

# Promoting Self-Directed Learning for English FAL Learners in a Rural Context: An Asset-Based Approach



Mosebetsi Mokoena<sup>1</sup> 

<sup>1</sup> Department of Languages in Education, Faculty of Education, University of the Free State, QwaQwa Campus, South Africa.

## ABSTRACT

Providing quality teaching and learning in rural South African schools remains challenging. Seemingly, the different interventions have fallen short in addressing the challenges of teaching and learning English as an additional language in rural schools. For example, English first additional language (English FAL) learners in these schools have poorly developed writing skills. Despite studies addressing this challenge, research on applying the asset-based approach to promote self-directed learning for English first additional language learners in a rural context remains scarce. Using writing as an example, this study explores how an asset-based approach could promote self-directed learning for English first additional language learners in a rural context. The paper adopted a qualitative research approach and employed a descriptive case study design. Free attitude interviews, focus group discussions, and document analysis were used to generate data from twenty-two English FAL learners from one rural high school. For analysis, the responses were analysed thematically. The findings revealed various factors that prevent English FAL learners from learning autonomously to improve their writing skills. In addition, the study reported that there are assets in the homes of English FAL learners that can help them learn autonomously to improve their writing skills. Finally, the study found that incorporating self-directed learning improves English FAL learners' writing skills. The paper concluded that the asset-based approach can be used to promote self-directed learning for English FAL learners in a rural context.

Correspondence

Mosebetsi Mokoena

Email: [MokoenaMS1@ufs.ac.za](mailto:MokoenaMS1@ufs.ac.za)

Publication History

Received 20<sup>th</sup> April, 2023

Accepted 25<sup>th</sup> May, 2023

Published online 22<sup>nd</sup> June, 2023

**Keywords:** *English Foreign Language, Asset-Based Approach, Rural Education, Self-Directed Learning, Writing Skills, Rural Schools*

## INTRODUCTION

Since the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, many social institutions have changed how they operate worldwide. This state of affairs has necessitated continuous adaptation and changes in school teaching and learning.<sup>1</sup> These changes become more urgent and critical for learners and schools located in rural contexts. Historically, the interventions to address rural schools' challenges in South Africa have failed to consider the realities specific to these schools. In other cases, these problems were assumed, hence the exclusionary and top-down nature of the interventions from the government and

<sup>1</sup> Habasisa Molise and Bekithemba Dube, "Emergency Online Teaching in Economic and Management Sciences Necessitated by the COVID-19 Pandemic: The Need for Healthy Relations in a Rural Schooling Context," *International Journal of Learning, Teaching and Educational Research* 19, no. 6 (2020): 387–400.

education authorities.<sup>2</sup> For instance, in its report, the Ministerial Committee on Rural Education (MCRE) admitted to viewing rural schools as one homogenous group with similar challenges regardless of their contexts.<sup>3</sup> In other instances, the deficit approach to rural communities and schools exacerbated the problem. The misconception that people in these communities cannot solve their problems is perpetuated.<sup>4</sup>

In recent years, however, there have been slight changes in policy interventions and approaches to rural education in general and rural schools in particular. For example, the Parliamentary Monitoring Group (PMG) (2015) recognises that insufficient attention has been given to rural education, which needs to change.<sup>5</sup> In response, the *Rural Education Policy* has been drafted to address the challenges of poor quality of education plaguing rural schools.<sup>6</sup> Perhaps, the most over-arching piece of legislation is the *Action Plan 2014: Towards Realisation of Schooling 2025*. This action plan aims to address the many shortcomings in the education system. The focus, however, is on identifying areas needing support, ranging from learning and teaching materials to school buildings and facilities.

Apart from these legislative frameworks, the calls for a shift toward an appreciative approach to rural schools continue to gain traction in academic discourses. This approach should include all the resources (capital and human) available in these spaces.<sup>7</sup> In addition, this approach should embrace the indigenous knowledge that often flourishes in these rural communities.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, this approach should encourage self-management and resilience and recognise the assets that rural communities and schools possess.<sup>9</sup> This paper argues that, while self-directing their learning, English FAL learners can use these assets and knowledge at their disposal to improve their writing skills. Therefore, this paper explores how English FAL learners can use the asset-based approach to promote self-directed learning to improve their writing skills. The following questions guide this study:

- What factors impede rural English FAL learners from learning independently to improve their writing skills?
- What assets are available in the homes of rural English FAL learners that can promote self-directed learning?
- How do rural English FAL learners use different assets to promote self-directed learning?

The use of the asset-based approach is not foreign to language classrooms. There is a call for a renewed research agenda for asset-based language education.

The paper is structured in the following manner: it first reflects on the state of English FAL teaching and learning in rural South African schools. Next, a review of related literature on the self-directed and writing skills of English FAL learners is done. It then discusses the value of an asset-based approach to self-directed learning in English FAL and presents the findings of the study.

This study contributes to the current discourses by arguing for using the asset-based approach to promote self-directed learning for English FAL learners in a rural context. By fostering self-directed learning, the paper refutes the assumption that learners in rural schools should depend on solutions (including assets) from the periphery to learn English FAL and improve their writing skills. Moreover, by focusing on the assets that are readily available in learners' homes, this paper corroborates the

<sup>2</sup> Phumlani Myende, "Improvement from within: The Asset-Based Approach and Rural School Improvement," *Journal of Educational Studies* 16, no. 2 (2017): 33–50.

<sup>3</sup> Ministerial Committee, "Report on Rural Education: A New Vision for Rural Schooling," *Department of Education*, 2005.

<sup>4</sup> Pierre Du Plessis, "Problems and Complexities in Rural Schools: Challenges of Education and Social Development," *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences* 5, no. 20 (2014): 1109.

<sup>5</sup> Department of Basic Education. *Report of the Rural Education Research Team: Towards A Rural Education Policy*. Pretoria. Government Printers (2017).

<sup>6</sup> Department of Basic Education. *Report of the Rural Education Research Team*.

<sup>7</sup> Dipane Hlalele, "Social Justice and Rural Education in South Africa," *Perspectives in Education* 30, no.1(2012):111-18.

<sup>8</sup> Committee, "Report on Rural Education: A New Vision for Rural Schooling."

<sup>9</sup> Elize Du Plessis, "Student Teachers' Perceptions, Experiences, and Challenges Regarding Learner-Centred Teaching," *South African Journal of Education* 40, no. 1 (2020).

assertion that “rural areas possess assets [...] other communities may not have.”<sup>10</sup> In short, the paper advances the discourses about discarding the deficit models in favour of appreciative approaches to addressing the challenges facing rural education in general and rural schools in particular.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### The State of English FAL Teaching and Learning in Rural South African Schools

Currently, South Africa has 12 official languages; however, English has become the country’s *lingua franca* in the post-apartheid era. Learners’ indigenous languages (mother tongue) for curriculum and instruction do not extend beyond the third grade. However, research indicates that the optimal development and acquisition of Basic Communication Skills (BICS) and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) happen over time. For instance, non-native speakers of the English language require three to five years to develop BICS, while they need four to seven years to develop CALP.<sup>11</sup> Amid this premature transition from Mother-tongue instruction (MTI), the current Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) aims to equip learners with the skills necessary to become proficient in English FAL.<sup>12</sup> The English FAL syllabus teaches various language skills, including listening, speaking, reading, grammar, and writing.<sup>13</sup> In this case, CAPS recommends several language teaching approaches, such as text-based, communicative, integrated, and process-oriented approaches.

