue interference can either be negative or positive, however, in this case, it was negative because it prevents learners from freely practicing a second language through speaking. As a result, I was affected because I did not get to practice the language even at home as I noted in my story:

My dad was illiterate, and my mum did up to grade 7 as the last grade, for that reason I did not get to speak English in the house. Learners who came from different contexts better than mine and who came from families where there were literate people had better chances of learning English.

The use of the words *My dad was illiterate, my mum did up to grade seven as the last grade* suggests that my parents did not get an opportunity to be educated because of being socially marginalised. This tells us that with parents who were not educated, there was no chance to speak English at home even a little bit. In the same way, Smith (2011) adds that for learners who are placed in the poorest groups, background factors such as unstable home environments with fewer resources lack opportunities to practice the English language. Also, how the education system was structured during apartheid impacted my family, especially when it comes to education.

Also, when my dad left us things became even harder for my family. Furthermore, the use of the words, *learners who came from different contexts better than mine and who came from families where there are literate people had better chances of learning English* suggests that being in that community limited my chances of learning English at an early stage and being fluent in it. To explain this further I noted in the story that:

I noticed this when I came to the university and was in a class with learners who went to private schools, their fluency in English was at a high level and they were flowing in class. In my case, I took some time to be able to flow in a conversation or a lecture hall when a white or Indian was lecturing. So, there was a big difference in that aspect, but as time went on I adjusted and understood everything.

Taylor (2009) notes that it is well-known that Socio-Economic Status (SES) has a significant influence on children's educational achievement. Furthermore, Smith (2011) adds that the degree of poverty of a learner and his/her location within a deprived community is strongly linked to opportunity and attainment in education and society. I can attest to this, when I started school, I was in a village in a deprived community, and I was living with my mother who was struggling to provide food for us after my father left us. This suggests that coming from a poverty-stricken home can affect the performance of the child in school, for example sleeping in class because of hunger, and stress of not having something to eat daily. In line with this, I noted in my story that '*my father left for work and never came back home and it was not easy to survive as he was the breadwinner as there was no one else to provide for us and we started lacking food.*' This situation happened in our house and it affected us I used to see my mother stressed daily, trying to figure out what she could do to raise me and my siblings as we were so young. The use of the words *there was no one else to provide for us* suggests that at that time women solely depended on their husbands to provide for the family, unlike in this generation where most women are independent, work, and provide for their kids. I also mentioned *I did not have a new uniform so my mum washed one of my cousin's old clothes for me to wear in school...*, *I did not even have exercise covers let alone other stationery instruments, so I used to borrow from them.* All this shows that we struggled to survive after my dad left us and it was showing even in the school.

I mentioned that the larger context had an impact on me because, that was the mindset of the community that a man strictly works and provides for the family, while the wife stays at home and takes care of the children. Along with this theme, during conversations with my peers, Nonto noted that *a lot of villages are different from townships in terms of development and standard of education.* Her use of the words '*different...standard of education*' suggests that she saw a gap when comparing the education, she received in her previous school and the one she received in the township. Below is the discussion of change as a first sub-theme in this section.

- ***What are my learning experiences of English as a second language?***

In this section, I discuss the sub-theme of change that links to the previous theme of social and economic marginalisation. I look at all the changes that took place in my life at that time and how they affected me, especially in terms of my learning English as a second language. Secondly, I also discuss a second sub-theme that is related to this one: the context I was in and how I learned

English in that environment. I draw on evidence from what I discussed in my autobiographical story in chapter three, to substantiate my discussion of each theme and sub-theme. I then offer a reflection in which I consider my key learning from deliberating on the themes.

4.3.1 Sub-theme one: Change

Change is an important aspect of life; however, it can yield positive or negative effects in life. Bain et al. (2016) explain the change to refer to the idea of a difference or innovation in a behavioral social environment, practice, institution, or school. Change requires individuals to adapt to new things that they observe in their environment.

At that time as I discussed in my story at first we were a complete family and my dad used to play his role as a father and a husband at home. Unfortunately, things changed badly when he left us in 1998 because we were left in poverty and my mother was a full-time housewife without a job. My mother decided to sell things like meat, and clothes to have some cash and get food. I must say that change was terrible to adapt to, having to see my mother struggling like that and so on. She also decided that we would move to her mother, my grandmother's place. We were many and we received some unfair treatment from my cousins and my grandmother because we were tagged poor since my father left us. That period was also not easy because my sister and I were mistreated by my cousins and we were made to work more than others especially when my mother was away to go and sell, that was a difficult time. Also, as I mentioned earlier academically, things were not done properly in school, and teachers were lazy and did not teach us important content that was foundational.

When I moved from my first primary school in the village to Pietermaritzburg, I was excited at the beginning but later it was so difficult to adapt to change. In the narrative story I wrote, I noted that:

My eyes opened when I moved to a primary school in a township context where I got an opportunity to be taught by professional teachers, I had specialist teachers in every subject I was doing.

The use of the phrase *my eyes got opened* suggests that there was a transformation in my life as I observed a new way of teaching and learning in the new school. This can also mean that being in the new school made me realise things I did not notice when I was in my previous school. In support of this, Georgalis et al. (2015) in their qualitative study on characteristics of change note

that one of the positive signs of change in an environment is the act of observing newness in the way things are done. For example, in my case, I was impressed with the way things were done in the new school, and the way teachers taught and engaged with the content although I was struggling to adapt to the environment and the way things were done.

Also, the use of the words, *to be taught by professional teachers* suggests that by comparing the current school I was in, I saw improvements in the way I was taught, especially my English. As I noted in my story:

in my English class, we did not only fill in the missing words as we did in my English class in the previous school. We did spelling exercises, recited poems, prepared and unprepared speech activities, etc.

The excerpt I shared above from my story explains why I used the phrase *I was taught by professional teachers* because now looking back as an adult I observe that in the new school, they seemed to have a more structured curriculum that was followed.

This helped me to know different aspects of English, not only one aspect of it such as filling in the missing words. Also, it is interesting to note that my use of the phrase *I was taught by professional teachers* sounds like I have evidence that my previous teachers were less competent than the teachers in the new school. However, it just means that when I saw the difference between the way the new teachers tackled their subjects gave me an idea that they were more competent compared to teachers in the rural school. In agreement with this, Smith (2011) notes in a qualitative study that explored learning across socio-economic groups in South Africa, that rural schools are normally associated with having incompetent teachers, which can be observed from the results they produce.

Furthermore, Jackson et al. (2021) claim that most environmental changes may yield positive or negative experiences in each individual's life. This suggests that adapting to change is not an easy process, hence the process of adaptation can be frustrating for some people while it may be interesting for others. I tend to agree with this because of my experiences at that time as noted in my story:

As much as I admired what I saw in the new school, how the content was delivered, and how passionate the teachers were especially my English teacher. I felt intimidated by lots

of work, meeting new people, and being in a new environment that was completely different from the one I was previously in and it was not easy to adapt.

The use of the words *admired... content delivered...passionate* suggests that the change I was experiencing was good in my journey of learning English and I believe I needed it. In the same way, Weinreich (2010) notes that change can be good, however, the process of adapting to it may be slow and difficult. For example, in my case, In reflecting on the time when I changed schools and went to a better school, there is no doubt it was good for me and my learning, although I experienced hardship in settling into the new learning system. This suggests that in my previous school, things were more relaxed and nothing was done to properly teach me English, having to adapt to the new environment meant I had to come out of my comfort zone and be on my toes. Hence my use of the phrase *I felt intimidated by lots of work*. This means that in the new school, I saw more work being done compared to my previous school, which was a big change for me, having to move from doing one form of activity for the whole term to doing new forms of activities every week.

Furthermore, I had to engage with each activity and use my common sense to answer questions, that was something new for me to do. For example, when a teacher asked a certain English word in class and we did not have an answer, that would be given as homework to go and find the answer, and that required searching and asking questions.

Also, the use of the words *being in a new and completely different environment* suggests that I was struggling to adapt to the change in the new school as it was different from the environment I was in before. This change included having to be among learners who are fluent in English and who actively engage with teachers in the classroom, it was intimidating. I felt like most learners were flowing and understood lessons except for my sister in the new school, I needed to adapt to that environment. Hence, Fullan (2015) in his study that looked at educational change notes that when it comes to change and adaptation, different environmental changes may produce negative experiences at the beginning but may yield positive results later. This means that the process of engaging in a new environment or new system may not be easy but later it may bring lasting positive results. I attest to this because when I came to this school things were not easy for me, work, environment, et cetera, but in the end, I always look back and appreciate the change process

I went through because as I reflect I also see the positive learning experience. Also, to explain this experience better I noted in my story:

I felt threatened, fearful, and intimidated as I realized that I lacked a lot of English second language knowledge.

The excerpt above means that apart from the fact that I was generally adapting to the environment, I struggled to adapt to the standard of English in the classroom. By this, I mean there was a way in which learners were engaging with lessons during English periods and I felt I could not keep up or match the standard in the classroom. For example, when the teacher asked the meaning of an English word, I would see learners put their hands up quickly to answer the question while on my side I did not even understand the question, meaning that I was still trying to process what the teacher was asking. That alone tells you that I felt I was slow in catching up when it came to understanding English. Concerning this, Birney et al. (2020) add that second-language learners usually find themselves at a disadvantage in many settings when they are required to communicate in English, and this was exactly my case when I started grade five in my second primary school.

Hence, I used the words *threatened fearful, and intimidating* because my classroom environment alone was a major platform for me to adapt to if I wanted to flow along with and understand each English lesson. Similarly, Schläppy et al. (2016) note that environmental change can be diverse, it can mean physical environmental changes, contextual changes, or behavioural changes. In this case, I had to adapt to environmental changes during English lessons.

Also, as stated in my story I had to adapt to a school that had many learners, for me, it was a big change because in my previous rural school, we were few and knew everyone in the community, and in school, things were different in the new school. I was intimidated by the crowd in the school as a whole, especially during morning assemblies and also in the classroom having many classmates that I did not know. Another thing that was a shock to me was that I was taught by male teachers, in my previous primary school all teachers were females. The fear of men was another problem for me because I was not used to them and to make things worse most of my teachers were males, and few were females. My English teacher was a male who was described as someone who beats children which made me even more afraid, so adapting to all these changes was not easy. You can imagine that if a learner is scared of a teacher, it becomes difficult for him/her to learn and that was the

case with me and my English teacher. Apart from the fact that I struggled with his subject (English), I was afraid that a man was my teacher and throughout the lesson, I would be shaking until he noticed and called me to discuss with me just to make me relax, so I was affected by those changes specifically.

Jackson et al. (2021) note negative experiences of being in a new environment can be associated with longer-term benefits for individuals. This suggests that negative experiences that occur when one is adapting to a new environment at the beginning can be followed by longer periods of benefits for individuals if they learn and improve in the process. I benefited a lot from being in that school, especially during English lessons and I continue to build from those experiences. Also, I noted in my story that:

It was like I saw light shining in my life and darkness was disappearing gradually. I worked very hard especially in English subjects because I had realized and understood that my ticket to a successful future was knowing English. At the time when the experience occurred, it was so traumatizing but later I got to adjust.

The use of the phrase *It was like I saw light shining in my life and darkness was disappearing gradually* suggests that as time went on I managed to adjust to the environment. My use of personification *it was like* gives an idea that it was a process that brought feelings, emotions, and practical transformation in my journey. Also, the metaphorical use of the words light to refer to new knowledge being absorbed and the word darkness to refer to the state of being lost and lack of knowledge tells us that now that I reflect on my experiences, I get to appreciate being in that environment as it brought about (shone) improvement (light) in my learning and understanding of English as a second language. My adjusting to the new environment was slowly yielding positive results in my learning of English as a second language.

Also, the use of the words *I worked very hard, especially in English subjects* suggests that after my first year of being in that school and having experienced everything I experienced in my English classroom something was triggered in me. This means that the following year in 2004 when I repeated the grade, the environment I was in gave me no choice but to work hard to improve in the language. All that I experienced in the previous year made me determined that I was going to go back to my notes, ask questions from people, and do all I had to do to improve my English in preparation for the next year. To explain this further I noted in my story that:

I spent the December holidays of the previous year going through the English exercise books with my elder sister, I asked the meaning of English words she and I went to our neighbours who were educated and asked for help with the homework I did not understand. I studied and learned to recite word by word one of the poems we did in the class titled 'I Wonder'.

This extract tells us that I learnt and I did not want to be the same learner who lacked the confidence to speak English in the classroom, I, therefore, worked on myself. This suggests that one of the positives emanating from the environment was that it got me out of my comfort zone and forced me to work harder. All this courage came from within after I had been challenged by the environment and surrounded by learners who I considered intelligent because they were fluent in English. The results I had the following year were surprisingly good and proved to me that change can be positive if we allow it to affect us in a good way and we accept it with a positive attitude. As I extract from my story:

I was completely a new person in my English class in grade five in 2004, I used to raise my hand almost every time the teacher asked a question. I successfully recited the poem and I knew almost all the spelling words we did in that classroom. I felt very happy receiving comments like 'very good, well done' coming from the very same teacher who told me the previous year that my lack of English knowledge made him think that I did not do grade four. Moreover, learners who were new from grade four referred to me as a smart child because I could speak English and answer questions in class, I could not believe all that was said to me.

This extract proves that the change process we go through may not be easy but if one is willing to learn, it can produce a more lasting positive effect going forward (Bellicha et al., 2021). My sister (Nonto) participated in my study as a critical friend and as one of my peers and this is how she responded during the conversations: Nonto stated that *at the beginning, I could not even spell simple words like a teacher; it was not easy at all... ' even people who were in lower grades than me knew more than I did. As time went on she noted that 'I had to work harder so that I could meet with the standard of the school'.* Furthermore, she also added *'I saw the difference here...'* Even parents participated in their children's education she added. Her responses aligned with what I discussed about my own experiences and all these attests to my perception that change is

good in education especially if one focuses on the positive result. The learning of English as a second language is linked to a specific context the individual finds himself/herself. I discuss this further as a second sub-theme in this section.

4.3.2 Sub-theme two- Context and Learning English as a Second Language

I see context as an important factor when it comes to one's learning of any subject generally, but here I look at the context in the learning of English as a second language. Context can be understood as circumstances that form the setting for an event, in this case, the setting can be a place and the event may be the process of learning English as a second language (Smith, 2011). According to Li (2014), the background and context of second language learners influence their proficiency in the learning of the target language. This suggests that where, in other words, the place and setting a learner is learning English can affect him/her positively or negatively depending on factors that underpin each learning context.

Moreover, this can also mean that learning English as a second language in the rural township setting, or city context has a direct influence on the life of the learner. Looking at my case In my autobiographical story I wrote in chapter three, I noted that:

The context that I was in when I initially started school was a deeply rural area on the South Coast of KwaZulu-Natal. At that time, they did not put much value on education, not to mention learning English. Also, in my school in that area, the teacher would come to class once after a long time of not coming to class but chatting with each teacher outside until late.

The use of the words *deep rural area* gives an idea that, likely, the kind of education that is received is not necessarily of good quality. Studies by (Nikolov et al., 2020; Smith, 2011; Taylor & Yu, 2009) indicate that there is an education gap among learners from different social contexts ranging from lower, medium, and high-income groups. In addition, Smith (2011) adds that the majority of learners from low-income groups attend rural isolated schools and such get affected by unstable environments with fewer resources. Du Plessis and Mestry (2019) also state that in rural schools parents have no interest in children's education, rural schools lack resources and do not receive sufficient funding from the state, and tend to have underqualified teachers. These are some of the barriers to effective education. In my case, when I was in a rural school we had a serious problem

with multi-grade teaching, that made it difficult to separate grade three from grade four as we were taught the same curriculum. This suggests that the contextual environment where one learns has a way of improving or slowing down the process. In my case, I can say as a young child starting school in that environment slowed down my learning of English. This is because in my exercise book, I wrote some English words that I copied from the board but they did not register anything to me because there was no teaching of English, we just wrote words. Looking back I think the focus was more on spelling than on vocabulary development. Also, even during the writing down of words, the teacher would not explain anything and speak purely in Zulu, so it was not possible to learn English in that place at that time.