So far, attaining acceptable levels of English proficiency has proven problematic for many English FAL learners in rural schools. It is not within the scope of this paper to espouse the challenges relating to all four language skills espoused in the CAPS document. Instead, this paper endeavours to highlight the challenges associated with the skill of writing. Possessing well-developed writing skills is essential for learning a language. Ngubane et al. view writing as a conduit for creating and expressing learners’ ideas, thoughts and feelings.<sup>14</sup> According to Frans (2017), writing propels learners to focus on linguistic elements such as grammar, vocabulary and spelling when learning a language.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, writing prepares learners to think critically and develop innovative ideas.<sup>16</sup>

Unfortunately, many English FAL learners in South African rural schools forfeit these benefits. They have poorly developed writing skills.<sup>17</sup> In other words, many learners in English FAL classrooms cannot develop the necessary competency to write effectively and proficiently.<sup>18</sup> There are several reasons for this state of affairs. Blease and Condy mention the correlation between teachers’ lack of effective teaching strategies and the poor writing skills of learners.<sup>19</sup> In their view, Dornbrack and

<sup>10</sup> Hlalele, “Social Justice and Rural Education in South Africa,” 114.

<sup>11</sup> Jim Cummins, “Fundamental Psycholinguistic and Sociological Principles Underlying Educational Success for Linguistic Minority Students,” in *Social Justice through Multilingual Education* (Multilingual Matters, 2009), 19–35; Marco A Bravo and Gina N Cervetti, “Attending to the Language and Literacy Needs of English Learners in Science,” *Equity & Excellence in Education* 47, no. 2 (2014): 230–45.

<sup>12</sup> Curriculum Assessment and Policy Document, *Life Skills Foundation Phase (Grades R to 3 Pretoria Department of Education and Training* (Pretoria, 2011).

<sup>13</sup> Kufakunesu Zano, “Reading Comprehension Strategies of the EFAL Learners in the FET Phase: Teacher Perspectives,” *E-BANGI* 17, no. 7 (2020): 1–12.

<sup>14</sup> Berrington Ntombela, Nomalungelo I Ngubane, and Samantha Govender, “Writing Approaches and Strategies Used by Teachers in Selected South African English First Additional Language Classrooms,” *Reading & Writing-Journal of the Reading Association of South Africa* 11, no. 1 (2020): 1–8.

<sup>15</sup> T. Frans, “The Teaching and Learning of Writing, Reading and Speaking Skills of English as a Second Language in Grade 12 at Two Senior Rural Secondary Schools in Omusati Region,” *NWA Journal of Language & Communication* 11, no. 2 (2017).

<sup>16</sup> Isleem, 2012, as cited in Ntombela, Ngubane, and Govender, “Writing Approaches and Strategies Used by Teachers in Selected South African English First Additional Language Classrooms.”

<sup>17</sup> Ntombela, Ngubane, and Govender.

<sup>18</sup> H. R. Mhlongo, P Pillay, and M C Maphalala, “The Experiences of the Further Education and Training (FET) Phase Learners Involved in a Programme for Developing Writing Skills,” *Journal of Gender, Information and Development in Africa (JGIDA)* 7, no. 1 (2018): 139–54.

<sup>19</sup> Bernita Blease and Janet Condy, “Teaching of Writing in Two Rural Multigrade Classes in the Western Cape,” *Reading & Writing* 6, no. 1 (September 10, 2015), <https://doi.org/10.4102/rw.v6i1.58>.

Atwood state that English FAL teachers use inappropriate approaches when teaching the skill of writing.<sup>20</sup> For instance, teachers resort to teacher-centred methods when writing.<sup>21</sup> Also, some English FAL teachers have a negative attitude toward writing and teaching, while others fail to recognise the value of teaching this skill.<sup>22</sup>

Limited English language exposure remains another concern for learners in rural contexts. The rural nature of the localities in which these schools are found escalates the problem. As Du Plessis and Mestry assert, rurality brings challenges unique to the schools in the vicinity.<sup>23</sup> Providing physical and human resources remains challenging for these schools.<sup>24</sup> The chronic teacher shortage plagues many rural schools.<sup>25</sup> As a result, learners in rural schools have limited opportunities to practice the skill of writing.<sup>26</sup>

Moreover, rural communities and schools lack proper infrastructure.<sup>27</sup> Inclusive of rural schools, more than seventy percent of schools in South Africa do not have libraries.<sup>28</sup> Where they exist, only seven percent of school libraries in this country are functional, while the remaining ones are under-resourced.<sup>29</sup> Where there are functional and well-resourced libraries, learners demonstrate improved reading, writing and comprehension skills.<sup>30</sup> However, the absence of such facilities has dire consequences. This situation negatively impacts the relationship between reading and writing development. The implication here is that if learners lack the spaces where they can read effectively, this may hamper the development of their writing skills.

Rural schools also face the challenges of access to information and communication technology (ICT). So far, a few ICT facilities are available to learners in these schools. Only 41 percent of schools have computer centres across South Africa.<sup>31</sup> And only about 4000 schools across the country use the internet for teaching and learning purposes. Poor internet speed, unreliable connectivity, and low-tech software compound the problems.<sup>32</sup> This situation has dire implications for the teaching and learning of the skill of writing. Teachers may not be privy to the new developments in the field and continue

<sup>20</sup> Jacqui Dornbrack and Margaret Atwood, "Teaching Writing in the FET Phase," *Literacy Association of South Africa*, Viewed 21 November 2019, from <https://Litasa.Org.Za/Assets/Download/Dornbrack.Pdf>, 2019.

<sup>21</sup> Mhlongo, Pillay, and Maphalala, "The Experiences of the Further Education and Training (FET) Phase Learners Involved in a Programme for Developing Writing Skills"; Ntombela, Ngubane, and Govender, "Writing Approaches and Strategies Used by Teachers in Selected South African English First Additional Language Classrooms."

<sup>22</sup> Ernest A Pineteh, "The Academic Writing Challenges of Undergraduate Students: A South African Case Study," *International Journal of Higher Education* 3, no. 1 (September 25, 2013), <https://doi.org/10.5430/ijhe.v3n1p12>.

<sup>23</sup> Pierre Du Plessis and Raj Mestry, "Teachers for Rural Schools—a Challenge for South Africa," *South African Journal of Education* 39 (2019).

<sup>24</sup> Phumlani E Myende and Dipane Hlalele, "Framing Sustainable Rural Learning Ecologies: A Case for Strength-Based Approaches," *Africa Education Review* 15, no. 3 (2018): 21–37.

<sup>25</sup> Victor H Mlambo and Toyin C Adetiba, "The Brain Drain of Teachers in South Africa: Identifying the Dynamics of Its Push Factors," *E-BANGI* 17, no. 1 (2020): 152–64.

<sup>26</sup> Mhlongo, Pillay, and Maphalala, "The Experiences of the Further Education and Training (FET) Phase Learners Involved in a Programme for Developing Writing Skills."

<sup>27</sup> Jan Heystek and René Terhoven, "Motivation as Critical Factor for Teacher Development in Contextually Challenging Underperforming Schools in South Africa," *Professional Development in Education* 41, no. 4 (August 8, 2015): 626, <https://doi.org/10.1080/19415257.2014.940628>.

<sup>28</sup> Department of Basic Education (DBE). *National Curriculum Statement, Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS)*. Government Printing works (2011).

<sup>29</sup> Maredi Samuel Mojapelo, "A Legislated School Library Policy: Can Functional School Libraries Be Envisioned without One?: Library and Information Services to Children," *Mousaion* 33, no. 2 (2015): 36–55.

<sup>30</sup> Mary Nassimbeni, "Availability of Books as a Factor in Reading, Teaching and Learning Behaviour in Twenty Disadvantaged Primary Schools in South Africa," *South African Journal of Libraries and Information Science* 77, no. 2 (2011): 95–103.

<sup>31</sup> Department of Basic Education (DBE). *National Education Infrastructure Management Systems Standard Report April 2021*. Pretoria: Government Printers (2021).

<sup>32</sup> Aakash Kamble et al., "Learners' Perception of the Transition to Instructor-Led Online Learning Environments: Facilitators and Barriers during the COVID-19 Pandemic," *International Review of Research in Open and Distributed Learning* 22, no. 1 (2021): 199–215.

using traditional approaches to teach writing. Similarly, the learners continuously have limited exposure to any information.

The situation described above will likely remain the same in many rural schools across South Africa. In 2012 the DBE published the National Guidelines for School Library and Information Services.<sup>33</sup> However, these guidelines fail to effect changes in the current situation because they are not legally binding on the education department to ensure that each school has a functional library. Moreover, the recent amendment to the South African Schools Act (SASA) (No.84 of 1996) to make provision for all schools to have a library facility or media centre facility has limitations.<sup>34</sup> It remains silent on issues about the condition of reading materials and staffing in school libraries.<sup>35</sup> There is still no national policy about school libraries in this country.<sup>36</sup> Moreover, the DBE has missed several deadlines for ensuring that all public schools (including rural schools) meet the Minimum Uniform Norms and Standards for Public School Infrastructure. To complicate the situation, the DBE has recently published draft amendments to these norms and standards. Surprisingly, the department proposes to remove the latest 31 December 2030 deadline for the same Minimum Uniform Norms and Standards for Public School Infrastructure.<sup>37</sup>

Given these uncertainties, rural English FAL learners are essentially left to fend for themselves. This paper argues that there is a need to find alternative ways to ensure these learners develop writing skills. Building on the advocacy for adopting an appreciative approach to rural education, the paper places self-directed learning as an alternative strategy through which English FAL learners in rural schools may become resilient amid the challenges. Drawing from the assets in their homes, these learners may dispel the misconception that rural people are powerless while confirming Hlalele's observation about the available assets to rural communities.<sup>38</sup>

### **Self-directed Learning and the writing skills of English FAL Learners**

The literature provides synonyms such as self-education, autonomous learning, independent learning, and self-regulated learning to refer to self-directed learning (SDL).<sup>39</sup> Amani explains the SDL process regarding learners' roles when learning independently.<sup>40</sup> Firstly, during SDL, learners regulate their learning. Secondly, they interact with the learning activities, material and each other. Lastly, they assess their performance and self-correct where there is a need to do so. In short, SDL is a learning strategy where learners actively manage, direct and take responsibility for their learning with limited guidance from the teacher.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>33</sup> Department of Basic Education. *National guidelines for school library and information services*. Pretoria: Government Printers (2012).

<sup>34</sup> Department of Basic Education. *South African Schools Act (No. 84 of 1996). Amended national norms and standards for school funding* (2015). [www.education.gov.za/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=...tabid=188&mid=...](http://www.education.gov.za/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=...tabid=188&mid=...) (accessed December 17, 2022).

<sup>35</sup> Maredi Samuel Mojapelo, "(Re) Thinking and (Re) Positioning Library Programmes and Services in Public High Schools in Limpopo Province, South Africa," *Mousaion* 34, no. 3 (2016): 60–88.

<sup>36</sup> Mojapelo, "A Legislated School Library Policy: Can Functional School Libraries Be Envisioned without One?: Library and Information Services to Children."

<sup>37</sup> Department of Basic Education, *National Education Infrastructure Management Systems Standard Report April 2021*. Pretoria: Government Printers (2021).

<sup>38</sup> Du Plessis, "Problems and Complexities in Rural Schools: Challenges of Education and Social Development."

<sup>39</sup> S. C. Mahlaba, "Reasons Why Self-Directed Learning Is Important in South Africa during the COVID-19 Pandemic," *South African Journal of Higher Education* 34, no. 6 (2020): 120–36; Piseth Neak, "Self-Directed Learning: The Way Forward for Education after the COVID-19 Crisis," *Edited by Kimkong Heng Sopheap Kaing Vutha Ros Koemhong Sol*, 2020, 63.

<sup>40</sup> Amani Alghamdi, "COVID-19 Mandated Self-Directed Distance Learning: Experiences of Saudi Female Postgraduate Students," *Journal of University Teaching & Learning Practice* 18, no. 3 (2021): 014.

<sup>41</sup> Made Dama Yanti, Luh Putu Artini, and Luh Gede Eka Wahyuni, "Teacher's Perception Of Self-Directed Learning And Efl Students'learning Autonomy During Covid-19 Pandemic," *Jurnal Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris Undiksha* 9, no. 2 (2021): 112–19.

The CAPS expects English FAL teachers to help learners develop various language skills. They are also likely to help learners become independent lifelong readers and writers. Throughout learning English FAL, learners are expected to identify and solve problems and make decisions using critical and creative thinking.<sup>42</sup> Xiao and Yang describe SDL as a “...core capability of lifelong learners.”<sup>43</sup> In addition, SDL is learner-centred in that learners develop the skills to learn without depending too much on the teacher.<sup>44</sup> In other words, English FAL teachers facilitate learners’ learning. In this regard, learners of English FAL get the opportunity and responsibility to continue learning outside the classroom.<sup>45</sup> They also set goals, devise different strategies to achieve them, and evaluate their performance.<sup>46</sup>

In South Africa, English FAL teachers are expected to teach writing skills through the process-based approach.<sup>47</sup> In other words, learners develop these skills through various stages.<sup>48</sup> However, research indicates that writing is viewed as a product, not a process. It is mainly regarded as a product of mastery of grammar rules instead of being an expression of thoughts and ideas.<sup>49</sup> In light of this, Aghayani and Janfeshan opine that while writing skill is essential for English FAL learners, it remains challenging to learn.<sup>50</sup>

Despite this challenge, SDL has become influential in language classrooms in various ways.<sup>51</sup> It gives English FAL learners the autonomy to become aware of and take responsibility to tackle language challenges, such as writing.<sup>52</sup> Studies continue to illustrate the link between SDL and the writing ability of English FAL learners.<sup>53</sup> In their study, Ramadhani et al. concluded that SDL improved learners’ academic writing skills.<sup>54</sup> SDL also positively impacts English FAL learners’ writing achievement.<sup>55</sup> Similarly, in a comparative study, Aghayani and Janfeshan found that SDL

<sup>42</sup> Curriculum Assessment and Policy Document, *Life Skills Foundation Phase (Grades R to 3 Pretoria Department of Education and Training*.

<sup>43</sup> Yangyu Xiao and Min Yang, “Formative Assessment and Self-Regulated Learning: How Formative Assessment Supports Students’ Self-Regulation in English Language Learning,” *System* 81 (2019): 39.

<sup>44</sup> Alghamdi, “COVID-19 Mandated Self-Directed Distance Learning: Experiences of Saudi Female Postgraduate Students.”

<sup>45</sup> Adrienne Cheng and Cynthia Lee, “Factors Affecting Tertiary English Learners’ Persistence in the Self-Directed Language Learning Journey,” *System* 76 (2018): 170–82.

<sup>46</sup> Do-Hong Kim et al., “English Language Learners’ Self-Efficacy Profiles and Relationship with Self-Regulated Learning Strategies,” *Learning and Individual Differences* 38 (2015): 136–42.

<sup>47</sup> Department of Basic Education (DBE). *National Curriculum Statement, Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS)*. Government Printing works (2011).

<sup>48</sup> Ntombela, Ngubane, and Govender, “Writing Approaches and Strategies Used by Teachers in Selected South African English First Additional Language Classrooms,” 4.

<sup>49</sup> Izyan Safira Ibrahim and Nor Hafizah Adnan, “Students Teams–Achievement Division (STAD) for Enhancing Speaking Performance and Teamwork Satisfaction in English as a Second Language (ESL) Classrooms (Pembahagian Pencapaian Pasukan Pelajar (STAD) Untuk Meningkatkan Prestasi Pertuturan Dan Kepuasan Kerja Berpasukan Dalam Kelas Bahasa Inggeris Sebagai Bahasa Kedua (ESL)),” *Akademika* 90, no. S3 (2020).

<sup>50</sup> Behnam Aghayani and Kamran Janfeshan, “The Effect of Self-Directed Learning on EFL Learners’ Writing Performance,” *International Journal of Research in English Education* 5, no. 3 (2020): 78–89.

<sup>51</sup> Marufjon Karimov, “Reflective Writing: An Effective Way of Boosting Student’s Self-Directed Learning Attitude,” n.d.

<sup>52</sup> Cheng and Lee, “Factors Affecting Tertiary English Learners’ Persistence in the Self-Directed Language Learning Journey”; Karimov, “Reflective Writing: An Effective Way of Boosting Student’s Self-Directed Learning Attitude.”