Also, the use of the phrase *the teacher would come to class once after a long time of not coming to class but chatting with each teacher outside until late* suggests that the same attitude was manifested in school, teachers themselves did not put value and importance on teaching. In line with this, Li, (2014) argues that one of the factors that influence English language proficiency is associated with a learner's background.

At that time, I was in a school that I now consider to have employed uncommitted and incompetent teachers because of the experiences I faced. This is because, in my observation, they lacked passion, love, and purpose for what they were doing. Du Plessis and Mestry (2019) assert that most principals in rural schools feel neglected by the government and most teachers have other jobs like farming to augment their salary because they are not paid well. Thus, some of the rural schoolteachers lack passion and motivation because of the environment they find themselves in.

The use of the words *did not put much value on education, not to mention that learning English* suggests that education, in general, was not something that was viewed as important, how much more than learning English. This means that the beliefs of the people in the area where the school is (macro-environment) affected what was happening in the school (micro-environment) as was demonstrated in the attitudes of the teachers I was exposed to. Hence, Guy-Evans (2020) in a qualitative study that discussed Bronfenbrenner's ecological system and how society affects the development of the child notes that to understand a learner's development, one must not only look at the immediate environment of the child but also look at the impact of the larger environment as well. To explain this further I noted in my story that:

One of the beliefs of the community I was in at that time was that a proper man should teach a boy, but a girl should be trained to do house chores because she is going to marry and belong to another man. Also, speaking English at home was something that was not done at all as they believed that it shows one was not proud of their language (mother tongue), hence English learning was not something important in the eyes of the villagers.

This extract explains why it was difficult for me to learn English as a second language at that early stage in the context I was in. It is also interesting to note that these were just views of society, but they indirectly affected my chances of learning English at a young age. In my early years, my community had the mentality that it was not necessary to educate a female child because they would marry and go to another man's house. Alhamami (2020) notes that the community where learners find themselves positively or negatively affects them and who they become in the future, that is the sociocultural aspect of learning a second language. In my community, learning a second language was not regarded as something important, especially for girls. One of the reasons is that it was expected that a girl would marry in the community and remain a housewife. That is why I highlight the difference between the two communities where I went for primary school education, rural and township contexts, and how people view life. Therefore, the process of a child's development is affected by different social factors that influence the development of an individual's identity (Makoelle, 2016).

For example, the child is shaped by the beliefs and views of the immediate family, neighbours, and the community. On the other hand, when I moved to the new environment in Pietermaritzburg, I noted that:

When I got there the community members were a little bit enlightened to an extent compared to my former village where I was born. The fact that I was now in a community that was far better than the previous rural area as in the new environment, I could see the educated people that I took as mentors. In the new school, I saw how learners were speaking English fluently and citing poems and I was challenged and wanted to be like them.

The use of the words *enlightened... compared...* suggests that comparatively, the environment I was in was more open and conducive for a learner. In that community, second-language speakers were speaking the language, unlike in the area where I was born. This means that I found

community members to be more open to learning and using English in normal conversations. This, therefore boosted my desire to learn and speak some English words informally with other kids while playing. Also, the use of the words *I could see educated people that I took as mentors* gave the idea that the place was better for me compared to the previous context I was in. In my new context, I saw people I looked up to in the same community, which encouraged me to be more courage to be intentional about learning the language. This is in line with Smith (2011)'s view that some of the neighbourhood problems in our societies are caused by the absence of positive role models. For example, in our neighbourhood, there was a parent who was working as a social worker and she used to speak English occasionally with her daughter. That made me see that being in the same environment with these people I can also learn and improve in the language without any fear. Furthermore, Gardner (1988) notes that learners learning a second language are influenced by their social experiences, and these experiences can take place in school, at home, or in the community through social interaction.

Not only in the community did I gain the courage to learn English second language in that area but also in school, as I noted. *I saw how learners were speaking English fluently and citing poems and I was challenged and wanted to be like them.* The use of the words '*I was challenged*' points to the fact that I saw myself in their environment and I felt like I could also be fluent in English if I am willing to go through the learning process and adapt to the new context. To explain this further I noted in my story that:

When I was in the new school and I observed how my classmates spoke English confidently and fluently, I wanted to be like them and even better. Even though at first I felt intimidated by all that, deep down I admired what I was seeing around me. The way they were praised by the English teacher for their fluency in English and how they got all the English spelling correct summoned courage inside me and I started learning.

This extract shows that the school environment in the new context and observing learners' interactions in the class motivated me to put in the effort and learn the language at that time. Moreover, Gardner (1988) asserts that learners' motivation changes directly as a result of what they experience inside and outside the classroom. In this case, my motivation was stirred by what I saw and observed in my classroom and also in the community to a certain extent, because in the

community not everyone saw English the same way but the attitude towards it was better than in the village I came from.

In addition to my story, during conversations that I had with my peers Nonto, Paul, and Sizwe, also shared some thoughts; Paul stated that he noticed that in his township, *'people are ignorant, it is sad to see that we live amongst people who do not care how they speak and that made me want to know more'*. I understand what Paul is saying but I think the use of the word ignorant is very harsh because there are people who did not have a chance to go to school as opposed to young people who chose to be in that situation. Also, I realised that Sizwe spoke out of his passion for learning the English language, but what he said sounded too harsh. For him, people's lack of interest in learning English in his place encouraged him but motivated him to learn the language. This is interesting to note that people's attitude towards learning the English language in his community did not discourage him but made him learn more to improve his knowledge of the language. On the other hand, the attitude of my community discouraged me, so I admire the fact that he decided to be more focused as a potential English scholar. However, I realised that looking back I should have overlooked what was happening in my context and focused on what I wanted to do and to be.

What I learnt from this experience is that learners need to develop reflective skills parents and caregivers encourage them to allow situations in their environments to discourage them but focus on achieving their goals. I am glad I realised that later. Related to this, Paul stated *'the environment has a way of shaping us, but we also must make our own decisions'*. Nonto also added that *'it was like I was just starting afresh to be a first-time learner... in villages, even the teachers do not care so, environment plays a major role in children's education and how they view life generally'*. She added *'I was getting real content in different subjects; teachers knew what they were doing'* when we moved to the new township context. All this shows that environmental factors play a huge role in a learner's development specifically when learning English as a second language.

- *What can I learn from my experiences of learning English as a second language?*

What I learnt from the first theme I discussed in this section, ‘social and economic marginalisation’ is that the journey of learning English as a second language is a social process that involves larger contexts. This is in line with what Scott and Palincsar (2013) study on the sociocultural approach that explains about how individuals’ thinking relates to their historical, cultural, and institutional contexts. The way I understand it, this means that one cannot go through the learning process in isolation, people and circumstances around us affect us in one way or the other. Hence, the importance of Vygotsky and Cole (1978)’ sociocultural theory in education and the learning of the language, he notes that knowledge is socially constructed in our surroundings and has a way of shaping our identity. What I also learnt is that the environments we find ourselves in have a lot to do with the experiences a person is exposed to in life and what we become at the end of the day. I realised that every learner is directly and indirectly affected by different circumstances that surround him, for example, what happens at home influences what happens what happens in school and also what happens in the church and the larger political and economy of the country. Hence the sociology of education by Durkheim (1956) emphasises an analysis of the social process and social patterns that are involved in the education system. His philosophy is that you cannot separate what happens in individual households and what happens in school and this is related to my case as most of what I face outside school premises affected my learning of English second language.

I say this because as I went through my experience of learning a second language, I noticed that what I experienced at home was influenced by the community, and the community was affected by the country’s system. This is in line with what Makoelle (2016) calls the different layers in Bronfenbrenner’s (1975) ecological system. I noticed in my story that almost all the aspects of life interacted with my education in one way or the other, including the church I went to.

I also realised that being in a certain socio-economic system affects one’s learning. I saw that learning English coming from a poor family exposed me to different experiences. However, it is interesting to note that all these years I did not realise this affected my learning of the English language until I wrote my autobiographical story. I, therefore, see the power of writing one’s autobiography as it fosters reflection. My story allowed me to explore my experiences more deeply, as Ortiz and Duarte, (2019) suggested. They claim that autoethnography shares many

characteristics with linguistic autobiographies. For example, at the beginning when I started writing my story, I did not see a need to mention what was going on in my family, like how we suffered when my dad left us. However, after I spoke to my supervisor Dr Bridget Campbell one of my critical friends, she suggested I write everything as it might have affected my learning of English, I did that and to my surprise, the story played a big role in realising how my surroundings affected my learning of English.

By engaging with the theme of change, I learnt that change is important in life and that if one does not change, it becomes impossible to grow. In my case, I needed a change because if I had continued to stay in my village, I do not think I would have continued with school, finished matric, and gone to university. When I was in the village, there was no information about opportunities when one goes to the university, it was like we were in the darkness. Therefore, changing the environment and school was the best decision my mother made. I also noticed that many changes happened in my life that started when my dad left us as a family when we moved to stay in my grandmother's house, and when we finally moved to Pietermaritzburg. Again, these social changes affected me, which shows the effect of the socio-cultural perspective (Mughal & Zafar, 2011; Scott & Palincsar, 2013). Like Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory, these scholars note that individuals are affected by what happens in their environment which can be home, school, or community at large. The effects can be positive or negative.

For example, when my dad left, it was a negative change as we had to learn to live without food for days and manage with what we had. Also, when we moved to my grandmother's place, we were mistreated and that negatively affected me too. Such changes even affected the relationship with other learners and teachers in school. When I moved to a new school, things were better there educationally, the problem is that I found it challenging to adapt too quickly.

When I was in a rural school, everything was relaxed and there was not much learning going on, especially when it came to English. However, things changed when we relocated to one of the townships in Pietermaritzburg. In the new school, things were done differently, teachers taught enthusiastically compared to the teachers in my former school, and that was a big transformation for me. It was interesting to be in a school where the curriculum was taught thoroughly but it was difficult to adjust to the system because I was used to the system I was coming from. Even at that time, being in the new school made me see that in the previous school,

we were playing, and no prescribed content was taught thoroughly especially when it comes to learning the English language. Being in a new environment exposed me to a real learning environment that was effective and interactive, although I was intimidated by children who were fluent in English. In the same way, Jackson et al. (2021) note that changes we go through may look negative at the beginning, but in the end, may yield positive results. The same thing happened in my case, as I am commending the education system in my new school, things did not start well with me as it was difficult to adapt but I knew that it was a positive change, I am grateful that I went through that process of change. Therefore, what I am learning in this process is that adapting to change might seem difficult at the beginning but in the end, it yields positive results.

The process of adapting took a while and caused me to plan so that I could be better at expressing myself in the language. By this I mean I had to plan for the next year by going through all the work that was done in the grade that same year to be able to be better in the following year. Another positive change is that the environment and what I observed around me in the classroom forced me to be motivated to learn and go the extra mile in mastering the content that was taught in my English classroom in grade five.

At the end of the day after going through all the hardship and learning hard, I was referred to as an intelligent child in the following year because of how I had improved in English as a whole. This attitude made me realise that according to my teacher fluency in English is equal to intelligence. What I learnt from here is that changing schools was a very good idea and if I had not changed schools, I doubt if I would be where I am today in terms of competency in the English language.

By looking at the sub-theme *context and learning English as a second language*, I learnt that the learner has so much to do with his learning and in my case the learning of English as a second language. The context might present positive or negative factors depending on each case. In my case, in the first context I was in, it was not easy to learn English both at school and within the community because it was something new to me, in the previous school I was not exposed to it more directly. On the other hand, when I moved to a different context, I learned that it was much easier for me to learn English both in the community and in school. All this is because of the experiences that I faced in both contexts. What I learnt is that you cannot compare learners

who come from rural areas, townships, or cities when it comes to English proficiency as there is a big difference. In agreement, Smith (2011) adds that learners who come from rural areas are normally from a lower socio-economic status in society. As a result, as a teacher, you would expect that they have a basic understanding of English.

In contrast, through conversations that I had with my peers, I also learnt that even if one comes from the worst environment, the challenge lies with the individual to become what he wants to be and learn what he/she thinks will make his/her future better. This came from the interaction I had with one of my peers who mentioned that for him, the ignorance of community members motivated him to learn English as a second language and be better at it. I learnt a lot from that and I did not realise it at first until later. Self-motivation and curiosity are important aspects of learning a second language and they are discussed further below:

- *What are my learning experiences of English as a second language?*

In this section, I discuss the theme of self-motivation and curiosity as I look at how self-motivation and curiosity helped me in my journey of learning English as a second language. Critical Discourse Analysis is used to make sense of each discourse that relates to the theme in consideration. I draw on evidence from what I discussed in my autobiographical story in chapter three, to substantiate my discussion of each theme. I then offer a reflection in which I consider my key learning from deliberating on this theme.

4.4 Theme three: Self-motivation and Curiosity

The next theme that I identified is self-motivation and curiosity. I see motivation as an important factor in the learning of a second language. According to Gardner (1988), motivation refers to the feeling of the learner toward a certain language, its culture as well as individual reasons for learning a second language. This suggests that the motive behind learning a second language is a factor that may serve as a driving force in the process of learning the target language. Curiosity is another important factor in learning a second language. I see curiosity as a strong desire to learn something, in this case, a second language learner is expected to be eager to learn and know the language.

Pluck and Johnson (2011) add that it is important to consider the role of motivation in learning a second language using Gardner's theory. I noted in my story that from a young age, I showed some motivation and curiosity to learn and know the language, this is seen in my story as I noted:

I was already crying that I wanted to go to school. I was interested in learning, but no one was ready to assist with the learning process, I used to wake up early in the morning and find my way to school. I used to wait, expect, and patiently long for the teacher to stand in front of me and teach. Unfortunately, no one was ready to come and teach me which made my heart sorrowful because I did not have a way to satisfy the burning desire that was in my heart to learn.

The use of the words *already crying I wanted to go to school* tells us that from a young age, I was very curious to learn and be in a learning environment. I see the curiosity that was stirred up by evening lessons my aunt conducted with the family. In line with this, Anderson et al. (2010) note that early family literacy stirs up interest and appetite for learning in the life of a child. Smith (2011) also asserts that in sociology, socio-economic status refers to societal rank, position, and prestige. This means that for someone to gain access to power and prestige in society, literacy is important beyond the role it plays in securing a job. This suggests that it is first enabled by the support one gets at home, bearing in mind that parental education is one component of SES. As a result, better-educated parents can directly benefit their children's education by starting the education process during their preschool years. In my case, even though I had parents who were not well-educated, my aunt taught me basic literacy skills before I started school. I noted in my story:

At that time, I was still underage to start school but I wanted to go to school badly to the point that I cried and fortunately, my mother's former classmate was the grade 1 teacher in that school. She asked her to just keep me in her class even if I was not registered, however, when I got there she was surprised that I knew most of the things even more than the registered learners in the class. As a result of my top performance, she had to promote me to the next grade at the end of the year.

This extract shows how my motivation to learn in general started at a very young age, which also inspired my desire to learn English as a second language. Furthermore, the use of the words, *I was interested in learning, but no one was ready to assist with the learning process* tells us that as time

went on in that school I just had the eagerness to learn, but teachers were not available to teach. As I noted earlier the teacher hardly came to class but was just chatting outside until late.

Also, the use of the words *sorrowful, I did not have a way to satisfy the burning desire* suggests that I was even curious to learn things I did not know as a result of the lessons my aunt offered. In the same way, Tulgar (2018) notes that curiosity is an aspect of intrinsic motivation that has great potential to enhance the learning of a language. This suggests that curiosity is another important ingredient to enhance motivation in the life of a second language learner. It is interesting to note that at this stage of my life, I was interested in going to school and learning.

Also, it is worth noting that I was in school but the teachers did not teach in the class. I see this in the words I used *unfortunately, no one was ready to come and teach me.* This reveals the kind of school I was in and the kind of teachers we had. In that place, teachers behaved as if they were lazy and incompetent. Hence, Smith (2011) states that generally, low quality of education was attributed to a poor foundation and mastery of subjects. However, despite that, I was still interested in learning, not necessarily to be in school, I just had a hunger for knowledge that needed to be satisfied.