<sup>53</sup> Tsara Desiana Akmilia, Pupung Purnawarman, and Rojab Siti Rodliyah, “Self-Directed Feedback: An Attempt towards Learner Autonomy in Writing,” *Indonesian EFL Journal* 1, no. 1 (2015): 48–57; Yulia Rizki Ramadhani et al., “Investigating the Influence of Self-Directed E-Learning Toward Students’ Academic Writing Ability,” in *International Conference on English Language Teaching (ICONELT 2019)* (Atlantis Press, 2020), 143–47; Nor Hafizah Adnan and Siti Shakirah Sayadi, “ESL Students’ Readiness for Self-Directed Learning in Improving English Writing Skills,” *Arab World English Journal* 12, no. 4 (2021): 503–20.

<sup>54</sup> Ramadhani et al., “Investigating the Influence of Self-Directed E-Learning Toward Students’ Academic Writing Ability.”

<sup>55</sup> Chuanpit Sriwichai and Bhornsawan Inpin, “A Development of the Writing Instructional Model Based on Blended and Self-Directed Learning to Promote EFL University Students’ Writing Ability and Self-Directed Learning,” *ASEAN Journal of Education* 4, no. 1 (2018): 117–37.

significantly affected the learners' performance in English writing ability.<sup>56</sup> Furthermore, the SDL environment was conducive for English FAL learners to gather more information, identify their mistakes and rectify them.<sup>57</sup>

Through SDL, learners of English FAL get the opportunity and responsibility to continue learning outside the classroom.<sup>58</sup> In this case, Moradi asserts that it enables learners to use their experiences and immediate resources to support independent learning.<sup>59</sup>

### **The Value of the Asset-based Approach to Self-directed learning in English FAL**

As argued elsewhere in this paper, the interventions provided to the rural schools are either top-down or fail to address the challenges facing these schools. In other words, the need for a people-centred intervention is more critical for learners in these schools. Kretzmann and McKnight provide the asset-based approach as a bottom-up strategy for community development.<sup>60</sup> To do this, the asset-based approach recognises and capitalises on different forms of assets that exist in rural communities. The assets refer to tangible and intangible resources that are beneficial to and readily available to rural dwellers.<sup>61</sup> Other scholars distinguish between tangible and intangible assets. For instance, Myende opines that tangible assets comprise the people, community organisations, and material possessions of individuals.<sup>62</sup> The same author recognises individuals' skills, talents, and capacities as intangible assets that people can use to address the challenges facing communities and schools in rural contexts.

Moreover, Chikoko and Khanare classify assets into different layers.<sup>63</sup> These include primary, secondary and tertiary assets. In a school context, at the primary layer, the focus is on all the physical resources (buildings, books, people etc.) and intangible resources (skills, talents, capacities and strengths of English FAL teachers and learners) that are readily available within the school. At the secondary layer, assets include all resources (tangible and intangible) that are outside the school but still belong to the community in which the school is located. In the context of this study, the tangible assets may include learners' homes, parents, home libraries and material possessions that can contribute to promoting self-directed for English FAL learners. In turn, this may result in the improvement of learners' writing skills. The knowledge, skills and strengths of other stakeholders such as parents, siblings and other family members constitute the intangible assets that English FAL learners may tap into becoming self-directed in their learning towards improving their writing skills. In the last layer, there are assets not controlled by the school or the community. These are in the form of expertise and a specialised physical or policy intervention from places and people outside the community.

There are several reasons for promoting self-directed learning through the asset-based approach, especially for enhancing the writing skills of English FAL learners. Firstly, the asset-based approach challenges the deficit models of problem-solving.<sup>64</sup> It acknowledges and encourages rural people to initiate and drive their educational development. Similarly, with SDL in the English FAL,

<sup>56</sup> Aghayani and Janfeshan, "The Effect of Self-Directed Learning on EFL Learners' Writing Performance."

<sup>57</sup> Sriwichai and Inpin, "A Development of the Writing Instructional Model Based on Blended and Self-Directed Learning to Promote EFL University Students' Writing Ability and Self-Directed Learning."

<sup>58</sup> Cheng and Lee, "Factors Affecting Tertiary English Learners' Persistence in the Self-Directed Language Learning Journey."

<sup>59</sup> Hamzeh Moradi, "Self-Directed Learning in Language Teaching-Learning Processes," *Modern Journal of Language Teaching Methods (MJLTM)* 8, no. 6 (2018): 59–64.

<sup>60</sup> John Kretzmann and John P McKnight, "Assets-Based Community Development," *National Civic Review* 85, no. 4 (1996): 23–30.

<sup>61</sup> Lisa Garoutte and Kate McCarthy-Gilmore, "Preparing Students for Community-Based Learning Using an Asset-Based Approach," *Journal of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*, 2014, 48–61.

<sup>62</sup> Phumlani Erasmus Myende, "School-Community Partnership in Education in a South African Rural Context: Possibilities for an Asset-Based Approach." (University of Kwazulu Natal, 2011).

<sup>63</sup> Vitallis Chikoko and Fumane Khanare, "School Management Teams' Conceptualisation of School Assets in Addressing the Needs of Children Orphaned and Made Vulnerable by HIV and AIDS: Evidence from South Africa," *Journal of Social Sciences* 32, no. 1 (2012): 23–36.

<sup>64</sup> Gillian Forrester et al., "Schools as Community Assets: An Exploration of the Merits of an Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) Approach," *Educational Review* 72, no. 4 (2020): 443–58; Jacob Huckle, "Equity and English as an Additional Language: Looking beyond Deficit and Asset Lenses," 2022.



learners are responsible for and in control of their learning.<sup>65</sup> In this study, rural learners take the initiative by mapping and identifying the assets from their homes that can help them improve their writing skills. This is a sharp contrast to waiting for ‘expert- advice’ from ‘outsiders’ like education authorities and researchers.

Secondly, the asset-based approach militates against the practices that encourage dependency. These include methods such as rote learning and other teacher-centred pedagogies. These pedagogies provide the teacher with complete and explicit control in the classroom.<sup>66</sup> Learners do not solve the problems themselves. On the contrary, coupled with this approach, SDL promotes learner-centred pedagogies in the teaching of writing skills. Through the learner-centred approaches, English FAL learners develop critical and problem-solving skills, which are essential for writing skills.<sup>67</sup> In this study, after identifying the assets, the English FAL learners think critically about how they can use these assets to improve their writing skills.

Lastly, the asset-based approach recognises the vast amounts of knowledge people can draw from the second layer of assets.<sup>68</sup> In the context of this study, these involve the indigenous knowledge, skills, talents, and strengths of people (parents, siblings, etc.) in the learners’ homes. The focus is on how these assets can be used to help learners learn independently to improve their writing skills.

## METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a qualitative research approach. This research approach allowed the researcher to gain an in-depth understanding of the issues affecting the participants. Understanding the different challenges preventing the learners from learning independently and improving their writing skills became easier. In other words, it allowed for understanding problems from the participants' viewpoint.<sup>69</sup> The study also adopted a descriptive case study design. This design focused on the area where the problem was investigated. Using a case study allowed the researcher to gain insights from multiple viewpoints, interpretations and views about the issue.<sup>70</sup>

### Participants

The study occurred in one rural high school, and twenty-two English FAL learners in Grades 10 and 11 participated in this research. The fact that these were learners of English who needed to develop writing skills made them suitable for the study. They were also purposively selected to participate in the study.

### Data Generation and Methodological Implementation

Data generation took place over three weeks and stretched into three different phases. The first phase involved a free-attitude interview. The Free Attitude Interview (FAI) allowed the participants to explore their ideas, suggest solutions, and challenge oppressive and marginal conditions. In this study, the participants generated data on the factors preventing them from engaging in self-directed learning. During the second phase, focus-group discussions were used to generate data. According to Cohen et al., during focus group discussions, the participants’ views become more projected as they interact.<sup>71</sup> In this study, while the researcher played a facilitative role, the participants shared ideas about the

---

<sup>65</sup> Neak, “11. Self-Directed Learning: The Way Forward for Education after the COVID-19 Crisis”; Yanti, Artini, and Wahyuni, “Teacher’s Perception Of Self-Directed Learning And Efl Students’ learning Autonomy During Covid-19 Pandemic.”

<sup>66</sup> Abdo Al-Mekhlafi and Ramani Perur Nagaratnam, “From Firm Ground To Shifting Sands: Issues In Adopting Learner-Centred Esl/Efl Pedagogy,” *English Teacher* 41, no. 1 (2012).

<sup>67</sup> Sudarat Payaprom and Yupares Payaprom, “Identifying Learning Styles of Language Learners: A Useful Step in Moving towards the Learner-Centred Approach,” *Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies* 16, no. 1 (2020): 59–72.

<sup>68</sup> Chikoko and Khanare, “School Management Teams’ Conceptualisation of School Assets in Addressing the Needs of Children Orphaned and Made Vulnerable by HIV and AIDS: Evidence from South Africa.”

<sup>69</sup> Louis Cohen, Lawrence Manion, and Keith Morrison, *Research Methods in Education* (8<sup>th</sup> Ed) (London: Routledge, 2018).

<sup>70</sup> Cohen, Manion, and Morrison, *Research Methods in Education*.

<sup>71</sup> Cohen, Manion, and Morrison. *Research Methods in Education*, 532.



different assets available in their homes and how they can use them to promote self-directed learning. The final phase used document analysis. In this regard, the participants submitted paragraphs that they had written independently using the assets from their homes. The researcher then analysed these documents for language errors to determine any improvement in their writing skills. Document analysis was also used to strengthen the data generated during the second phase. The reason is that, according to Cohen et al., focus-group discussions generally "... tend to produce less data than interviews with the same number of individuals on a one-on-one basis."<sup>72</sup> This triangulation of data collection methods assisted in establishing the reliability and validity of the data generated in this study.

### **Data Analysis**

The study adopted qualitative data analysis. In this regard, the data was analysed through the technique of thematic analysis. The study followed an inductive approach to data analysis. In doing this, the researcher adopted the guidelines recommended by Braun and Clarke.<sup>73</sup> These included: familiarisation with the data, identifying significant codes, formulating meanings, clustering themes, developing a detailed description, producing a fundamental structure and seeking verification of the basic design as the processes in analysis. Throughout, the utterances and written texts of the participants were quoted verbatim for analysis. The generated data was also shared with the participants to increase a sense of ownership of the research and its findings.

## **RESULTS**

The analysis revealed the following themes:

### **Factors impeding rural English FAL learners from learning autonomously to improve their writing skills**

#### ***Theme 1: Lack of motivation to learn independently***

In most cases, motivation often determines the success or failure of acquiring a second language and the related skills.<sup>74</sup> In addition, Xiao and Yang state that self-motivation is crucial for self-regulated learners to direct their learning.<sup>75</sup> The self-efficacy of learners and the expected outcomes often enhance motivation. However, when lacking this motivation, Cheng and Lee found that language learners tend to quit autonomous learning.<sup>76</sup> The participants in this study also corroborate these findings. During focus-group discussions, they had this to say:

**Learner N:** *One challenge preventing me from studying on my own is that when I don't understand, there is no one that I can ask, and that leads me to not continue with my writing skills.*

**Learner S:** *The challenge is that I cannot study alone because I cannot push myself, I need someone to study with in order for me to have good writing skills.*

From the above extracts, it is apparent that these learners lack confidence in their ability to learn independently. As a result, the need to depend on others, such as friends and teachers, becomes significant. Most importantly, this vulnerability seems to obscure English FAL learners from noticing the vast amount of assets at their disposal. The assets that may be useful in helping them improve their writing skills. Perhaps, this obliviousness may result from the English FAL teachers' resistance to

---

<sup>72</sup> Cohen, Manion, and Morrison, *Research Methods in Education*. 532.

<sup>73</sup> Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke, "Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology," *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3, no. 2 (2006): 77–101.

<sup>74</sup> Cheng and Lee, "Factors Affecting Tertiary English Learners' Persistence in the Self-Directed Language Learning Journey."

<sup>75</sup> Xiao and Yang, "Formative Assessment and Self-Regulated Learning: How Formative Assessment Supports Students' Self-Regulation in English Language Learning."

<sup>76</sup> Cheng and Lee, "Factors Affecting Tertiary English Learners' Persistence in the Self-Directed Language Learning Journey."

adopting unconventional methods, such as asset-based approach to teaching writing.<sup>77</sup> Additionally, this may signify the need to train learners to devise different learning strategies without much dependence on their teachers.<sup>78</sup> This is an area to which the current study aims to contribute.

### ***Theme 2: Unreliable power supply***

According to Nunez and Leon, creating learning experiences that enhance and fulfil learners' autonomy and competence needs is important.<sup>79</sup> In cases where this fails, learners become unhappy and less productive, or they are more likely to remain in a state of motivation.<sup>80</sup> According to the participants in this study, external factors such as unreliable power supply contributed immensely to the lack of intention to engage in self-directing to improve their writing skills. Their responses are as follows:

**Learner C:** *Load-shedding minimises my time, and there is no device for me to use and also cuts off the network limiting my contact time with teachers.*

**Learner H:** *The challenge preventing me from studying is electricity...I also have a challenge of data that I could use to watch videos on YouTube to improve my writing skills.*

From the above extracts, it is clear that rural English FAL learners lack external support to keep them motivated to learn autonomously. Also, their responses reveal that the lack of resources compounds their problem. This is not surprising because rural schools and communities are deprived of essential resources.<sup>81</sup>

### ***Theme 3: Unsuitable home conditions (and house chores)***

The role of social conditions in supporting or thwarting the basic psychological needs of learners remains critical.<sup>82</sup> In their study, Munoz-Restrepo et al. cautioned that the failure to provide a supportive environment negatively impacts the learners' well-being.<sup>83</sup> As a result, learners may feel less in control of their behaviours and incapable of completing the given activities.<sup>84</sup> The participants in this study revealed that the conditions in their homes made it impossible for them to practice writing skills. The following sentiments were expressed:

**Learner D:** *At home, we are overcrowded, and there is no quiet place to practice writing without any disturbances.*

**Learner I:** *The environment that I live in is noisy, and I cannot get to finish practising my writing skills without someone interrupting me.*

Despite being intrinsically motivated to a certain extent, rural English FAL's homes are not conducive to them learning autonomously. In some cases, overcrowding in the house adds to the problem, while others spend time doing house chores.

---

<sup>77</sup> Mhlongo, Pillay, and Maphalala, "The Experiences of the Further Education and Training (FET) Phase Learners Involved in a Programme for Developing Writing Skills."

<sup>78</sup> Bahador Sadeghi, Mohammad Taghi Hassani, and Ahmad Dashtaki Hessari, "On the Relationship between Learners' Needs and Their Use of Language Learning Strategies," *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences* 136 (2014): 255–59.

<sup>79</sup> Juan L Núñez and Jaime León, "Autonomy Support in the Classroom: A Review from Self-Determination Theory.," *European Psychologist* 20, no. 4 (2015): 275.

<sup>80</sup> Ali Dincer and Savas Yesilyurt, "Motivation to Speak English: A Self-Determination Theory Perspective.," *PASAA: Journal of Language Teaching and Learning in Thailand* 53 (2017): 1–25; Aleidine J Moeller, "Bringing Flow into the Language Classroom," *Foreign Language Annals* 51, no. 4 (2018): 711–13.

<sup>81</sup> Gabriel Fredi Daar and Ismail Nasar, "Teachers Challenges in the Learning Process during the Covid-19 Pandemic in Rural Areas," *JINOTEP (Jurnal Inovasi Dan Teknologi Pembelajaran): Kajian Dan Riset Dalam Teknologi Pembelajaran* 8, no. 2 (2021): 186–93.

<sup>82</sup> Angela Ford, "Examining and Improving Classroom Environments through the Lens of Self-Determination Theory.," *Critical Questions in Education* 10, no. 1 (2019): 65–77.