Furthermore, Gardner (1988) notes three elements to learning a second language; first, the motivated learner makes an effort to learn the language. This means that the individual on his/her own decides to learn the second language for reasons unknown to him or her. In support of this, my story reveals that *although many of my cousins were forced to read those during the family literacy program, I used to look forward to that time.* This shows that I had the motivation to learn, which yielded positive results in the end. Secondly, a motivated learner wants to achieve a goal (Gardner, 2010), this suggests that for example, she/he wants to know and understand English so that they can excel in all subjects as they are examined in English. In my story, I mentioned that *I used to wait, expect, and patiently long for the teacher to stand in front and teach.* In my case, this means my motivation was integrative because at that time I was too young to consciously have external goals that I wanted to achieve, I just wanted to know English and be able to communicate through it. Thirdly, a motivated learner enjoys the task of learning as Hossain (2016) notes, for example, one may enjoy parts of a speech and use nouns and verbs intentionally in conversations. In line with this, my story reveals that *we used to learn that every evening and I was the only one*

who seemed to understand easily what was being taught, I think it is because I used to enjoy every session.

Although my aunt did not explicitly teach us English at that stage, the alphabet we did learn served as a foundation for me, to know that from the (a)-vowel I can write the word apple, from (b) bee, et cetera. When I later saw all this from the chart on the wall of my classroom it was interesting.

In Gardner (1988) second language motivation research, he divided motivation into two types, instrumental and integrative motivation. He stated that second language learners need to adopt a certain behaviour pattern or characteristic of another group leading to the motivation to learn a second language, which can either be integrative or instrumental (Burlakova, 2019). This suggests that learners who prospered in second language learning were motivated by integrative or instrumental motivation or even both. Motivation is a complex construct; one which can change depending on situational factors like time, place, and activity. Moreover, Gardner and Smythe (1975) identified integrative as the personal interest in learning a second language, for instance, to learn more about the culture and the people of the target language. On the other hand, when someone has the desire to achieve a certain goal and benefit from acquiring a second language, it is referred to as instrumental motivation. From my story, it looks like my motivation started as integrative, but as I became older it was more instrumental as I noted:

When I was growing up and started to realize the importance of learning and knowing English, my reasons became instrumental because I see English as a global language that is spoken in most countries of the world. I realized that if one wants to operate in a global market one needs to know the language, hence when I came to varsity I took it as one of my majors, and considering that I am an English teacher equipping myself with it, I stand a chance to teach anywhere in the world comfortably. Also, English is the only language that helps us to communicate as human beings from every tribe.

The use of the words *importance of learning and knowing English* tells us that this realisation motivated me to focus on academic success and just to succeed in life, to achieve that required knowledge of English. In line with this, Clement and Murugavel (2018) assert that the importance of English as the most spoken language globally is undeniable. This explains how language is considered an asset in our academic and economic lives, just like the key in our hands that we can

use to open great doors. Also, the use of the words *I am an English teacher equipping myself with* suggests that my motivation keeps increasing even after obtaining my first degree, I saw the need to continue to learn to operate effectively in all spheres.

This explains why I decided to pursue a Ph.D. in English education studies. Although embarking on a narrative study was not going to be easy based on my background and the challenges I went through to learn English, I realised it was important to pursue it as many people who come from a similar background could benefit from my story.

Another motivation I demonstrated was when I repeated my grade five in 2004 as I noted in my story:

Normally when one repeats a grade, she/he gets mocked by other learners and even some teachers, but as for me I did not even care that I was repeating a grade I just wanted to show those teachers that I was not dumb I just needed to pull up my socks. I then made attempts to study all the things we were learning throughout the year and I also asked about the meaning of some English words from our new neighbours. I made up my mind that I was going to be the one receiving these commendations the following year.

The use of the words *I did not even care* whether I would be mocked that I was repeating a grade, I just focused on improving myself in English. This is self-motivation at its highest because I had made up my mind that in the new year, I was going to learn and know the language. Also, all the positive feedback the teacher used to give to the learners who were fluent in English the previous year in the classroom encouraged me to work on my English literacy skills so that I could get the same recognition the following year. This points to instrumental motivation and to the fact that motivation itself is complex as it can come from internal or external factors. This means that at this stage, my motivation was integrative because I wanted to feel validated by my English teacher and be regarded as a smart learner. This shows in the phrase I used in my story as I noted *I made up my mind that I was going to be the one receiving these commendations the following year*. It is interesting to realise that even though throughout the story I discussed how his comments about my English negatively affected me, there is something positive I picked from it. This tells us that there is always a positive side to every negative thing, it depends on how one is motivated to achieve their goal.

Also, I stated that *I told myself that that year I was going to work hard read my notes, and do all the necessary things to get promoted at the end of the year.* The use of the words *I told myself* suggests that my motivation came from within and I was determined to do better in the following year. *I also gathered strength from the fact that my elder sister had been promoted to the next class, I needed to man up and face the challenges with a positive mind.*

Oroujlou and Vahedi (2011) state that motivation and attitude are primary factors in sparking interest in learning a second language, and can help sustain a long and sometimes rough process of learning a second language.

In line with the above discussion, one of my peers Sizwe through the conversation that we had noted that *that is why I pushed so hard to learn how to speak the language... navigate around them teachable, and fluent.* The use of the words *pushed harder* suggests that he made an effort to learn the language on his own through different means. The use of *navigating around them is teachable, and fluent* also gives us an idea that his motivation to learn the language was integrative as he uses it mostly to socialise and establish relationships with people.

- ***What can I learn from my experiences of learning English as a second language?***

In the theme of self-motivation and curiosity, I learnt that motivation is very important for one to learn a second language and also that this motivation should come from within. Motivation is the driving force for this research as it is out of that I decided to explore my experiences of learning English as a second language, not my native language. I can say my motivation was also instrumental as I wanted to obtain my PhD. Hence, Oroujlou and Vahedi (2011) note that motivation and attitude are primary factors that spark interest in someone learning a second language, and sustain it through the long and sometimes rough process of learning. However, during my formative years, the motivation I had was more integrative because I did not have a clear goal, I just had an interest in learning, but interestingly that yielded positive results.

Also, when I interrogated my story I noticed that I had this motivation from a young age, and it has been growing and increasing. I also realised that motivation is the reason why I decided to embark on this study, given that it is a personal story, I had to share experiences I am not proud of. However, motivation led me here, and I am discovering and learning more about myself. For

me, this means, that if one is pursuing a second language without any motivation, they are not likely to make it.

I also learnt that my motivation has been growing and changing in different circumstances in some cases I noticed it was integrative and in other cases instrumental. For example, now I am married to a man who is from another country, if I did not know English, there would be no way to communicate and understand one another. In this way, my learning of English second language was integrative because I wanted to fit in every group, class, and society. My reasons are still instrumental because for me this is a career now and I know it is likely to open many doors for me.

Motivation being one of the concepts in my conceptual framework fits well in my study and makes me understand my experiences better. Another lesson I got is that the second concept in my theoretical framework which is socio-cultural theory appeared in this section, and I saw the alignment and realised the importance of these two concepts in the learning of a second language.

- *What are my learning experiences of English as a second language?*

In this section, I discuss the theme of cruelty and non-inclusive education as I look at how cruelty and non-inclusive education affected my journey of learning English as a second language. Critical Discourse Analysis is used to make sense of each discourse that relates to the theme in consideration. I draw on evidence from what I discussed in my autobiographical story in chapter three, to substantiate my discussion of each theme. I then offer a reflection in which I consider my key learning from deliberating on this theme.

4.5 Theme four: Cruelty and non-inclusive education

When I went to the second primary school in Pietermaritzburg in 2003, unlike in my previous school where teachers used a hose pipe to punish us, they used a wooden stick. As a result, the new schoolteachers used to come to class with hose pipes to scare us so that we would do what they instructed us to do. So, when I was in grade five, my English teacher would use it to punish us for spelling English words incorrectly and I used to be very scared when he came to class with

it. A picture of the hose pipe prompted memories of everything that happened in my grade five English classroom.

Cruelty and non-inclusive education are other themes that were identified. Makoelle (2016) asserts that inclusive education refers to an act of inclusive approach to education where all learners are taught in classrooms, irrespective of their background, disability as well social context. This suggests that it is expected that all learners in the classroom are treated equally irrespective of their background, economic status, gender, race, et cetera. In the same way, Smith et al. (2011) state that learners who come from poor backgrounds attend schools in rural areas, which explains the challenges they face in accessing education, let alone learning a second language.

Furthermore, Donohue and Bornman (2014) note that one of the challenges of inclusive education in South Africa is implementation, teachers know about it and how it is supposed to be implemented but do not practice it. This explains why because of our background, my sister and I felt excluded and inferior to other learners when we moved to the new school. In the letter I wrote to Mr. Shelembe, I stated:

When we came to Mpumelelo primary school in 2003, my sister Nqobile and I were coming from a rural area I explained to you when you asked me at that time we came new.

The use of the words '*I explained to you*' suggests that I expected him to understand and accommodate us and be patient with us since he had been notified about the background we came from. In my story, I noted that the teacher said:

'look at learners who did grade four' ...when he said this, I felt like an outsider, I just did not fit into the rest of the class. I felt like everyone was feeling at home and enjoying the learning process while on the other hand, I felt isolated, even though I also kept to myself because I did not feel belonging in the environment at that time.

The use of the words *look at learners who did grade four* supposes that we who were not able to write English words did not do grade four. Van Dijk (2015) adds that presupposition refers to the use of language in a way that appears to take certain ideas for granted as if there were no alterations. I interpret this to mean that Mr. Shelembe was clearly saying that learners who he considers as those who did grade four are the ones who are fluent in English and active in class. Also, the use

of the words '*I felt isolated*' tells us that what the teacher said about me and my sister in the class made me feel bad and excluded. Furthermore, I stated in my story:

I got an English wrong and it was very embarrassing for a grade five learner to fail to write the spelling of such a simple word The teacher made things worse by broadcasting to the whole class that I did not know anything, How can I fail to spell such a simple word?

The use of the words *embarrassing* suggests that I understood my situation and knew that I lacked basic English knowledge, however, the use of the words *broadcasting to the whole class that I did not know anything* suggests that I was not happy with the fact that he told the whole class that I got a simple English word wrong during spelling. This is contrary to what Messiou (2017) recommends, the focus of inclusive education should be to eliminate all barriers to learning by emphasising the participation of all learners to ensure that they succeed in their academic careers and lives. I believe the teacher was supposed to correct me privately and help me improve, instead of shaming me in front of the whole classroom. In agreement with this, according to Paat (2013), the successful implementation of inclusive education is important to achieve a democratic society. However, inclusive education pedagogy remains a challenge in South African schools, especially in schools located in disadvantaged communities such as rural and township schools. The Department of Education needs to redefine the meaning of inclusive education to its stakeholders, provide workshops on it, and include it in the teachers' professional development plan. I also noted that as a result of what the teacher did and said,

'I felt inadequate, dumb, and worthless especially when the teacher even made things worse by showing other learners that I did not know simple English words like a teacher.'

The use of the words *dumb* and *worthless* indicates how affected I was when the teacher did that as I felt hopeless. Paat (2013) adds that this constitutional imperative (inclusive education) aims to build an inclusive model of education where all learners learn together in a single classroom regardless of their strengths, disabilities, and weaknesses. At that time my strength was that I did not cause problems in the classroom, I could sit and listen. However, my weakness was that I allowed fear of the teacher to get to me because I did not understand English coming from a rural disadvantaged school.

Another incident I listed in my story as I stated,

'my teacher made me feel worthless, if it was just learners, I would not take it to heart like that but because I knew that he was an English teacher and had the power to keep failing me I repeated the grade, and my hope just faded.'

The use of the words *if it was just learners* suggests that I did not expect that treatment from the teacher because if it was learners, I would not mind, but coming from the teacher made me lose hope in myself.

Under this theme, Mr. Shelembe is topicalised and as the teacher in the class he had the power to handle the situation in the best way he could, unfortunately, he decided to misuse his authority by belittling my sister and me in the classroom. Knowingly or unknowingly, what he did humiliated us in class because of our poor background, and that negatively impacted our performance, this is the direct opposite of what inclusive education is. I link this treatment to our background because he knew that we came from a village and that was funny to him, he could not understand that the reason why we did not understand English was because of our background. Another incident was when we wrote a test:

'he said to me, even you finished, no we are going to all start afresh and he scratched all our scripts and made us write again just because he wanted to see me struggling.'

The use of the words, *even you finished* suggests that the teacher was saying that he also did not believe I could finish on time being stupid as I was and unfortunately, we all started afresh. The fact that he made the whole class repeat the test just because he could not accept something positive from me, made me conclude that he was a cruel and bad teacher. This is because it is expected that teachers play pastoral roles, they are expected to motivate learners and be happy to see progress in their students' academic lives. Makoelle (2016) adds that inclusive education is more than just caring for learners with special needs, rather to ensure that all learners in class receive the same information that addresses their needs. Furthermore, Engelbrecht (2020), adds that inclusive education sounds simple in theory, however, in practice, it is challenging for teachers, it can be demanding and overwhelming to create an inclusive education environment for learners who come from diverse groups. This means that inclusive education sounds easy on paper but when teachers have to practice it, it becomes difficult because of different reasons like overcrowded classes, time constraints, inadequate preparation, et cetera.

In line with this, Nonto through the conversation I had with her about cruelty and non-inclusiveness asserts that '*Mr. Shelembe used to make things worse and embarrassed me and I hated it*' looking at her use of the word *I hated* suggests that the teacher's comments towards her were not encouraging at all but brought hopelessness. Also, she added that for her, *Zondi was passionate and inspired me if Mr. Zondi also behaved like Mr. Shelembe, I would not have known that I had that great potential he saw a potential in me and let it out and I shone. What I can say is teachers need to be agents of positive change in the lives of their learners.*' Firstly, her use of the words *if Mr. Zondi behaved as Mr. Shelembe* gives us an idea of a comparison between the two teachers, as Mr. Zondi is painted as an example of a good teacher who brought a positive change in the life of the learner. Also, her use of the words *would not mean that I had that great potential* suggests that from the outside it looked like there was no hope in her but the teacher had the skill to be patient and bring the best out of the learner. Lastly, her use of the word *teachers need to be agents of positive change* explains how she saw a good example of a teacher who is there to stir up potential in the lives of the children.

However, that was not the case with Mr. Shelembe who represented bad teachers who did not support their learners. As Engelbrecht (2020) asserts all teachers are expected to practice inclusive education by making all learners in the class feel that they belong despite their background, disability, and academic capabilities.

- ***What can I learn from my experiences of learning English as a second language?***

In the theme of cruelty and non-inclusive education, I learnt that at that time when everything was happening, as a child I did not know that my English teacher was not being inclusive in his treatment of us. As I wrote my story and looked at it closely and read about what is expected of teachers in South African schools, I realised that he was not inclusive in his approach. In agreement with this, Meier and West (2020) state that learners are to be accommodated in each South African classroom regardless of their background, disability, or race. Mr. Shelembe and the way he treated us in the classroom showed that he did not recognise us as learners who needed to be incorporated into the learning. Rather he used our weaknesses to embarrass us in front of everyone, which affected our self-esteem a lot.

This may be something he may have done unconsciously or unintentionally, so I learnt that as teachers we need to be careful of how we treat or react to learners who are less privileged in our classes, that way we will not perpetuate stereotypes about learners from disadvantaged communities. I also learnt that inclusive education does not only refer to people with disabilities, but it also includes people who come from disadvantaged backgrounds. I also realised that as a teacher I should not be cruel to my learners because whether something done is good or bad it stays in the mind of the learner. Another important lesson is that as teachers we need to focus on the potential of the learners we teach.

This means that even if their situation seems hard and hopeless, we need to instill interest in them so that they can be motivated and see that they can achieve more if they work hard. A good example is Mr. Zondi, my sister's English teacher in grade six, who patiently taught her and explained things to her until she understood and was good in the English language. In the section below, I discuss the theme of bullying with its sub-theme of fear and intimidation.

- *What are my learning experiences of English as a second language?*

In this section, I discuss the theme of bullying. I use my story to explain how I experienced this during my learning of English as second language and the effect that this had on me. I also write a reflection on what I learned during the discussion under this theme. I later discuss the sub-theme of fear and intimidation and then I write a reflection on what I learned from the main theme and the sub-theme.

4.6 Theme Five: Bullying

The next theme I identified at this point is bullying. According to Juvonen and Graham (2014), bullying involves targeted intimidation that is propagated by a physically stronger, or socially more prominent individual who threatens, demeans, or belittles other people. The experience of being bullied can negatively affect one's performance in school when bullying takes place between school children. In the same way, Menesini and Salmivalli (2017) assert that bullying can have several negative effects on the life of the one who is being bullied such as depression, anxiety, suicidal thoughts, et cetera. I experienced bullying during the early years of my life as a result of my family and academic background. In my story, I noted that:

I was bullied when I came newly in the township school because I was new and not used to the environment at that time, some girls came to me and gave me a slap that I should stand up and they took my sit and desk, I just cried and stood the whole day. That day I felt bad and unwelcome, to be honest, that incident made me think that I was worthless and useless and good for nothing.

Reflecting on my experiences, it seemed as though such girls used their familiarity with the environment to mistreat people who were new to the environment, which made them feel more important than I was. This aligns with the socio-cultural theory because bullies know who is familiar and not familiar with the cultural environment (Martinez, 2020). In line with this, Cornell and Limber (2015) add that power imbalances between two parties are evidence that what happens between them is bullying and not conflict, and that power is created by perceptions in that particular environment. The use of the words *'took my sit and desk and I just cried* suggests that I voluntarily settled as a victim which gave them the liberty to treat me as they pleased, I was supposed to try and defend myself but I did not. In agreement with this, Menesini and Salmivalli (2017) note that children who are insecure and lack confidence create conditions for bullying unconsciously. To be honest, when I came to the new school, I was insecure, fearful, and lacked confidence. Also, Nickerson (2019) adds that there should be interventions in schools to stop bullying as it can destroy both the bully and their victims' futures. I mentioned in my story that *whenever I was in a queue for food, some learners would snatch my food from me until I was left with nothing on the plate*. That was an act of bullying that made me lose confidence as I stood in class without a chair to sit on the whole day. In support of this, Vorster (2012) asserts that many bullies act based on superiority to the victims, in my case she noticed that I was not yet comfortable in the class and they took advantage of that. So, I would not be surprised if my behavior prompted the incidents of bullying because I was still trying to adjust to the new environment.

'I wrote about this incident because it made me traumatized and even more fearful and that negatively affected my learning as I lacked concentration in class because of fear.'

The use of the word *'traumatised'* suggests that this incident traumatised me and as I wrote about it, I got some healing from inside.

In agreement with this, Menesini and Salmivalli (2017) note that one of the effects of bullying is anxiety which may lead to depression. Another bullying incident that I wrote about was:

'while standing there to get stew, other learners who take me for granted would just come and take my rice to their plates or pour it down and beat me just to embarrass me in the presence of other kids. Also, in my class, one boy just slapped me and said I was an ugly girl, so people took advantage of me and my situation at that time.

This used to make me feel very embarrassed and very bad about myself to the point that I just left the food and went away. What made me feel this way is that this was happening as a result of how I was treated in the English classroom. What made me know that it was because of this reason is the way they used to refer to me as I stated, *then other learners from other classes who did not know me started pointing at me and calling me "a girl who does not know anything.* The use of the *'do not know even A'* tells me that even though they are not in my class, they were told about me, and that affected my confidence as I was referred to as someone who does not know anything. This was verbal abuse as Juvonen and Graham (2014) noted that bullying can be in different forms. Also, because I was new in the school, I noted in my story that:

On Fridays after school, some girls used to organize fights between us just because we were not known, we were new in school, and as a result of all this, I hated going to school a lot.

The use of the words, 'because we are not known', suggests that being in the new school comes with many challenges, so what I faced in the classroom made things even worse as it escalated outside the classroom. Another bullying incident took place at home between myself and my cousins as I noted:

She (my cousin) took my wood because it was good, I expected the eldest cousin to intervene and rebuke her for doing that, but she was on her side and even told her to beat me. I decided to share this story as it is because of my devotion to learning that planted hatred for me in their hearts being a child of a poor mother. I came back and slept; I was so hurt to the point that till today I never told anyone about it.

The use of the words, *I was so hurt to the point that till today I never told anyone about it* means that it hurt me to go through that because it was not fair.

I also note that *they bullied me a lot because I was new in the school but mostly because Mr. Shelembe's comments towards me made them look down upon me.* The use of the words *because*

Mr. Shelembe's comments towards me suggest that I blame him for the bullying I received, and I cannot prove that. What I mean is that it was the main cause of my being bullied because learners saw how he treated me in the class and took it outside.

That does not mean that it was the main cause however, another reason was because I was new in the school, people could see that I was insecure, and bullies could see that. Fear and intimidation is a sub-theme that I discuss further below:

4.6.1 Sub-theme one: Fear and intimidation

The school bell is an artifact that helped to trigger my memory of the fear that I had in school and during English lessons. It was used to indicate that assembly is starting or the break as well as to notify us to go back to classes after the break, including a change in periods. For example, when we were on a break and I heard a bell ring knowing that the next period was English, my stomach would just turn so hard because I knew what the bell indicated. Also, if his period was first, whenever we came in the morning and the bell rang, I would wish that he had not come to school that day, whenever I saw his car I knew that he was around and the English lesson was going to take place, I had to be prepared for another unpleasant experience in the classroom.

Fear and intimidation are the sub-theme of the theme of bullying. Bachman et al. (2011) state that fear is a natural and normal human experience, however when care is not taken it can negatively affect the nervous system. This suggests that human beings normally go through some kind of fear, however, it should not get to the point where it paralyses someone to the point of not being able to do anything. This explains the use of my words:

'She used to come to our house and start telling us that in grade 5, there is this Mr. Shelembe that teaches English, and he beats a lot if you do not know anything, and because of him many children leave the school. what was going on in my mind was that number one, he is a man and I had never had a male teacher before and on top of that I am hearing that he beats a lot and he teaches English, a subject that I am not familiar with, it was terrible.

The use of the words *She used to come to our house and start telling* gives an idea that fear started even before I met this teacher because of what I heard about him.

Moreover, it is interesting to note the use of the words ‘*he beats a lot*’ suggests that I understood him to be someone who would just enter the class and beat everyone without a reason, this might have resulted in my lack of concentration in his classroom, Zhang et al. (2023) refers to this as one of the effects of fear.

I witnessed this in my life as the moment he entered the class, I would be shaking already and would not look him in the eye. I would be so restless; the words of that teacher affected me a lot. Also considering that he was an English teacher and I knew that I did not understand it although it was a very important subject, my lack of concentration because of this fear made things even worse for me. Furthermore, my story reveals that:

‘I was afraid to the point that I was shaking and in the school assembly, they introduced all the teachers to us when I heard his name I was finished with fear.’

This suggests the possibility that I was not going to hear and understand anything in class because of fear that was gripping me; as a result, I was distracted from learning English. The use of the word ‘*shaking*’ suggests that even before I entered the class I was already defeated by fear in my mind and what followed was the result of that fact, as Aldama et al. (2023) assert that being fearful in school can affect perceptions and capacity to learn. I also noted in my story that:

‘Mr. Shelembe, the English teacher, noticed that every time he taught, I would shake, yes that is how scared I was of him. It was even so difficult to concentrate on his teaching because of the fear I had towards him, I even saw him struggling as a boy just because he did not keep his exercise book well. That was an even worse case because I saw him as someone who had anger issues also.’

The use of the word ‘*so difficult to concentrate on his teaching*’ suggests that this fear was so much that it paralysed me to the point where I could not concentrate in class Gale (2011) notes that there is a need for teachers to make the learning environment welcoming and conducive for learning, to allow learners to relax in the classroom. It is interesting to note that fear and intimidation could have been one of the causes of my bullying as other learners observed the way I was in the classroom, especially during English periods.

- *What can I learn from my experiences of learning English as a second language?*

In the theme of bullying, what I learnt is that I did not realise that what happens around us affects our learning. At the time when I was experiencing bullying when I got to the new school, I did not notice that it affected me until I started to reflect and write about what I faced.

In support of this, Krause and Maldonado (2019) note that autobiographies point to the identity and the consciousness of oneself and the principle of autonomous existence. For example, it is through the writing of my autobiography that I was conscious of this experience, I could reflect on how it affected my learning at that time. I also learnt that incidents of bullying can be caused by the way we conduct ourselves Zhang et al. (2023). In agreement to this, Nickerson (2019), added that most of the learners who get bullied in schools normally show signs of insecurity and lack of confidence, and that attracts bullies. I also learnt that as a teacher, it is important to be careful of what we say to our learners in the classroom so that we would not encourage bullying or suggest that it is okay to bully others. I also learnt that not understanding English can subject one to unpleasant experiences where everyone in school views you as someone inferior and stupid. This highlights the influence and social value of English in terms of the hegemony of English and the negative attitude towards those who are less fluent in the language. In support of this, Beard (2020) refers to the communicative approach where instruction in a second language aims to develop the practical ability to interact and communicate with others. For me, this shows the importance and significance of English in society. However, in my case, a lack of linguistic tolerance was displayed by my teacher where his focus was not explicitly on the communicative purpose of the message in the second language but more on equating how correct is the pronunciation and vocabulary.

On the sub-theme of fear and intimidation, I learnt that fear can be an enemy and if not addressed appropriately, it has the potential to affect someone's performance negatively. As I noted in my story, because of what I heard about Mr. Shelembe even before I met him, I started being afraid of learning English, fear being one of the factors that influence a person's motivation to learn a second language (Gardner, 2010).

which made me miserable in class. To the point that I could not concentrate on his teaching, I was afraid and waited for the moment he would use the pipe to beat someone. This affected me so

much because, in my English class, I could not wait for him to leave, and that did not help my learning. Also, my fear was so obvious, that I would not be surprised if bullies noticed that as well, everyone could see that I was not comfortable or confident in the English classroom. The theme of the social currency of English is discussed in the section below.

- *What are my learning experiences of English as a second language?*

In this section, I discuss the theme: the social currency of English. I use my story to explain how I experienced this during my learning of English as a second language. I also discussed the sub-theme of the English language and stigma as I realised that there are stigmas attached to people who know or do not know the English language. Again, I use my experiences to interrogate this notion and make sense of the data generated from the study.

4.7 Theme six: Social Currency of English

The social currency of English refers to the value individuals derive from their social relationships, networks, and interactions. This suggests that using language in a certain way gives people recognition in society, especially when it comes to people in certain positions and institutions. Slavova et al. (2020) note that communication skills are increasingly becoming important with English recognised as an international language. Therefore, language skills in this context can be viewed as social currency considering their power and impact on society.

I stated in my story that I realized that I needed to know English being the language of instruction in the school if I wanted to get promoted to other grades.

This suggests that through language one can progress and advance in society. In line with this, Wakeman (2019) notes that the value that is attached to linguistic competence, especially in English, enables some learners to be successful and others unsuccessful. Thus, this can serve as a way to instill instrumental motivation so that they would work hard to progress to the next level. On the other hand, learner's negative view of their perceived linguistic competencies may contribute to them being less motivated to learn the language and to communicate in it. This suggests that being competent in English as a language of learning and teaching in South Africa is advantageous, people who speak the language fluently are highly regarded in society. Some of the

challenges I experienced in learning the language can be ascribed to this thinking. My story reveals that I wrote about what I experienced in my grade five English classroom:

Other kids who recited poems and spoke English words well, received commendations from my English teacher and he used to do as if such learners were smarter because they spoke English fluently. 'Look at a grade 5 learner who does not know what water is,... very good Nokulunga, well done Nhlakanipho, and I was just there looking at how learners fluently recited an English poem without any struggle'.

The use of the words *smarter* suggests that the teacher's response to the kids who were fluent in English made it look like whosoever is fluent in English is more intelligent than kids who are not fluent in the language. This suggests to me that learners who were struggling in English were regarded as stupid.

My conclusion is a result of the compliments my English teacher gave to learners who spoke and wrote English well. What Lipka (2010) asserts is that learners who can speak the language well are privileged and highly regarded than other learners in the classroom. I can relate to this because, in my mind, these learners started to behave like geniuses in the classroom as if they did not come to school to learn but to show off. This explains why my English teacher said this to me when I could not explain what water was in grade five *'Look at a grade 5 learner who does not know what water is,* for me, this suggests that according to him, I was not supposed to be in grade five because I could not explain in English what water was. Also, the use of the words, *very good Nokulunga, well done Nhlakanipho* made me feel hopeless and unsuited for that class. On the other hand, the words *'very good Nokulunga, well done Nhlakanipho'* suggest that these were the more intelligent in class because they were able to speak English fluently. This is in line with Perin (2013)'s assertion that in many classes, discourses concerning English position learners who do not understand English as being deficient, this was the case with me. This may lead to how learners begin to perceive their linguistic competencies in English as negative which may impact their motivation to communicate and learn the language as if they use the language and make a mistake, they may be mocked, so they may rather not use it at all which disables motivation. I also noted in my story that:

There was a girl in my class who used to recite an English poem very well and my teacher used to put her in the front and say things like, 'Well done Nokulunga, clap for her.'

For the teacher to *put her in the front... clap for her* made me feel that you are celebrated only when you know English well. Also, as a result of what the teacher said in class, my classmates during breaks used to point at me and say *'this is the girl that does not know anything in class, "a girl who does not know even 123.* That made me think that I was useless because it seemed like every learner was mocking me, just because I did not know an English word. However, things changed when I repeated grade five in 2004 as I had improved a lot in my English, as I noted in my story:

When I repeated grade five in the year 2004, I had learned how to recite poems, knew how to spell most English words, and when a teacher was asking anything in class, I could raise my hand and give answers confidently. Learning who was new in grade five referred to me as a smart child because of how I demonstrated knowledge of many activities we did in the English classroom. Whenever I answered, the teacher would respond very well, and I could not believe what was said to me.

Moreover, when I repeated grade five in 2004, I noted that *'during spelling exercises, I was doing well and getting most of the words correct... I became his favorite as he used to use the words like "very good," and "Brilliant" to me.'* The use of the words *'very good, brilliant'* suggests that after I had improved in English the following year, I was now regarded as intelligent, I was no longer dumb. This tells us that in the eyes of my English teacher at that time and the rest of the learners in my class, one was referred to as being smart just because he/she could express herself in English. Slavova et al. (2020) suggest that communication skills are increasingly becoming important with English recognised as the language most spoken globally. This could be the reason why everyone in my class regards someone fluent in English highly.

It is interesting to note that when I repeated grade five in 2004 as I stated in my story, I was viewed as smart in my class because I memorised poems, knew what water was, and every other thing we learnt in the previous year. The use of the words *I was described as a smart learner* shows that in my school, especially in my English class, someone who could speak English was respected. Learners referred to me this because I noted in my story that I started to participate in the class if the teacher was asking a question. This points to the fact that situational classroom factors and perceived competence may contribute to second language learning motivation and the willingness to express yourself in English as the second language.

I could raise my hand and answer confidently. The use of the words ‘answers confidently’ tells us that mastering what we learnt in the previous year boosted my confidence in class.

Furthermore, I noted that in 2004 as I repeated grade five, girls in the class had English songbooks. As girls we would have an exercise book where we wrote all English songs by singers like R. Kelly, Celine Deon, Luther Vandross, and Chris Brown, this tells me that we equated English with intelligence. This points to the social currency of English in that knowing the language gives one some form of respect and a special place in society. However, Prinsloo-Marcus and Campbell (2023) note that students need to be made aware that being fluent in English is not an indication of competence or intelligence. Birney et al. (2020) note that non-native speakers are aware of negative stereotypes associated with their accents, they work so hard to make sure they get better and improve their accents. In the following year, I worked so hard on my English to an extent that there was a change. I also noted in my story:

When I was in grade eight, ‘He used to talk about my sister and me to his grade 10 Physical Sciences class. How stupid we are and how we will not make it in life to the point that he even sent one of the learners to come and call us to be seen by the class and be made fun of so that even learners who do not know us would laugh and look down upon us.’