<sup>83</sup> Ana Muñoz-Restrepo, Marta Ramirez, and Sandra Gaviria, "Strategies to Enhance or Maintain Motivation in Learning a Foreign Language," *Profile Issues in Teachers Professional Development* 22, no. 1 (2020): 175–88.

<sup>84</sup> Reiko Komiya and Alessandra McMorris, "Examining International Students' Motivation to Read in English from a Self-Determination Theory Perspective.," *CATESOL Journal* 29, no. 2 (2017): 61–80.

#### **Theme 4: Misuse of technological devices.**

Although most rural schools face poor internet speed, unreliable connectivity, and low-tech software, this was not the case in the school under study.<sup>85</sup> On the contrary, the misuse of technological devices impeded the participants' self-directed learning. Their responses are reflected below:

**Learner K:** *Watching TV and being on my phone frequently disturbs me because while typing, the words appear on the keyboard, and it reduces my knowledge.*

**Learner Q:** *What prevents me from improving my writing skills is that I am always on my phone.*

In this regard, they stated that they spend most of their time on social media instead of downloading materials that could help them improve their writing skills. Others do not watch learning programs on television.

#### **Assets at Rural English FAL Learners' Disposal that can Promote Self-directed Learning**

##### **Theme (i): Basic household and educational items as assets**

The scholars of the asset-based approach posit that assets include tangible and intangible resources readily available to rural dwellers.<sup>86</sup> The asset-mapping process in this study resulted in learners identifying household and educational items as assets they can use to promote self-directed learning and improve their writing skills. While the list is inexhaustive, the following items were found to be most helpful: Televisions, computers, chalkboards, dictionaries, old newspapers, books, magazines, and cell phones.

##### **Theme (ii): Family members as assets**

The asset-based approach recognises the vast amounts of knowledge people can draw from the second layer of assets.<sup>87</sup> In the context of this study, these assets included learners' homes, parents, and other family members. During the free attitude interviews, the participants described their roles in the following manner:

**Learner 4:** *My parents help me to improve my writing skills by making sure that I have everything that will help me to be able to write.*

**Learner 6:** *My parents help me by finding someone who has knowledge about what I am struggling with to come and help and see if I could understand.*

The above extracts reveal that the participants realised the critical role the different family members could play in helping them learn autonomously. These roles include providing resources and seeking external support.

#### **How to use the available Assets to promote Self-directed Learning to Improve Rural English FAL Learners' Writing Skills**

##### **Theme A: Accessing information from online platforms**

During the focus group discussions, the participants shared views about they could use the different assets (cell phones and computers) to learn autonomously and improve their writing skills. In this regard, the following statements emerged:

**Learner 14:** *I use my mobile phone to get access to YouTube video tutorials to improve my writing skills.*

**Learner 16:** *I use a computer for watching videos that help me with gaining knowledge and help to improve my vocabulary.*

**Learner 14:** *I also use television to watch programmes that would guide me to write.*

The information from these extracts indicates that the participants realise that these assets can be used for learning purposes and not for entertainment only. In this case, the participants use some of these

---

<sup>85</sup> Jonathan Monareng, Andrisha Beharry Ramraj, and Pfano Mashau, "The Rise in Online Learning in South African Schools due to the Coronavirus Pandemic," *Gender & Behaviour* 18, no. 4 (2020).

<sup>86</sup> Chikoko and Khanare, "School Management Teams' Conceptualisation of School Assets in Addressing the Needs of Children Orphaned and Made Vulnerable by HIV and AIDS: Evidence from South Africa"; Garoutte and McCarthy-Gilmore, "Preparing Students for Community-Based Learning Using an Asset-Based Approach."

<sup>87</sup> Chikoko and Khanare, "School Management Teams' Conceptualisation of School Assets in Addressing the Needs of Children Orphaned and Made Vulnerable by HIV and AIDS: Evidence from South Africa."

assets to access information from different online platforms by themselves and use this information to improve their writing skills.

### **Theme B: Reading to improve writing**

The relationship between reading and writing has long been established. Similarly, the participants in this study read the available assets (books, newspapers and magazines) to improve their writing skills. For instance, some of the participants had this to say:

**Learner 3:** *I read almost any piece of writing I find, such as books, newspapers and magazine articles or even news from the phone to improve my vocabulary.*

**Learner 9:** *I use books to help me improve my vocabulary and I also use them for note taking... to improve my writing skills.*

**Learner 22:** *I read novels and make some notes about the story then I write notes to improve my writing skills.*

The participants' views towards these assets have changed. Instead of considering some of this material outdated and irrelevant, they began seeing them as assets that could support them to learn autonomously and improve their writing skills. In other words, these old reading materials help these learners expand their vocabulary and practice reading. This may contribute to the improvement of their writing skills.

### **Theme C: Practicing writing using different household and educational items**

Writing is a process and not a product.<sup>88</sup> In other words, learners develop these skills through various stages.<sup>89</sup> For successful development, rural English FAL learners need opportunities to practice writing. In this study, the participants used the available assets to practice writing independently. They stated:

**Learner 14:** *I have a book where I can measure my writing capabilities*

**Learner 21:** *I take words into consideration, especially new words. I go to the dictionary or my translating app for better understanding and this also improves my writing skills, as I learn how to read and write a word.*

The preceding statements reveal that the assets in the participants' homes foster self-directed learning. In other words, they allow them the opportunity to practice their writing skills without being instructed to do so by their teachers or parents.

### **Theme D: Partnering with family members and friends**

Learning is a social process. Similarly, learning a language and its related skills requires interaction between people. The participants in this study collaborated with their family members and friends. In the context of this study, these individuals comprise the assets that can help improve self-directed learning for rural English FAL learners. In addition, they possess valuable skills and knowledge that learners can tap into to improve their writing skills. Data from the focus-group discussions evoked the following responses:

**Learner 8:** *My sister knows I'm very talented with poems so she always encourages me to write them frequently...my mother always advises me on writing down unique incidents of my life, in this way, I get used to writing.*

**Learner 13:** *Sister always asks me to assist with her homework which also helps me to improve my writing skills...I help my mother with the preparation of church speeches by writing*

Based on the responses above, it is clear that the parents, siblings and friends possess knowledge and skills that could be utilised to promote self-directed learning for English FAL learners in a rural context. These stakeholders play both facilitative and supportive roles. Additionally, they expose

---

<sup>88</sup> Curriculum Assessment and Policy Document, *Life Skills Foundation Phase (Grades R to 3 Pretoria Department of Education and Training.*

<sup>89</sup> Ntombela, Ngubane, and Govender, "Writing Approaches and Strategies Used by Teachers in Selected South African English First Additional Language Classrooms."

learners to different real-life situations where the language skills such as writing apply. This is in line with the communicative approaches to language learning that CAPS recommends for language learning in South Africa.

## DISCUSSION

This explored how an asset-based approach could promote self-directed learning for English first additional language learners in a rural context. The findings indicated several factors that impede English FAL learners from learning independently to improve their writing skills. They lacked the motivation to learn independently. The challenge of lack of motivation is featured prominently in many language acquisition studies.<sup>90</sup> External factors such as unreliable power supply were found to impede the learners from learning independently to improve their writing skills. Unreliable power supply has been reported as the main problem plaguing rural communities and schools.<sup>91</sup> The conditions in the homes of the participants prevented them from learning independently to improve their writing skills. Many rural homes are small and often overcrowded. This situation makes it difficult to learn. Lastly, the participants reported spending too much time playing music or watching movies on their cell phones. This was an unexpected finding, mainly because learners in these schools do not have a steady and reliable network connection.<sup>92</sup> One would have thought that these learners would use the available network and devices to complement the lack of resources that often plague these schools. Further research may provide insights into this kind of behaviour among learners in rural spaces.