The use of the words ‘*stupid we are and how we will not make it in life*’ clearly suggests that according to him people who do not know English are useless and good for nothing. In line with this, Fivush and Bauer (2010) add that students need to develop a range of communicative strategies and use them productively when the need arises. This also suggests the socio-economic currency of English, meaning that for one to be accepted in the class he/she needs to know English very well. Prinsloo-Marcus and Campbell (2023) agree that there is a strong link between language and culture, English proficiency is often associated with success and power. This means that knowing English has a way of giving that power and authority to individuals. Therefore, I know that understanding English is very important and necessary to be able to operate in this world, however, I disagree with the notion that fluency in English is equivalent to intelligence because not all fluent English speakers have brilliant ideas. Hence there are basic interpersonal communication skills and cognitive academic language proficiency, Khatib and Taie (2016) assert that BICS refers to conversational fluency in the language which means that some people have a good command of language during conversations. On the other hand, CALP refers to people who

can understand and express themselves verbally or in the written word through relevant ideas. This suggests that the second category of people are not only fluent in the language, they can understand and engage in creative thinking and problem-solving through it. Therefore, the notion that fluency in English equals intelligence is debatable.

Clement and Murugavel (2018) assert that the significance of English as the most spoken language globally is undeniable. This suggests that it is recognised as the common language for second-language speakers in the world, and being able to speak it increases one's chances of getting a job in multinational companies and institutions. I also noted that

I also see English as a ticket to get recognized and fit even in other countries as an English teacher can go and teach overseas without having to worry about means of communication.

The use of the words' *ticket* suggests that for one to go outside his/her country they need to have sufficient knowledge of the language so that they would be able to communicate anywhere in the world.

Beard (2018) asserts that individuals use language as an indicator of their ability to 'fit it'. Language as a currency allows the speaker to negotiate (build power) according to their ability or proficiency. Like currency, language derives its value from a context which means that it can be used only in situations where it is accepted as payment, and this requires a listener who is willing and able to use the speakers' language.

During the conversation I had with my critical friends, some ideas that relate to this theme came to the fore. In other words, Paul also notes that *speaking English does not mean anything bad about someone*. On the other hand, some people speak good English as a result of their background but lack critical thinking skills. In line with this, Paul adds that *those who do not know English do not mean they lack intelligence as English is not a measure of intelligence*. Nonto also adds that *'Mr. Shelembe said to me 'Even a grade R learner was better than me' and other learners in the class used to laugh at me and take me for granted*. Her use of the words *grade R learner better than me* tells us that the teacher undermined her to that extent just because she could not spell English words. All this is in line with what has been discussed above. Stigma is another matter that arises in the learning of a second language, as I discuss further below.

In addition to this, Sizwe stated that *English is an important language because it is the language of communication with everyone in South Africa and around the world*. The use of the words *English is an important language...South Africa and around the world* give an idea that one must know it so that they can operate anywhere in the world. Furthermore, I also stated that *currently I live with people from other countries who do not know my language, so my knowledge of English helps me to communicate with them*. The words *communicate with them* suggest that if I did not know the language, communicating with them would be a challenge, and thus; no business can be done together or in helpful conversations. Sizwe adds that *English is important and it will help them to communicate with people from different places* and this tells us that it is a global language that is spoken in most countries.

Paul notes that *English for some can be a tool to empower them... English can both be a useful tool and a disadvantageous tool to some an obstacle to communication*. Sizwe also adds that *for someone to gain access to power and prestige in society, literacy is important beyond its role in the labor market*. The use of the words *empower*, and *prestige* suggests that even in society someone who knows English is associated with power and status.

In line with this, Slavova et al. (2020) assert that Werkhopers' analysis describes politeness as an intrinsic social medium that is based on socially recognised values such as social order and social identity. Moreover, money and politeness are both socially and historically constructed, this is also used as a metaphor for social currency in this context. Just like any other currency, politeness can also be used by individuals and groups to establish power and status in society. This is because normally, values, behaviours, norms, and expressions that are usually favored by powerful people and groups in society get established as the most correct and appropriate. So, knowing English is like a ticket that guarantees a certain status and position in society. On the other hand, Paul's words *to some an obstacle* suggest that if one lacks this knowledge, he/she may be hindered from achieving academic and social goals in society.

Furthermore, Nonto added that *young people need to learn English and speak it well, especially because they need jobs to develop themselves. So, I encourage them to learn it and be serious about it*. The use of the words *they need jobs* suggests that there is also an economic value to English. Bartz and Fuchs-Schündeln (2012), note that cultural capital in the form of English competence is needed for technological advancement, employment opportunities, national

progress, and international travel. Furthermore, Lipka (2010) notes that the knowledge of English is seen as a door to better employment as well as higher social status for the younger generations or to gain a sign of ‘distinction’. In addition, English has become a valued linguistic currency, a form of cultural capital, it is also seen as a requirement imposed by globalisation. Learning English has become a component of an “imagined global citizenship,” one of the ways of imagining globalisation. Imagined globalisation is seen as the linguistic currency that makes one a potential actor in the global marketplace, English has acquired a special inflated standing among forms of cultural capital. Nonto notes that *if the child go to a good school from a young age, even when they get to interviews, they are viewed as the best because of how they communicate with English fluently*. In the same way, Perin (2013) notes that English is more like a ticket for one to gain a certain status in society.

The use of words *interviews, and English fluency* suggests that people who speak the language well stand a better chance of getting jobs during the selection process because of their clarity in speech. Hence Rao (2019) adds that English is an influencing factor during interviews at the workplace and poor English can hinder one from finding a good job.

This suggests that one of the main reasons why knowing English is important is the possibility of getting a job and this is influenced by instrumental motivation. It is important to be proficient in English to be effective in the workplace. It is also important to use English for in-house training to improve learners’ knowledge of the language. I noted in my story that my *mother used to say English is ‘ulimi lokucela itiyē’, which means English is a language of trading or business or working class*. The words’ *language of the trading or business or working-class* emphasises the significance of the language as economic currency, especially in the labour market.

Hence, Slavova, (2020) asserts that it is important for teachers to teach relevant communication skills to promote and produce students with the currency of today. This suggests that having noticed the importance of communication skills, especially in English, it becomes necessary for teachers to equip their learners with such skills to remain relevant in the societies they live in. I noted that I realised how people respect you when you are fluent in English as if you were intelligent. The use of the word *respect* suggests that when one speaks English well, people associate it with being educated or one who knows more than others. In line with this, Chen et al. (2021) add that willingness to communicate in a second language was found to be one of the

important variables in predicting someone's success in learning a second language. This means that communicating using the target language helps the learner to grasp the language better. It also helps to connect closely with multiple concepts in positive psychology like self-confidence, self-esteem, and positive emotions.

After I complete this degree, I plan to be an English teacher/lecturer, hence I am preparing myself as it will not be easy in the first few years of my teaching career. Rostami and Yousefi (2020) state that novice English teachers are required to practice teaching and learn from their learning experiences to manifest themselves as professional teachers. As a result, I want to capacitate myself before I get into the classroom. I hope this study will go a long way in helping me to prepare for that time. I also hope that having conversations with peers and MKO will assist me in learning from their experiences. In the next section, I discuss the sub-theme English language and stigma.

4.7.1 Sub-theme: English language and stigma

English language and stigma are sub-themes that were identified at this point. Stigma is a mark of shame that is attached to something or someone, for example, saying that boys normally struggle when it comes to language. This may not be a fact but just a stigma attached to them in a particular context. Gluszek and Dovidio (2010) note that stigma is an attribute of an individual that discredits a person or conveys a certain value in a particular social context. This suggests that stigma paints a bad or good image of someone or something because of reasons that ascribe to a particular ideology. For example, a girl who was privileged to go to a more affluent school and is fluent in English can be regarded as the most intelligent girl in the community, however, you find that in university children who do not speak good English score higher than her in subjects like Mathematics and even English language. I noted in my story that

In the fifth grade of primary school, I was tagged as dumb and good for nothing because I lacked English knowledge. Both my English teacher and my classmates referred to me as a girl who did not even know anything, a girl who did not even know 123, and a girl who was going to fail.

The use of the words *dumb and good for nothing* suggests that because I could not spell English words, they concluded that I was stupid as if fluency in English is a measure of intelligence.

However, in terms of the social currency of English, it is seen as a sign of intelligence. Also the use of the words *a girl who does not even know anything, a girl who does not even know 123* tells us that in their eyes if one cannot speak English, they do not know anything and that is not true, they did not test me to see if I am better at other subjects or not, they did not think that as much as English is important as a language of instruction, it does not determine an individual's mental capacity. Birney et al. (2020) add that any characteristic that can be devalued in a social or situational context can be considered stigmatisation including accents. In Garner's (1975) motivation model, he explores how motivation is an effective factor, which shows the efforts of the learner in acquiring a new language, and situational anxiety, which relates to the inhibiting effects on the learner's efforts on language acquisition.

Moreover, Slavova (2020) concludes that this is why many English second language learners normally shy away from speaking English in the classroom because they feel that they are likely to be judged by other learners if they make a mistake. I can relate to this because in my class if someone rarely speaks English in the class, everyone laughs at him or her, hence most of us choose not to speak the language.

According to Guy-Evans (2020), the ecological system by Bronfenbrenner looks at a child's development within the context of the system of different relationships that form his/her environment. This suggests that the theory shows the interaction between factors in the child's maturing process including his immediate family/community environment and the societal landscape that directs his/her development, hence the stigma showed even at home. I noted in my story that:

If I ever say a sentence in English, everyone at home looks at me like a stranger, this is because they see someone who speaks English at home as portraying himself as better than others, that is another stigma they attach to you by saying you are a black-white person, that you are a traitor, betrayer or false person. I also noted that whenever I speak English on the phone and my mom's friend is in our house, my mom would be embarrassed because they see that as disrespect. Not only at home, but it was the view of the community as I also stated that in other families, they would tell their kids that English is for school and at home pure Zulu is spoken because they consider speaking English at home as disrespectful or acting better than others. The fact that they

saw speaking English at home as disrespectful shows they attached a stigma to such people, they are viewed as rude.

In this theme also, I have the comments that were made by my peers through conversations that we had. Nonto states that *'when you speak English, community members look at you very weirdly as if you are portraying yourself better than other people'*. Sizwe also adds that *in the village when speaking English, they see you as being disrespectful, unruly, and without manners*. The use of the words *acting better than others, disrespectful, unruly, and without manners* suggests that most people in my community and other similar communities viewed English as a language that should not be spoken at home. Also using the word *disrespect* suggests that they take English as belonging to certain people that should not be spoken at home. In the same way, Birney et al. (2020) add that the presence of a non-native accent can mark the speaker as culturally dissimilar to other people who are members of a threatening group. I did not see it as disrespectful to speak it at home if I speak with someone who understands it and as a means of practicing as they say *'practice makes perfect.'* In line with this, Paul states that *language should be taken as just a means to communicate, nothing more than that*. In addition, Nonto asserts that *'Mr. Shelembe even gave me a name because he felt there was no hope in me.'*

The use of the words that *gave me a name* suggests that there was a negative stigma attached to her because she did not understand English. On top of that, I could not recite poems that other learners were reciting as my story reveals that *"I had never seen an English poem before, let alone the ability to analyze it and pick figures of speech and so on."*

- ***What can I learn from my experiences of learning English as a second language?***

In the theme: *social currency of English*, I learnt how important it is to know the English language as it opens opportunities for people to succeed in life, whether academically or in life in general. In line with this, Clement and Murugavel (2018) assert that the significance of English as the most spoken language globally is undeniable. Also, English is regarded as the common language for second language speakers around the world and the ability to speak the language increases one's chances of getting a job in multinational companies and institutions.

I also learnt that English is important because it is globally recognised. I say this because I explained how I was viewed as someone useless when I struggled with English in my first year. For me, this is evidence that English creates opportunities for people who can communicate fluently. In support of this, Bartz and Fuchs-Schündeln (2012) note that language and currency are equated in a very overt form. Personally, in my experiences of learning English as a second language, I noticed that this is real, I knew that I just needed to know English to move forward.

I also learnt that people, especially those who take English as their first additional language equate its knowledge to intelligence. I observed this in my English class when I was in grade five from my English teacher and my classmates. In line with this, Wakeman (2019) suggests that the value that is attached to linguistic competence in English renders some learners successful and others unsuccessful. This suggests that being competent in English as a language of learning and teaching in South Africa is highly regarded in society. Furthermore, It was very obvious that one was taken as intelligent and smart if he/she could speak the language fluently. It came to the point that learners who were good in English in my class were viewed as superior to everyone else in the classroom to the point that we viewed them as better than us, and we wanted to be like them.

On the other hand, learners who struggled with English were humiliated and embarrassed because they could not spell English words or express themselves in the language. This is in line with Perin, (2013)'s assertion that in many classes, discourses concerning English position the learners who do not understand English as being inferior, this was the case with me as I shared in my story. I was one of the learners who did not speak English very well and I felt excluded and hopeless because of the comparison that was made between me and learners who were fluent in the language. My English teacher at that time made things worse by telling the whole class that I could not spell some simple English words being in grade five, and that encouraged other learners to mock and bully me inside and outside the classroom. In line with this, Lipka, (2010) asserts that learners who are fluent in English are privileged and given more authority than other learners in class. I can relate to this because such learners started to behave like geniuses in the classroom as if they did not come to school to learn but to show off. Even nowadays especially in places like townships and rural areas, people who are fluent in English are highly regarded.

On the other hand, I don't believe that thinking is correct. I know understanding English is important academically and in other areas of our lives, however, I believe and have observed that English is not a measure of intelligence. This is because I have seen that some people may be fluent in the language because of their background. After all, they went to private schools where English was compulsory or grew up with parents who were educated and spoke the language occasionally. One thing I observed when I came to university was that coming from disadvantaged schools, I was classmates with students who were privileged, but they did not pass English well, on the other hand, I saw rural kids who were very good in subjects like Mathematics and science that are regarded as difficult, and they succeeded. With this, I concluded that English is not a measure of intelligence. I would advise people to improve in it and grow because it is a global language, but never to regard it as a measure of intelligence.

On the sub-theme of the *English language and stigma*, I learnt that because people perceive people who are fluent in English as intelligent, those who are not fluent are stigmatised. For example, they attach names like 'someone that does not know anything', 'someone good for nothing', 'someone who is dumb and does not even know her name', or 123 just because that person does not understand English. In line with this, Birney et al. (2020) add that any characteristic that can be devalued in a social or situational context can be considered stigmatisation including accents.

I faced this a lot when I did my grade five for the first time in 2003 and even during breaks, learners used to laugh at me and say I am a girl that does not know anything and that would fail. All those names that were attached to my sister discouraged me and made me think that there was no hope. Also, Slavova (2020) suggests that this is the reason why many English second language learners normally shy away from speaking English in the classroom because they feel they will be judged by other learners if they make a mistake. I can relate to this because in my class if someone rarely speaks English in the class, everyone laughs at him or her, hence most of us choose not to speak the language. Fortunately, later I summoned courage and I worked hard to be respected the following year when I repeated that grade. Interestingly, the negative stigma that was attached to me changed in the following year when I learnt most English words and poems we did the previous year. My name changed from good for nothing to a smart girl, and even the teacher started to make me an example in the classroom. For me this proved that to meet the standard in that class, one needed to know English and use it well to the satisfaction of the teacher.

4.8 Conclusion

In this chapter, I presented the interpretation and analysis of my early and primary school experiences of learning English as a second language. Different themes and sub-themes that were created were analysed through the Critical Discourse Analysis and thematic analysis methods. At the end of each theme, I gave a reflection on what I learnt in each theme and sub-theme. The next chapter will interpret my learning of English as a second Language in high school and the university.

CHAPTER 5 : INTERPRETATION OF MY HIGH SCHOOL AND UNIVERSITY EXPERIENCES OF LEARNING ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE

5.1 Introduction

The previous chapter gave an interpretation of my early and primary school experiences of learning English as a second language through the use of thematic analysis and CDA. This chapter interprets my high school and university experiences. The themes I derived from the data are taken from the autobiographical story that I wrote. The autobiographical story reveals that I learnt English second language in different ways in different contexts. I highlighted words in my writing to identify themes and sub-themes. I then developed a table with a column for sub-themes and another for keywords and phrases. Several themes and sub-themes were developed from these. In this section, I discuss the theme of my lack of understanding of English grammar knowledge at high school and in the university. Furthermore, I discuss sub-theme one, personal agency, and sub-theme two approaches to teaching English second language grammar. My peers and critical friends also made contributions. Some of their responses that are related to themes that emerged will be critically discussed in support or in contrast to what I wrote. In the discussion that follows you will refer to Siswe and Paul as your peers.

What are my learning experiences of English as a second language?

In this section, I discuss the theme: My lack of English second language grammar. I use my autobiographical story discussed in chapter three to explain my experiences in high school and the university. I use Critical Discourse Analysis to make sense of the data and at the end, I will give a reflection of what I have learned from this theme.

5.2 My lack of English grammar knowledge

High school

English second language learning comprises reading, writing, listening, and grammar. My lack of English grammar knowledge is the first identified theme identified in my learning of English in high school and the university. Grammar refers to the system and structure of a language that consists of syntax and morphology and sometimes also phonology and semantics (Ayliff, 2012). Furthermore, Uysal and Bardakci (2014) assert that English grammar is how meanings are encoded into words in the English language. Every language has its own rules which makes it unique and different from other languages. Huddleston et al. (2021) note that grammar refers to a set of conversations and rules that govern language, it is also a branch of linguistic science that is concerned with the description, analysis, and formulation of formal language patterns. This suggests that every language is governed by certain rules that are formal, for instance, to form a proper sentence there must be an object and a subject. Furthermore, Syafiqah Yacob and Md Yunus (2019) state that the knowledge of grammar is important for the development of second-language communicative competence. Grammar can also help students understand, make sense, gain confidence, and eliminate errors by making and correcting errors' (Liviero, 2017). Zhou (2018) agrees that a shortage of grammar knowledge can result in poor performance in the teaching and learning of English as a second language This points to the importance of teaching grammar as it affects how one will do in English as a whole. My autobiographical story revealed that I started to struggle with grammar in high school and it escalated to the university. I noted in my story:

'In high school from grade ten to twelve, the teaching of English as a Second Language is separated into three sections; literature, creative writing, and grammar. Between these three sections, I used to struggle with the grammar section because, during lessons in the classroom, the focus was more on the literature and the writing part. English teachers used to avoid the grammar section to the point that during examinations I and other learners used to fail the section and after the teacher did not even come back to give us corrections.'

My use of the words '*during lessons in the classroom, the focus was more on the literature and the writing part*' tells us that the expectation was that this section of grammar was neglected to an extent.

Hence the use of the words *struggles with the grammar section* as a result of it not being given enough time in the classroom. In support of this, Shuib (2009) notes that even though many English teachers have several years of experience teaching the language, they still lack grammatical awareness and knowledge. This could be a possible reason why my high school English teachers avoided this section as I noted in my story that *English teachers used to avoid the grammar section to the point that during examinations*. Also, Mabasa and Lumadi (2016) add that the teaching of English grammar is normally neglected from the high school level because of teacher's lack of knowledge. Also, I noted that when I noticed that this section was not given attention, I thought it was not important, I now realize it is a very important aspect of English as it lays a foundation for how learners write different texts.

Moreover, I also noted in my story that: in grade twelve I decided to focus on other sections like poems, novels, and drama where I used to obtain marks and forgot about the grammar section. This is because there was no hope that I was going to improve in it and at the end of grade twelve I was able to get 68% in the English language.

The use of the words, *there was no hope* related to the situation little or no attention was paid to it, and for me to pass the language in Matric, I needed to obtain higher marks in other sections. However, having noticed the importance of grammar in learning the English language, I was concerned and had hoped that when I got to university I would learn more. In the conversations I had with my peers, the issue of grammar teaching was also highlighted as Sizwe stated: *In high school, teachers did not pay attention to grammar, I feel like they didn't care much about it because they realized that most of us were failing it, so they didn't pay much attention to it*. In support of this, Paul also noted that *grammar was not the focus but writing*. In my mind, I concluded that my high school teachers may have not had proper knowledge of how to teach English grammar or English grammar as a content per se. In the next paragraph, I discuss my lack of English grammar knowledge at the university level.

The University

In this section, I continue to discuss the theme of my lack of English grammar knowledge at the university level. Furthermore, Benitez-Correa et al. (2019) note that grammar teaching is a vital area that should be given special and prominent attention as it is perceived as a determining aspect for students to communicate in written form.

However, similar to what I experienced in high school, my university English lecturers focused on the teaching of different literary texts each semester. I expected more than that at the university level because I wanted to be fully equipped to go and teach the language in high school. In support of this, I noted in my story that:

'When I got to the university, I was hoping to get the full knowledge and skills that I did not get in high school that would prepare me for the field especially sections like grammar that I struggled with. Content modules usually deal with what needs to be taught while methods modules deal with how to teach a certain aspect of the language. In this case, content modules were mostly on the literature (drama, novel, drama, poems, and films), and the grammar section was never taught in a content module.'

The use of the words *hoping to get the full knowledge... in sections like grammar that I struggled with* suggests that I understood the importance of grammar, and my lack of its knowledge even at the university level. In the same way, Uysal and Bardakci (2014) add that the knowledge of English grammar is crucial as it helps learners correct mistakes and improve written work. I therefore expected that attending lectures at university would solve the problem I had with grammar, but unfortunately, that did not happen. I noted in my story that *'I went through the English discipline template and realized that there was no prescription of any intention to teach grammar explicitly, it was only included on one of the method modules as to how to teach it in schools and the section only took two weeks'*. In the same way, during the conversation, Paul noted that *'to my disappointment in the university it was the same thing as high school, grammar was not much difference because again grammar was taught in context*. Also, Sizwe noted that *'well I feel like the lecturers at university already assumed that all of us know grammar, therefore they never paid much attention to it*. I understood all this to mean that English lecturers had an assumption that we had sufficient knowledge of grammar from high school and focused on different literature texts,

unfortunately, their assumptions were not correct. In support of this, Ayliff (2012) asserts that at the high school level, there is a lack of grammar teaching when it comes to second language learning. Furthermore, Yusob (2018) submits that not knowing how to meet the needs of students is another challenge in the teaching of English grammar at a university level. I tend to agree with this because most second language learners like me who come from similar backgrounds have the same problem. In line with this, I noted in my story that:

At the end of my degree, I felt unprepared to go and teach the English grammar section in high school as I was not explicitly taught it. This is because even during my teaching practice, especially when I had to be assessed by the university tutor, I avoided the grammar section and taught others.

The use of the words *I felt unprepared to go and teach the English grammar section in high school* tells us that I acknowledged that I had a challenge and I wanted to address it instead of avoiding it even if I was a qualified teacher. In line with this, Gardner and Smythe (1975) note that motivation is the main driver in learning and mastering a second language. Moreover, as a responsible English teacher, I wanted to do justice to my second language learners, having seen how affected I was, I was therefore motivated to look at what I could do to address this challenge. Concerning this, the next emerging sub-theme that I will discuss below is a personal agency in my learning of English as a second language.

5.2.1 Sub-theme one: Personal agency

Teacher agency is a person's ability to step out of the normal way of doing things and act upon their own goals as individual professionals (Oolbekkink-Marchand et al., 2017). This suggests that one discovers a problem and looks for ways to solve it rather than expecting other people to assist them. For example, in my case after discovering my problem with English grammar, I had to sit down and think of what I could do to improve myself as an English teacher. Teacher agency also includes novice teachers' active involvement in directing and designing their practice, using their discretion in dealing with matters that are peculiar to their subjects and their classrooms (Impedovo, 2016). In agreement with this, after I realised that I was not ready to teach grammar in high school, I noted in my story that:

I bought an English grammar book and located an English Language Course (ELC) Module guide, one of the foundational English modules in the discipline. I read it thoroughly and I realized that there are so many aspects of grammar I did not know. I wish that they had made the module compulsory for all intending English teachers. Having that module guide helped me to note aspects of grammar I needed to learn on my own.

The use of the words *English grammar book, and an English Language Course (ELC) Module guide* tells us that when realising I was not ready to teach grammar motivated me to do something about it, and these materials helped me. At this point, I saw it as my responsibility to make sure that I studied more on it to do justice to this section for my learners. In support of this, Priestley et al. (2012) note that personal agency drives individuals to go the extra mile in taking charge of their learning and practice. This is because I did not want to repeat mistakes made by my teachers in high school (apprenticeship of observation). This links directly to motivational theory as I could have chosen to just replicate what my teachers did, but I decided to seek information that would help me to improve (Gardner & Smythe, 1975).

Smagorinsky and Barnes (2014) note that apprenticeship of observation is the same as the claim that "teachers teach the way they were taught". Novice teachers see the impact of the instruction they receive as students in schools in shaping the way they replicate such approaches in the teaching of grammar. I practiced personal agency because I did not want to find myself doing what my teachers did, avoiding the grammar section, I wanted to find ways of learning it by myself and see how to improve as an English second language teacher. My peers also added comments on this as Paul noted: *It's kind of disadvantageous for people who are just finishing a B.ed because I saw the need to go beyond and do my research because as an English teacher, I felt if not I would be doing my learners' disservice.* In addition, Paul stated that *I had to get a study guide because my modules didn't provide me with those things but then I got a study guide and I went on the internet and looked at the Youtube videos but I looked at the rules in isolation.* In this case, we see that personal agency is important for passionate teachers who want to make a difference in their learners' lives (Rostami & Yousefi, 2020). In connection to personal agency, I discuss the sub-theme of approaches to teaching English second language grammar.

5.2.2 Sub-theme two: Approaches to teaching English second language grammar

The teaching and learning of English second language grammar has been a major subject in the field of language education (Türkmen & Aydin, 2016). Teaching and learning grammar has become a major issue for teachers and high school students (Williams, 2012). Grammar is seen as boring, demotivating, and threatening, which may be a result of teachers mostly using traditional teaching methods to teach it (Hassan et al., 2018).

Petraki and Hill (2011) affirm that many English language teachers lack sufficient grammatical awareness and appropriate skills to effectively impart grammatical knowledge to students. This is a cause for concern as Lawrence and Lawrence (2013) claim that knowledge of grammar is foundational and plays a vital role in English teaching and learning. Chiou (2019) concurs with Zhou (2018) and indicates that grammar is one of the fundamental elements for the construction of any language, and it is critical in expressing meaning and understanding of what is written.

Furthermore, Mufanti et al. (2019) note that teachers and students identify grammar as a key source of their difficulties in English second language teaching and learning process. This suggests that it is a challenge that needs to be addressed not only on paper but in practice. This tells us that the teaching and learning of grammar is still a challenge to both teachers and learners of English second language, to address the challenge teachers need to have strategies that they would use in their practice to address this problem, rather than only have the grammar teaching strategies prescribed. According to Ngesi et al. (2018) English teachers normally stick to traditional teaching methods which are not necessarily the best for this generation. Similarly, Khalil and Kholofelo Semono-Eke (2020) and Ganjabi (2011) assert that students and learners usually develop negative attitudes toward the manner of teaching grammar as they feel it is boring and too mechanical. This points to the fact that there are effective approaches that can be used to make the teaching of English second language grammar interesting. My autobiographical story shows that I noted that:

When I was in high school, my English teacher hardly came to class to teach English grammar as she used to focus on other sections, whenever she came she would show signs of a lack of passion and confidence to teach the section. That used to make us very bored in the English classroom to the point that we would sleep, and she would normally use the chalkboard and the textbook, no other strategy she used.

The use of the words, *signs of a lack of passion and confidence to teach the section* suggests that the teacher was not enthusiastic to teach the section and that affected our response as well. This also points to the theory of motivation and having the right attitude toward the teaching of English. In line with this, Yusob (2018) looked at the challenges of teaching English grammar and noted that teachers had negative perceptions of the teaching of English grammar. Also, the use of the words *she would normally use on the chalkboard and the textbook, no other strategy she used* tells us that she was not innovative enough to look for effective strategies. Yusob (2018) adds that several English teachers stated that “grammar is the hardest part of the job”, while others confessed that ‘they did not enjoy the teaching of grammar’.

Mirazna and Hikmah (2019) also note that teachers’ negative perceptions of the teaching of English grammar discourage learners from learning and mastering it. In addition, during the conversation I had with my peers, I asked them to each draw a picture that best describes their experiences in the English grammar classroom. Paul drew a man with formal attire holding a stick in his hand and frowning. He said:

That picture portrays how English grammar sessions used to be too mechanical and intimidating, there was no flexibility. It was all about receiving rules from the teacher that we needed to follow, nothing was interesting.

Similarly, Sizwe gave me a picture of someone confused who constantly uttered words such as ‘huh’. This tells us that in his class he was not following what the teacher taught. What I noted as my experiences and the experiences of other participants point to the fact that there is a need for English second language teachers to look for better approaches to teaching grammar. Firstly, to keep up with the pace of technological advancements, English teachers should embrace online learning and incorporate it into their methods. However, this may not always be possible as most of the South African schools are under-resourced. Hassan et al. (2018) state that teachers need to constantly adjust and improve their teaching methods to enhance effective teaching and learning of grammar. In doing this different approaches can be used to teach grammar, some are discussed below:

A study by Guo, and Qiu, (2018), on 152 university students in China explored the introduction of a guided-learning interaction teaching model to avoid English teachers from teaching English grammar in a spoon-feeding way. The study revealed that applying guidance-learning-interaction

teaching in an English classroom can help improve the academic achievement of learners. Guided learning interaction is implemented following different steps; Outline guidance- involves teachers selecting appropriate guidance materials such as English political events, interesting questions, and answers depending on the content of the lesson. Cooperative interaction- involves methods of guided learning interaction teaching that can help students build positive learning emotions and self-learning skills. It can help to expand learners' abilities in learning communication. Individual independence includes individual students engaging in studying alone after class and going through the content and materials that were used in class.

Furthermore, Turkmen and Aydin (2016) add that to promote the construction of knowledge among students, online concordances and authentic texts can be effectively used. While these studies agree that student-centered construction promotes effective teaching, mastering ways of teaching grammar effectively is important.

Mufanti, Susilo, Gestanti, and Nimasari (2019) introduced the constructing and analysing model (CAM) developed by English novice teachers as participants. This model (CAM) is one of the communicative ways of teaching grammar that facilitates students to learn effectively while constructing their understanding. The authors add that the model engages students in various grammar activities and also enables them to be interactive and collaborative, CAM has five major steps that are followed during teaching and learning. The first step is whereby students are asked to compose a paragraph based on a certain topic given by the teacher. Secondly, the teacher asks students to analyse their friends' papers' use of grammar and give comments. Thirdly, the teacher asks students to analyse their work, analyze comments given by peers, and correct the wrong grammar. The fourth step is whereby the teacher analyses students' papers based on writing errors and gives corrective feedback. The last step is the concluding part where the teacher gives the paperback to the students and facilitates class discussions and question.

A qualitative case study by Chiou (2019) on 50 English major students in Taiwan China shows that problem-based learning which is characterized by student-centered learning and small group learning empowers students to explore knowledge in their own space. Results also show that the use of problem-based learning PBL proves that an active learning manner in teaching English grammar is effective. This suggests that English grammar lessons should be interactive to ensure

effectiveness. Guo and Qiu (2018) affirm that interdependent and interactive learning helps to expand students' abilities in learning communications.

Thus, there is a need for a change in teaching approaches teachers use to teach grammar, especially in making students interested in learning grammar, as the use of traditional methods might be boring and ineffective to students. Ngesi et al. (2018) found in their study that looked at the use of Mobile-assisted language learning (MALL) that most SMS and Mxit texts produced by students displayed full sentences, punctuation marks, correct spelling, proper sentence use, and acceptable grammar. They showed an understanding that SMS and Mxit could be used for learning purposes because they use it as social media, so they are familiar with it. This tells us that this generation of learners is technologically advanced; thus, as English teachers, we need to upgrade ourselves in that regard.

Creativity can also address the issue of learners' inactive participation and low English proficiency in English grammar. Creativity can be described as the use of imagination and original ideas to write a product or create something unique (McCallum, 2012). Creative education is one of the powerful ways that can be used to engage learners in the classroom. In addressing the issue of boring English grammar lessons, teachers can adopt teaching approaches such as Communicative Language teaching (CLT), Problem-based learning (PBL), and others. Also, Erkmén (2014) commented that there is a gap between theory and practice as most teachers need to make grammar practical in the learners' daily lives. This can be done by using practical everyday examples to relate the content to learners' daily lives, for example, *Sipho went to buy a car, what is the subject and the object in the sentence?* Proper preparation can also be helpful before teachers go to classes. Lesson planning is explained as the teachers' or instructors' road map that shows what learners need to learn and how that may be done effectively (Mansouri, 2014).