The study found that there were assets in the homes of English FAL learners that promoted self-directed learning. In this regard, these learners identified and used several household items as assets to direct their learning and improve their writing skills. Learners in rural communities are known to be innovative and tap into their strengths rather than their deficiencies.<sup>93</sup> Family members and relatives were identified as important assets in helping learners to improve their writing skills independently. This finding was in line with the asset-based approach's notion that rural people possess a wealth of untapped skills, wisdom and abilities. While using family members as assets is not new,<sup>94</sup> it refutes the findings that rural parents do not participate in their children's educational activities.<sup>95</sup> These findings are particularly important in advancing the argument of this article to discard the deficit lenses of rural spaces and their communities.

The study also found that various assets successfully promoted self-directed learning, improving learners' writing skills. The different assets such as cell phones and computers enabled learners' access to the online platforms. They used these platforms to learn independently about ways to improve their writing skills. Although using online platforms for learning purposes by English FAL learners is not unique to this study, these findings are interesting for learners in rural contexts.<sup>96</sup> In particular, they challenge the notion that rural learners are backward in using technology and cannot

---

<sup>90</sup> Cheng and Lee, "Factors Affecting Tertiary English Learners' Persistence in the Self-Directed Language Learning Journey."

<sup>91</sup> Du Plessis and Mestry, "Teachers for Rural Schools—a Challenge for South Africa."

<sup>92</sup> Kananga Robert Mukuna and Peter J. O. Aloka, "Exploring Educators' Challenges of Online Learning in Covid-19 at a Rural School, South Africa," *International Journal of Learning, Teaching and Educational Research* 19, no. 10 (October 30, 2020): 134–49, <https://doi.org/10.26803/ijlter.19.10.8>; Reg Leichty, "Online Learning for Rural Students.," *State Education Standard* 21, no. 1 (2021): 12–17; Kamble et al., "Learners' Perception of the Transition to Instructor-Led Online Learning Environments: Facilitators and Barriers during the COVID-19 Pandemic."

<sup>93</sup> Phumlani Erasmus Myende, "Improving Academic Performance in a Rural School through the Use of an Asset-Based Approach as a Management Strategy" (University of the Free State, 2014).

<sup>94</sup> Myende, "Improving Academic Performance in a Rural School through the Use of an Asset-Based Approach as a Management Strategy."

<sup>95</sup> Ntombela, Ngubane, and Govender, "Writing Approaches and Strategies Used by Teachers in Selected South African English First Additional Language Classrooms."

<sup>96</sup> Susanne M Owen et al., "Integrating Online Learning in Schools: Issues and Ways Forward for Developing Countries," *Journal of Information Technology Education: Research* 19 (2020): 571–614; Kamble et al., "Learners' Perception of the Transition to Instructor-Led Online Learning Environments: Facilitators and Barriers during the COVID-19 Pandemic."

direct their learning.<sup>97</sup> Learners also independently practised using various texts and read outdated texts; books, newspapers and magazine to sharpen their writing skills. This was consistent with the findings that reading and practising lead to improved writing skills. Perhaps, the notion of reading independently with the conscious and sole intention of improving writing skills, (instead of pleasure, assessment etc.) separated this study from the rest. Lastly, the partnership with family members enabled self-directed learning and improved English FAL learners' writing skills. The participation of family members in helping their children with schoolwork was not a new phenomenon. Often parental involvement is limited to providing answers and motivation.<sup>98</sup> However, the unexpected findings in this study were that the family members facilitated the independent learning process, improving learners' writing skills. This was quite unique, especially because that facilitative role is often reserved for teachers.<sup>99</sup> Again, the type of activities that family members as assets used to promote self-directed learning were quite unique to this study. From the perspective of the asset-based approach, Learner 13's assertion that "*I help my mother with the preparation of church speeches by writing*" indicated how innovative and resourceful rural parents were, and it dismissed the perception that rural communities lacked education and could not solve their problems.

Finally, the data generated through document analysis showed improvement in the participants' writing skills. In this regard, fewer spelling errors were noted in the participants' paragraphs. In addition, the participants showed fewer mistakes in sentence construction, especially with concord. However, the small number of participants in this study makes it difficult to generalise the findings of this research. In other words, further research with a large number of participants may yield results that may be generalised.

## CONCLUSION

This study has explored how an asset-based approach could promote self-directed learning for English first additional language learners in a rural context. The inferences drawn from the data, theories and literature illustrate how the asset-based approach can be used to promote self-directed learning for English FAL learners in a rural context. The COVID-19 era showed that rural English FAL learners are not yet ready to work independently for prolonged periods. The failure of rural English FAL learners to recognise, identify and utilise the different assets at their disposal aggravates teacher dependency and amplifies the need to seek solutions from the periphery. As a result, the development of language skills such as writing continues to lack behind. Going into the post-COVID-19 era, however, the participants in this study challenged these deficit models by using the asset-based approach to promote self-directed learning to improve their writing skills.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Adnan, Nor Hafizah, and Siti Shakirah Sayadi. "ESL Students' Readiness for Self-Directed Learning in Improving English Writing Skills." *Arab World English Journal* 12, no. 4 (2021): 503–20.
- Aghayani, Behnam, and Kamran Janfeshan. "The Effect of Self-Directed Learning on EFL Learners' Writing Performance." *International Journal of Research in English Education* 5, no. 3 (2020): 78–89.
- Akmilia, Tsara Desiana, Pupung Purnawarman, and Rojab Siti Rodliyah. "Self-Directed Feedback: An Attempt towards Learner Autonomy in Writing." *Indonesian EFL Journal* 1, no. 1 (2015): 48–57.
- Al-Mekhlafi, Abdo, and Ramani Perur Nagaratnam. "From Firm Ground to Shifting Sands: Issues in

<sup>97</sup> Amanda M Y Chu et al., "Factors for Sustainable Online Learning in Higher Education during the COVID-19 Pandemic," *Sustainability* 13, no. 9 (2021): 5038.

<sup>98</sup> Vusi Mncube, "Parental Involvement in School Activities in South Africa to the Mutual Benefit of the School and the Community," *Education as Change* 14, no. 2 (December 2010): 233–46, <https://doi.org/10.1080/16823206.2010.522061>.

<sup>99</sup> Al-Mekhlafi and Nagaratnam, "From Firm Ground to Shifting Sands: Issues in Adopting Learner-Centred ESL/EFL Pedagogy."; Payaprom and Payaprom, "Identifying Learning Styles of Language Learners: A Useful Step in Moving towards the Learner-Centred Approach."