- ***What can I learn from my experiences of learning English as a second language?***

In the theme of my lack of English grammar knowledge, I learnt that it is important to identify the problem as that is the first step to solving it. In this case, I was able to identify the problem and that motivated me to look for possible solutions. I also learnt that making assumptions does not help because at first, I thought learning English grammar was not important because of the way

my teachers acted towards it. However, I am now aware that the same as other aspects of the language, it is an important component to mastering the language (Ganjabi, 2011).

In the sub-theme of personal agency, I learnt that as an English teacher, I am unique and I need to go the extra mile and find ways that would make my teaching of the language appealing to my learners. These include addressing the needs of my learners by learning more and improving myself to deliver quality content and do justice to my learners as well as avoiding apprenticeship of observation (Smagorinsky & Barnes, 2014). Also, in the sub-theme of approaches to teaching English second language grammar, I learnt that creativity and incorporating blended learning is crucial for my lessons to be effective and that I need to love the language so that I can be motivated to work hard on improving myself (Hannaway, 2019).

5.3 Conclusion

This chapter discussed the interpretation of my experiences in English as a second language in high school and university. I used CDA and thematic analysis to make sense of the data. I discussed the theme of my lack of English grammar knowledge and subthemes of personal agency as well as approaches to teaching English second language grammar, and at the end, I gave a reflection of what I learnt in each theme and sub-theme. The next chapter will discuss the findings as I look at learning through discovery.

CHAPTER 6 : LEARNING THROUGH DISCOVERY

6.1 Introduction

The purpose of my auto-ethnography research was to understand my experiences of learning English as a second language so that I could understand my personal journey and derive lessons so as to improve my teaching of English. What led me to explore my experiences was so that in understanding my learning a second language I can avoid exposing my learners to similar experiences. I anticipated that adopting auto-ethnography would help me to understand many things relating to my experiences that I share in this chapter which it did, and I believe that it will also help other people who are in a similar situation as mine. By that, I mean people who are English second language teachers who come from disadvantaged backgrounds and have faced similar challenges, and who want to learn from their experiences and become better teachers.

6.2 Purpose and structure of this chapter

I gave this chapter the title ‘Learning through discovery’, as I plan to show what I learnt in conducting my research and how exploring my experiences may impact my future practices as an English teacher. With that, I am answering the two research questions: *What can I learn from my experiences of learning English as a second language? How can the awareness of these experiences offer possibilities for my future teaching of English as a second language?* I also aim to provide an overall picture of my research thesis in terms of what it entails; the title is an informing statement that captures keywords that sum up the findings and emphasises the importance of reflecting on one’s experiences to learn from them and be a better person.

This chapter provides findings as I outline what I discovered through this study and how that may help me improve my craft as an English teacher. With this, I give a review of the thesis, with an outline of the previous chapters. I further elaborate on the critical conclusions of these chapters. Furthermore, I answer the third research question: *How can the awareness of my experiences of learning English offer possibilities for my future teaching of English as a Second Language?* I then make meaning of my auto-ethnographic journey as I discuss what I uncovered in the memories the

pictures elicited in juxtaposing with Joseph's life, thus answering the second question: *What can I learn from my experiences of learning English as a second language?*

Thereafter, I consider my conceptual and theoretical learning, where I discuss how my understanding of a socio-cultural theoretical perspective and motivational theory supported my research. Lastly, I consider my study's contribution to the knowledge based on this auto-ethnographic research and put forward my conclusions.

6.3 Review of the thesis

6.3.1 Chapter one

In chapter one, I introduced the thesis where I discussed the purpose and focus of the study and the rationale for conducting the study. I went on to explain what I planned to uncover in each research question as I listed and discussed the questions: *(a) What are my learning experiences of English as a second language? (b) What can I learn from my experiences of learning English as a second language? (c) How can awareness of my past experiences of learning English offer possibilities for my future teaching of English Second Language?* I discussed key concepts that underpinned this research. I conclude by giving an introductory overview of the chapters.

This section helped me to outline two theoretical concepts in this study. The socio-cultural theory and the motivational theory. The first concept is socio-cultural theory which is an important concept in an autobiographic study because it connects the learning process to the culture of the society where the learner is. The second concept is motivation which I see as another driving force for my learning English second language. The study of a second language can be successful if the motivation is clear (Gardner, 2010).

6.3.2 Chapter two

Chapter two offered a detailed account of my auto-ethnographic research approach and methodology. I explained that in auto-ethnographic research, the researcher looks at her experiences concerning culture and my rural and township environment context. I also emphasised my understanding that auto-ethnography requires the researcher to do a deep self-introspection to understand her experiences and to describe and critique cultural beliefs and practices. Also, to gain

understanding and insight into the context so that I can understand who I am, why I act the way I do, and how I may also act differently in the future.

As an English teacher, this method helped me to understand why I am the way I am and what I can change in the future in terms of teaching English. Next, I acknowledged my roles as a researcher and a participant in the study. I described my critical friends (peers, sister, my supervisor, and two postgraduate students). I stressed the significance of my critical friends' contributions. Next, I explained my use of different data generation methods, namely: a) Reflective Autobiographical story; b) Conversations; c) Letter-writing, and d) Images as memory triggers.

I explained thematic and CDA to interpret and make sense of the data. I reflected on ethical issues; I explained how I sought to establish a foundation for my study's trustworthiness. Finally, I discussed some of the challenges I experienced in the research journey and how I dealt with them. This chapter draws attention to my learning that, in auto-ethnographic research, it is important to work in collaboration with others as it is easy to misinterpret or omit critical information. I certainly believe my critical friends played a huge role in helping me overcome some challenges, especially my supervisor as the more knowledgeable other. Also, auto-ethnography allowed me to heal from the wounds of the past as I discuss emotionality in research through the letter-writing process. In summary, this approach was very helpful for me to understand my experiences, identify cultural implications, and learn from them moving forward.

6.3.3 Chapter three

Chapter three focused on my early and high school memories. I responded to my first question: *What are my learning experiences of English as a second language?* In this Chapter, I recalled incidents that helped me while I was learning English as a second language in my early years through writing a narrative story that portrayed a Bible character, Joseph. The letters that I wrote to the two people, directly and indirectly, affected my learning from an early age to the high school level. I gave a brief overview of my autobiographical text, each letter that I wrote, and the story of my incidental learning of English as a second language through play.

I also recalled discussing letter-writing and emotionality in research and how I interpreted the two letters that I wrote. After writing the letter to the two people (my grade five English teacher and

my Dad), I had a closer look at each letter and through the help of questions I designed, I was able to analyse the emotionality of the letters.

Through this chapter, I was able to explore research and emotionality, and I discovered that in such a study, one cannot overlook emotionality as it is part of it. This is because as auto-ethnographers, we get to dig and interrogate all our experiences from childhood and find that most memories are not pleasant, it would have been better to bury them, although discussing them helps us to heal (Kumari, 2017).

I learnt that faithfully digging into one's past experiences may not be an easy thing to do but it helps the reflexive researcher to understand her/his experiences better. At first, I felt very uncomfortable when my supervisor suggested I do that, I tried to avoid it but later I decided to confront my unpleasant experiences and through that, I learnt more about myself and even had a chance to let go of the past. Letter-writing was therapeutic to me in this study.

This chapter also drew attention to how autobiographical texts helped me remember my past experiences by using some memory triggers. I got to appreciate the power of a written text and thorough reflection on the past as that helped me to understand myself (Ortiz & Duarte, 2019). With this, I stand a chance to be a better professional as learning from the past helps us to be better in the future. The process of remembering my past experiences helped me to realise things I had not noticed, such as English words that I learnt through play. Through autobiography, I can be free and let go of the past, and that life and its experiences are a learning process, we are what we are because of the past. Realising our experiences can help us to be better individuals as professionals. I juxtaposed my experiences with the Bible character Joseph, this helped me to take the focus off the self and look at someone else's life.

6.3.4 Chapters four and five

Chapters four and five gave an account of experiences I had in my early years, primary and high school, and their interpretation through thematic analysis and CDA. These chapters also gave an account of lessons I learnt through exploring each theme and sub-themes that were identified. These chapters addressed my two research questions: *What are my experiences of learning English as a second language? What can I learn from the experiences of my learning of English as a second language?*

In Chapter Four, I explained and interpreted experiences that best describe my early and primary school learning of English as a second language through thematic analysis and CDA, answering the first question. Then, in an attempt to answer the second question, I had reflections at the end of each theme and sub-theme to discuss what I had learnt from each theme. This activity helped me to appreciate the whole process of auto-ethnography because each theme gave me important lessons and I hope for my readers as well.

In chapter five, I followed the same process, where I explained and interpreted my high school and university experiences of learning English as a second language. To answer the first question, with the help of thematic analysis and CDA, I discussed and interpreted my experiences of learning a second language. The second question was addressed through reflection which allowed me to share lessons I learnt from each theme and sub-theme. Again, responding to the second question helped me to realise some important lessons I did not see before.

One of the findings I drew from these chapters is that as a young learner, I struggled with reading and writing the English language because the language had no connection to my history, culture, or experiences in education. After I started writing some chapters in this thesis, I discovered that I developed a knowledge of the close relationship between my life history, teaching, and lived experiences. Constructing my autobiography allowed me to see and understand the world around me in terms of learning English second language. I also noticed that my identities were largely influenced and shaped by socio-cultural and socio-political contexts where I had lived before in the rural area where I was born and the township where I lived during my late primary and high school days (Durkheim, 1956).

6.4 Professional learning: Future possibilities

In this section, after I explored my experiences of learning English as a second language and the lessons I learnt, I now address my third research question: How can awareness of my past experiences of learning English offer possibilities for my future teaching of English Second Language? One of the themes that came out from the data was the social currency of English. Slavova et al. (2020) note that it is important for individuals to possess communication and critical skills that would help them overcome challenges from cultural practices in societies.

Also, after sharing my experiences and beginning to notice the social currency of English, as an English teacher, I saw the need to equip my learners with communication skills in every way possible. Having realised how important it is to be fluent in English in our society, I aim to focus on it and encourage my learners to use the language more often. Furthermore, as I shared in my story the culture of my community was so dominant to the point that they did not see learning English as important. As a result, learners need to be equipped with critical skills and decide on their own if English is important to be learnt aware of the dominant community story and that will guide them to what they do moving forward.

I realised that writing my autobiography helped me to discover that there are English words that I learnt incidentally through play. This taught me that English can also be learned informally through play. In line with this, Myhill et al. (2013) assert that informal and incidental learning is at the heart of education because of its learner-centred focus and lessons learnt from life experiences. For example, English words I learnt informally through playing with other children. This has taught me that as a language teacher, I need to be creative and incorporate some play in my lessons with that, as a teacher, I can encourage my learners to use English during their playtime in games such as jumping robes and other games. Also, I learnt that as a teacher I can allow learners to interact with one another as that may lead to incidental learning. To do that, I would first make sure that I alert my learners that everyone is in the class to learn and no one should laugh if someone makes a mistake while speaking English. I would create study groups where weak learners are grouped with stronger learners academically to try and unite everyone in the class to work as a family and help one another.

I did not realise the deeper meaning of inclusive education, but after writing my story, I noticed that my teacher did not embrace inclusive education. In the past, I used to view inclusive education as merely involving disabled learners, after I read more about it and gained a better understanding of what it means, I have since learnt that it is more than that. An inclusive about supporting learners who come from disadvantaged backgrounds as well. In line with this, Guy-Evans (2020) notes that inclusive education is more than just disability, it also caters to learners who come from disadvantaged backgrounds. Therefore, equipped with this knowledge I will try to embrace inclusive education more as an English language teacher to accommodate learners from disadvantaged backgrounds by partnering them with learners who come from civilised

backgrounds and are better in the language, having private sessions with them to understand how best they learn and see how to actively engage them in my lessons.

Looking at the era we are living in, there has been rapid growth in technology, thus the way we were taught during our times may no longer be effective in this generation. Therefore, as an English teacher in this era, I would need to be creative and incorporate technological approaches to keep up with new trends in teaching. Although I am aware that not all schools would have access to technology. In line with this, McCallum (2012) asserts that creative education is one of the powerful ways that can be used to engage learners in the classroom.

Hulstijn (2013) notes that teacher education and social education are increasingly challenged to adopt student-centred approaches by focusing on spaces and materiality. Moreover, in the post-industrial era, traditional institutions have been criticised as learning involves a developing process of participation in the community of practice.

A variety of other learning approaches have influenced educational efforts to change traditional blackboard teaching. This suggests that in the generation we are in, there is a need for flexibility to include more technologically advanced approaches to cater to the needs of the current generation of learners. Inquiry-based learning and game-based learning are developed and inscribed in the national curricula in many countries with a particular interest in a student-centered perspective. Therefore, as the increased focus is on creative pedagogy, innovative and playful approaches or strategies to the teaching and learning of English have gained ground in the 21st century. These playful approaches include possibilities for participants to practice courage, stand in the open, and be involved in the process where the outcome is unknown and where such approaches are needed for the future. In the next session, I discuss what I uncovered in the memories the pictures elicited in juxtaposing with Joseph's life. With that, I answer question two: *What can I learn from my experiences of learning English as a second language?*

6.5 Making meaning of my auto-ethnography by what memories the pictures elicited in juxtaposing with Joseph's life

6.5.1 Confronted with English

I used words and pictures to express how I felt when I was confronted with English in grade five. The pictures and words I used to show unpleasant experiences in the English classroom in my

second primary school. In this section, I discuss fear, frustration, darkness, ignorance, and struggle. These were portrayed in the collage I made for myself to remember and analyse my experiences. In the bible Genesis chapter 38, when Joseph was sold by his brothers, he might have faced all these not knowing what would become of him in an unknown land, refer to chapter three). The word fear reminded me of the fear I used to have during English lessons because I was already told that the English teacher would come to the class with a pipe, and I knew that I was likely to be beaten because I did not understand English.

The fear I had in the class was so obvious to the point that my body used to shake and I could not look at the teacher directly, I even wished I was invisible to him. So, that was my greatest fear every time I was reminded of him and his lessons. In Joseph's life, we see the expression of fear in chapter 38 when his brothers confront him about his dreams and threaten to kill him, but later decide to sell him to a strange land. I can imagine the fear he had when they threw him into the hole as he might have wondered if that was the end of his life (Genesis 38).

By using the picture of Joseph that showed someone who was frustrated, it depicted the frustration I had in my life at that time. I had just arrived in a new school and the environment was different for me. I had to deal with that and the embarrassment I was getting in my English class from the learners and the teacher because I did not know English. I hated going to school, especially attending English lessons because I felt humiliated and even lost, frustration was at the peak at this time. In the same way, when Joseph got to Egypt for the first time, he might have been frustrated being away from his family and starting a new life alone in a strange land. Also, not knowing what was going to befall him in a strange land, whether he was going to survive or not (Genesis 37).

I also used the word darkness to describe the situation I was in at that time, being in a class where almost every learner seemed to understand lessons, felt like I was in a dark room. That period felt clouded with darkness and it was not easy to come out of it. It took time for me to adapt. In the case of Joseph, even though he found favour in the eyes of his master Potiphar, he was mistreated by his master's wife who wanted to force him to do what he did not like. This was a time of darkness in his life as he was later accused of raping her, he was arrested and imprisoned for something he did not do (Genesis 39).

I also used a picture that reminded me of my ignorance at that time, I remembered how I used to write notes in my exercise books with no understanding. I would even mix subjects, my English teacher also taught natural sciences subject, and every subject was taught in English. I therefore used to mix things up by writing Natural Sciences stuff in an English exercise book without realising I was making a mistake. In the same way in Joseph's story, being a child, he was ignorant of the fact that telling all his dreams to his brothers might stir up jealousy in them that could have led to his premature death. Also, his brothers were ignorant as they thought that selling him would kill all the dreams he had, whereas in the end what they did led to the fulfillment of Joseph's dreams (Gen 39-40).

I also used the picture of someone pushing a big stone as the best portrayal of how I struggled to adapt for the whole year, I found it difficult to find my feet. It even came to the point that my teacher told my mother that it was obvious that I was going to fail that year if I continued till the end of the year. My struggle got me to the point where I asked myself if I was ever going to adapt and understand the language or if I needed to give up and drop out but later decided to come back the following year better focused. When I moved to the new school I struggled to adapt to my English classroom and it led to more frustration. The picture also reminded me how I had to be strong and not drop out even though it was not easy to cope. In the same manner, when his master's wife wanted to sleep with him, Joseph kept refusing to the point that she dragged him by his coat and he had to run and leave it behind. He also did not give up but held on to his integrity (Genesis 37). In the same way, I decided to keep my integrity by not dropping out of school because I believed that continuing with my education would make my future better, and so I persevered.

6.5.2 Adapting to the English classroom environment

In this section that I discussed in chapter five, I elaborated on how things suddenly changed for the better in the following year when I repeated grade five. I adapted and started to get commendations from the teacher. The pictures and words I discuss in this session are understanding, progress, and joy. In Genesis 39 to 40, when Joseph got to the land of Egypt, because of his diligence and hard work, he adapted, understood the culture of the land, and was able to live like a legal citizen in the country and he grew. The word understanding made me remember how I began to understand things we learned in the class when I went through all that we did in the year for the preparation of the following year. I began to understand the poems we

did and the meaning of words in English as I asked questions from the people who were more knowledgeable than me.

In the class, I also began to show understanding by answering questions that were asked by the teacher. In the same way, Joseph being gifted in interpreting dreams began to use that gift even in prison, and through that things began to work in his favour and he was released (Genesis 38). I also used the picture of someone climbing the stairs to show the progress I made after I adapted to my English classroom. I began to make progress in learning English as a second language.

I was learning and improving every day and when I saw that I was progressing in my learning, I started to love English lessons more. I also noticed that when I improved in my English classroom, I did well even in other subjects because the language of instruction was English. The progress was so obvious as my teacher used to praise me in the classroom and other learners thought I was brilliant. In the case of Joseph, after being released from prison, he interpreted the king's dream, and that opened doors for him as he later became the prime minister of the country (Genesis 40).

6.5.3 Success and Promotion

In this section, I discuss how my progress in learning English led to me being promoted to the next grade, the improvement I saw and still see in my English so far, and the success I foresee as I climb the academic ladder as an English teacher. Similarly, because of his diligence and hard work, Joseph's initial dreams that he had as a young man came to pass as he became the prime minister of Egypt and people knew him as the President's first man. I am happy with the way I have improved my English proficiency as well as in my teaching of the language. However, there is still room for improvement, I am still striving to be better. The word 'success' is another assurance I have that I am closer to achieving my dreams when it comes to my teaching and learning of English, especially after conducting this study, understanding my experiences, and seeing the possibilities of being better as a teacher. I see that I am achieving success as an English teacher because I have improved so much in English and now that I understand factors that may influence second language learning I trust I will be even better in my teaching of English second language.

6.6 My conceptual and theoretical learning

In my study, I explored two key concepts: socio-cultural theory and motivational theory. I realised how the learning of a second language is directly linked to socio-cultural theory. This theory emphasises that knowledge is constructed socially through our interactions with peers, environments, more knowledgeable others, and other life circumstances. Interrogating my auto-ethnography through the lens of socio-cultural theory made me understand that my learning of English as a second language was directly affected by the culture of my community.

From my early learning of the language, I noted how difficult it was for me to grasp the language because I could not identify someone who spoke it in the area I was in. Moreover, as I moved to a new school I also noticed how my learning of the language improved because it was enforced in the school I was in.

From this, I learnt that our social surroundings play a major role in our learning, especially in a second language. I also learnt that I had to exercise personal agency and take control of my learning of English. Furthermore, socio-cultural theory taught me how individuals' thinking relates to their cultural, historical, and institutional contexts (Wolff-Michael & Yew-Jin, 2007). For example, in my case at first, because my community did not encourage me to learn English as a second language, people even laughed when I attempted to speak it. However, now that I understand better, my thinking that I had which is learning the language is unnecessary which was influenced by my community has changed completely. I now see understanding English as important for one to succeed academically and professionally. In this case, it means meeting the needs of my English learners in South Africa through the knowledge I gain from reading local and international content to equip them with the knowledge of the language that they can relate to in their daily lives.

Auto-ethnography has the potential to “deepen and extend our understandings of lived educational experiences through the articulation and acknowledgment of how selves are sociocultural, political and historical” (Pillay et al., 2016, p. 5). This suggests that socio-cultural theory works well with auto-ethnography as when one studies his/her experiences, one gets to understand how individuals are socialised by historical, political, and cultural perspectives. Thus; socio-cultural theory helped me to highlight these throughout my study.

Motivational theory is one of the key concepts that underpinned this study and it is a very important concept in the learning of a second language. When I was sharing my experiences about learning English as a second language, I realised that motivation kept me going even though I did not realise it at that time. Now through this study and by interrogating my experiences, I have seen how important it is to have a motive behind doing something as it keeps one going. For example, in high school, we just did English because it was one of the subjects and managed to pass, but I did not have a full understanding of how important it is to know it. In line with this, Beard (2018) notes that the dominance of English as the most spoken language globally is undeniable. With that, as an English teacher especially as I have noticed that learners normally struggle with the grammar part of the language, I have learnt that they need to understand why they need to learn it and master it, that is part of the motivation. In addition, after studying my experiences of having learned English second language, I see that (Krashen, 1982) affective would have worked to instill the learner's motivation to learn the language. For instance, firstly, motivation- refers to performers with high motivation tend to do better in second language acquisition. This suggests that these people have the attitude of "I can do it" and that helps them to easily acquire the second language that is targeted.

For instance, why do I need English speakers in our country or why do I need to be fluent in the language, I would say all this to stir up interest and passion in them to have some motivation to learn the language with a goal in mind. Furthermore, I would help my learners develop their intrinsic reasons to learn the language such as for individuals to intentionally develop an interest in learning the language so that they will enjoy learning it. I would also help them develop the extrinsic reasons to learn the language such as the benefits of being fluent in it, and excelling in interviews to get good jobs.

Secondly- self-confidence- People who have self-confidence as well as good self-image usually tend to be better at second language acquisition. This suggests that if someone does not have enough self-confidence, he/she might find it difficult to grasp the targeted second language. Thirdly- Anxiety appears to be conducive to second language acquisition seen as both personal and classroom anxiety. This tells us that panic and concern about getting it right assist the learners to easily acquire the second language. Moreover, I would also emphasize the need for teachers to

know specialized creative teaching techniques (e.g. visuals, gestures, play, interaction, eliciting background knowledge).

6.7 Contribution of this study to the knowledge base of auto-ethnography research

Pillay et al. (2015) argued that an auto-ethnographic stance on our lives and work as teachers can allow openness and honesty to critical “moments of learning (about ourselves)”, to make a qualitative difference in our teaching. While there are many auto-ethnographic studies on English teaching, my auto-ethnography specifically looks at my (teacher’s) learning of English as a second language. I believe that my auto-ethnographic study offers a distinctive and inspirational example of an English teacher employing an auto-ethnographic study approach. It is distinctive and inspirational because I took the initiative to interrogate my experiences of learning English second language and to learn from them. To expose my life and experiences took courage which was a bold and stressful journey for me. To juxtapose my story with the life of a Bible character was innovative and it helped me to take the focus off me as I drew parallels between Joseph and Andile. Furthermore, in exploring my experiences of learning English as a second language, my study adds to the knowledge base of auto-ethnographic research by demonstrating how English second language teachers can understand that there are many influences on learning. With that information, English second language teachers can critically reflect on their experiences of learning the language, learn from such experiences, and use such knowledge to improve the quality of their teaching in the future (Pithouse et al., 2009). Thus, the study’s contribution to research on teachers’ use of self-reflection.

This thesis provides a detailed account of how an English teacher can reflect on his/her experiences of learning a second language from early years till the present and learn from all that transpired during the learning process so that they can improve their future practices. My study shows that auto-ethnography can encourage teachers to revisit both good and unpleasant past experiences of their lives to learn from and identify possible solutions to challenges they might face in their practice. In the same way, Joseph in the Bible had both good and bad experiences in life but he got to the top because he learnt from such experiences, and his dreams were fulfilled in the end (Genesis 45, 47). Also, my study shows that auto-ethnographic research was not only about me

benefiting from my professional learning. Instead, the way I conducted my research allowed my peers to engage and express their thoughts and understanding about my experiences and their own experiences as well. In line with this, Ngunjiri et al. (2010) add that auto-ethnography uses data about the self as well to understand the connectivity between the self and others who are in similar contexts. Therefore, English teachers who come from contexts similar to mine as well as those who come from circumstances that are very different may benefit from this study.

Through my auto-ethnography research, I have been able to derive lessons from each experience I faced in the journey of learning English as a second language, and that has helped me to be aware of what I need to do such as unlearn old habits and relearn new ways of teaching English language so that I can deliver the language content in the best way possible to my learners. I trust other English teachers will learn from my study to make informed decisions, and I hope I have added to the field of English language education insights on how self-reflective auto-ethnography can help teachers to reflect on their experiences, learn new ways to teach the language and apply constant reflection timeously to improve in their teaching practices. Furthermore, this study may also help teachers to have a greater understanding of what it is that their learners are going through in their social settings. In my case, first I had to confront my experiences and, understand them which I did through reflective story writing, and I now need to decide what I do with what I now know.

6.8 Conclusion

Exploring my experiences in learning English as a second language was a wonderful yet challenging experience for me. This auto-ethnography challenged me emotionally because this kind of research can be messy, and so it took time for me to make important decisions about the way forward (Pinnegar, 2009). Also, revisiting painful experiences that I did not want to revisit drained me immensely. I learnt that learning a second language has a lot to do with our surroundings as social beings and that motivation is important for one to succeed in learning a second language. I say this because I realised how my journey of learning English as a second language was influenced by the environments I was in at each point in time. I also noticed that motivation drove me to exercise personal agency to learn the language by myself as well. Revisiting my experiences from my early years to high school made me realise that what I went through as a learner in the process of learning a second language has the potential to help me

improve my teaching as an English teacher. In the concluding chapter of this study, I answered the question: *How can awareness of my past experiences of learning English offer possibilities for my future teaching of English Second Language?* I noted areas I need to improve on such as intentional and constant self-reflection, equipping myself with modern teaching approaches to deliver content to my students, bridging the gap between theory and practice in my teaching, adopting ways to practice inclusivity in my English second classroom, the need to be creative and innovative and apply communicative and technological teaching strategies to teach my learners more effectively.

Auto-ethnography has taught me transparency and openness as ways to attain in-depth information about oneself. With auto-ethnography, I learnt to be self-critical by not being defensive about what others might think of me. It also helped me to note the undeniable importance of self-reflection and self-introspection, these will help me to keep growing in my field as I interrogate experiences as they take place. Also, with the auto-ethnography methodology, I hope to have contributed to English language education.

I am aware that it is not enough to know and that I need to do something to act on what I now know. I believe that others can also benefit by reading my work and using lessons they derive from it, to understand the influences on their teaching. Life is challenging and to know and understand the self is to negotiate one's way through past and future experiences. My greatest learning is that the most important things that I need to succeed in life and as a teacher of English are determination, motivation, and personal agency. However, on the other hand, learners also need to be self-motivated, determined to learn the language, and practice personal agency, with both sides working together I trust we can achieve great success in learning English second language.

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ANNEXURE A: ETHICAL CLEARANCE



06 November 2023

Andile Jideani (213527952)
School Of Education
Edgewood Campus

Dear A Jideani,

Protocol reference number: HSSREC/00003405/2021

Project title: An auto-ethnographic study of my teaching and learning experiences of English first additional language grammar

Amended title: An auto-ethnographic study of my learning of English as a second language

Degree: PhD

Approval Notification – Amendment Application

This letter serves to notify you that your application and request for an amendment received on 27 November 2023 has now been approved as follows:

- Change in title

Any alterations to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form; Title of the Project, Location of the Study must be reviewed and approved through an amendment /modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number.

PLEASE NOTE: Research data should be securely stored in the discipline/department for a period of 5 years.

HSSREC is registered with the South African National Health Research Ethics Council (REC-040414-040).

Best wishes for the successful completion of your research protocol.

Yours faithfully








.....
Professor Dipane Hlalele (Chair)

/dd

Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee
UKZN Research Ethics Office Westville Campus, Govan Mbeki Building
Postal Address: Private Bag X54001, Durban 4000
Tel: +27 31 260 8350 / 4557 / 3587

Website: <http://research.ukzn.ac.za/Research-Ethics/>

Founding Campuses:  Edgewood  Howard College  Medical School  Pietermaritzburg  Westville

INSPIRING GREATNESS

ANNEXURE B: LANGUAGE EDITING CERTIFICATE



251 Willowbrook Estate / Van Dalen Street South / Ruimsig / Roodepoort / 1742
WhatsApp: 0720560539 / Cell: 0720560539 / Email: info@chizindae.co.za

29 DECEMBER 2023

EDITING CERTIFICATE

I hereby confirm that I have proof-read, formatted and edited the style, layout, references and language of

A Thesis in fulfillment of the Requirements of the Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

LANGUAGE AND MEDIA STUDIES: ENGLISH

At the

University of KwaZulu-Natal
South Africa

By

Andile Jideani

On the Topic

An Auto-Ethnographic Study of my learning of English as a Second Language

(194 pages, 78 026 words)

Note: The edited work described here may not be identical to that submitted. The author, at its sole discretion has the prerogative to accept, delete or change amendments made by the editor before submission.

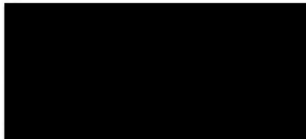


PERSONAL DETAILS

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- Masters in Communication: UNISA
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ANNEXURE C: INFORMED CONSENT LETTERS FOR PARTICIPANTS MY (PEERS)

Miss Andile Jideani
University of KwaZulu-Natal
Edgewood Campus, Student
[REDACTED]
Westville, Durban

Dear..... (*Potential participant*)

INFORMED CONSENT LETTER

My name is Andile Jideani and I am a Ph.D. candidate studying at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Edgewood Campus, South Africa. I am conducting an auto-ethnographic study of my learning of English as a Second Language. I would like to request you to be one of my participants. You will be involved in a focus group where I will present to you information about my experiences of learning English as a Second Language from my early years till the present. I will also expect that you give suggestions on what I need to do to avoid the situation I am in as a novice teacher.

To gather the information, I am interested in having conversations with you.

Please note that:

- Your confidentiality is guaranteed as your input will not be attributed to you in person, but reported only as a population member opinion.
- Any information given by you cannot be used against you, and the collected data will be used for this research only.
- Data will be stored in secure storage and destroyed after 5 years.
- You have a choice to participate, not participate, or stop participating in the research. You will not be penalized for taking such an action.
- The research aims at knowing the influences on, and possibilities for my English pedagogy and as we work closely together your input and insights will be useful to me.

- Your involvement is purely for academic purposes only, and there are no financial benefits involved.
- If you are willing to be a participant, please indicate (by ticking as applicable) whether or not you are willing to allow the conversations to be recorded by the following equipment:

	Willing	Not willing
Audio equipment		
Photographic equipment		

I can be contacted at:

Mobile: [REDACTED]

Email: [REDACTED] and 213527952@stu.ukzn.ac.za

My supervisor is:

Dr. Bridget Cambell

Tell: 031-2603468

Email: Campbell@ukzn.ac.za

The contact person in the research office is:

Mr Premlall Mohun - Senior Administrative Officer

Email: mohunp@ukzn.ac.za

Tel: 031 260 4557

Thank you for your contribution to this research.

DECLARATION

I _____ (*full names of participant*) hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of the research project, and I consent to participating in the research project.

I understand that I am at liberty to withdraw from the project at any time, should I so desire.

SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT

DATE

ANNEXURE D: TURNITIN REPORT

An Auto-Ethnographic Study of my learning of English as a Second Language



Andile Jideani

Student Number: 213527952

A Thesis in fulfillment of the Requirements of the Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

LANGUAGE AND MEDIA STUDIES: ENGLISH

School of Education: College of Humanities

University of KwaZulu-Natal

South Africa

December 2023

Supervisor: Dr. Bridget Campbell

TURNITIN FOR BC

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