- Adopting Learner-Centred ESL/EFL Pedagogy.” *English Teacher* 41, no. 1 (2012).
- Alghamdi, Amani. “COVID-19 Mandated Self-Directed Distance Learning: Experiences of Saudi Female Postgraduate Students.” *Journal of University Teaching & Learning Practice* 18, no. 3 (2021): 014.
- Blease, Bernita, and Janet Condy. “Teaching of Writing in Two Rural Multigrade Classes in the Western Cape.” *Reading & Writing* 6, no. 1 (September 10, 2015).  
<https://doi.org/10.4102/rw.v6i1.58>.
- Braun, Virginia, and Victoria Clarke. “Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology.” *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3, no. 2 (2006): 77–101.
- Bravo, Marco A, and Gina N Cervetti. “Attending to the Language and Literacy Needs of English Learners in Science.” *Equity & Excellence in Education* 47, no. 2 (2014): 230–45.
- Cheng, Adrienne, and Cynthia Lee. “Factors Affecting Tertiary English Learners’ Persistence in the Self-Directed Language Learning Journey.” *System* 76 (2018): 170–82.
- Chikoko, Vitallis, and Fumane Khanare. “School Management Teams’ Conceptualisation of School Assets in Addressing the Needs of Children Orphaned and Made Vulnerable by HIV and AIDS: Evidence from South Africa.” *Journal of Social Sciences* 32, no. 1 (2012): 23–36.
- Chu, Amanda M Y, Connie K W Liu, Mike K P So, and Benson S Y Lam. “Factors for Sustainable Online Learning in Higher Education during the COVID-19 Pandemic.” *Sustainability* 13, no. 9 (2021): 5038.
- Cohen, Louis, Lawrence Manion, and Keith Morrison. “Research Methods in Education (Eighth Edi).” London: Routledge, 2018.
- Committee, Ministerial. “Report on Rural Education: A New Vision for Rural Schooling.” *Department of Education*, 2005.
- Cummins, Jim. “Fundamental Psycholinguistic and Sociological Principles Underlying Educational Success for Linguistic Minority Students.” In *Social Justice through Multilingual Education*, 19–35. Multilingual Matters, 2009.
- Curriculum Assessment and Policy Document. *Life Skills Foundation Phase (Grades R to 3 Pretoria Department of Education and Training*. Pretoria, 2011.
- Daar, Gabriel Fredi, and Ismail Nasar. “Teachers Challenges in the Learning Process during the Covid-19 Pandemic in Rural Areas.” *JINOTEP (Jurnal Inovasi Dan Teknologi Pembelajaran): Kajian Dan Riset Dalam Teknologi Pembelajaran* 8, no. 2 (2021): 186–93.
- Dincer, Ali, and Savas Yesilyurt. “Motivation to Speak English: A Self-Determination Theory Perspective.” *PASAA: Journal of Language Teaching and Learning in Thailand* 53 (2017): 1–25.
- Dornbrack, Jacqui, and Margaret Atwood. “Teaching Writing in the FET Phase.” *Literacy Association of South Africa*, Viewed 21 November 2019, from <https://Litasa.Org.Za/Assets/Download/Dornbrack.Pdf>, 2019.
- Ford, Angela. “Examining and Improving Classroom Environments through the Lens of Self-Determination Theory.” *Critical Questions in Education* 10, no. 1 (2019): 65–77.
- Forrester, Gillian, Judith Kurth, Penny Vincent, and Mike Oliver. “Schools as Community Assets: An Exploration of the Merits of an Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) Approach.” *Educational Review* 72, no. 4 (2020): 443–58.
- Frans, T. “The Teaching and Learning of Writing, Reading and Speaking Skills of English as a Second Language in Grade 12 at Two Senior Rural Secondary Schools in Omusati Region.” *NAWA Journal of Language & Communication* 11, no. 2 (2017).
- Garoutte, Lisa, and Kate McCarthy-Gilmore. “Preparing Students for Community-Based Learning Using an Asset-Based Approach.” *Journal of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*, 2014, 48–61.
- Heystek, Jan, and René Terhoven. “Motivation as Critical Factor for Teacher Development in Contextually Challenging Underperforming Schools in South Africa.” *Professional Development in Education* 41, no. 4 (August 8, 2015): 624–39.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/19415257.2014.940628>.



- Hlalele, Dipane. "Social Justice and Rural Education in South Africa." *Perspectives in Education* 30, no. 1 (2012): 111–18.
- Huckle, Jacob. "Equity and English as an Additional Language: Looking beyond Deficit and Asset Lenses," 2022.
- Ibrahim, Izyan Safira, and Nor Hafizah Adnan. "Students Teams–Achievement Division (STAD) for Enhancing Speaking Performance and Teamwork Satisfaction in English as a Second Language (ESL) Classrooms (Pembahagian Pencapaian Pasukan Pelajar (STAD) Untuk Meningkatkan Prestasi Pertuturan Dan Kepuasan Kerja Berpasukan Dalam Kelas Bahasa Inggeris Sebagai Bahasa Kedua (ESL))." *Akademika* 90, no. S3 (2020).
- Kamble, Aakash, Ritika Gauba, Supriya Desai, and Devidas Golhar. "Learners' Perception of the Transition to Instructor-Led Online Learning Environments: Facilitators and Barriers during the COVID-19 Pandemic." *International Review of Research in Open and Distributed Learning* 22, no. 1 (2021): 199–215.
- Karimov, Marufjon. "Reflective Writing: An Effective Way of Boosting Student's Self-Directed Learning Attitude," n.d.
- Kim, Do-Hong, Chuang Wang, Hyun Seon Ahn, and Mimi Bong. "English Language Learners' Self-Efficacy Profiles and Relationship with Self-Regulated Learning Strategies." *Learning and Individual Differences* 38 (2015): 136–42.
- Komiyama, Reiko, and Alessandra McMorris. "Examining International Students' Motivation to Read in English from a Self-Determination Theory Perspective." *CATESOL Journal* 29, no. 2 (2017): 61–80.
- Kretzmann, John, and John P McKnight. "Assets-Based Community Development." *National Civic Review* 85, no. 4 (1996): 23–30.
- Leichty, Reg. "Online Learning for Rural Students." *State Education Standard* 21, no. 1 (2021): 12–17.
- Mahlaba, S C. "Reasons Why Self-Directed Learning Is Important in South Africa during the COVID-19 Pandemic." *South African Journal of Higher Education* 34, no. 6 (2020): 120–36.
- Mhlongo, H R, P Pillay, and M C Maphalala. "The Experiences of the Further Education and Training (FET) Phase Learners Involved in a Programme for Developing Writing Skills." *Journal of Gender, Information and Development in Africa (JGIDA)* 7, no. 1 (2018): 139–54.
- Mlambo, Victor H, and Toyin C Adetiba. "The Brain Drain of Teachers in South Africa: Identifying the Dynamics of Its Push Factors." *E-BANGI* 17, no. 1 (2020): 152–64.
- Mncube, Vusi. "Parental Involvement in School Activities in South Africa to the Mutual Benefit of the School and the Community." *Education as Change* 14, no. 2 (December 2010): 233–46. <https://doi.org/10.1080/16823206.2010.522061>.
- Moeller, Aleidine J. "Bringing Flow into the Language Classroom." *Foreign Language Annals* 51, no. 4 (2018): 711–13.
- Mojapelo, Maredi Samuel. "(Re) Thinking and (Re) Positioning Library Programmes and Services in Public High Schools in Limpopo Province, South Africa." *Mousaion* 34, no. 3 (2016): 60–88.
- . "A Legislated School Library Policy: Can Functional School Libraries Be Envisioned without One?: Library and Information Services to Children." *Mousaion* 33, no. 2 (2015): 36–55.
- Molise, Habasisa, and Bekithemba Dube. "Emergency Online Teaching in Economic and Management Sciences Necessitated by the COVID-19 Pandemic: The Need for Healthy Relations in a Rural Schooling Context." *International Journal of Learning, Teaching and Educational Research* 19, no. 6 (2020): 387–400.
- Monareng, Jonathan, Andrishah Beharry Ramraj, and Pfano Mashau. "The Rise In Online Learning In South African Schools Due To The Coronavirus Pandemic." *Gender & Behaviour* 18, no. 4 (2020).
- Moradi, Hamzeh. "Self-Directed Learning in Language Teaching-Learning Processes." *Modern Journal of Language Teaching Methods (MJLTM)* 8, no. 6 (2018): 59–64.

- Mukuna, Kananga Robert, and Peter J. O. Aloka. "Exploring Educators' Challenges of Online Learning in Covid-19 at a Rural School, South Africa." *International Journal of Learning, Teaching and Educational Research* 19, no. 10 (October 30, 2020): 134–49. <https://doi.org/10.26803/ijlter.19.10.8>.
- Muñoz-Restrepo, Ana, Marta Ramirez, and Sandra Gaviria. "Strategies to Enhance or Maintain Motivation in Learning a Foreign Language." *Profile Issues in Teachers Professional Development* 22, no. 1 (2020): 175–88.
- Myende, Phumlani. "Improvement from within: The Asset-Based Approach and Rural School Improvement." *Journal of Educational Studies* 16, no. 2 (2017): 33–50.
- Myende, Phumlani E, and Dipane Hlalele. "Framing Sustainable Rural Learning Ecologies: A Case for Strength-Based Approaches." *Africa Education Review* 15, no. 3 (2018): 21–37.
- Myende, Phumlani Erasmus. "Improving Academic Performance in a Rural School through the Use of an Asset-Based Approach as a Management Strategy." University of the Free State, 2014.
- . "School-Community Partnership in Education in a South African Rural Context: Possibilities for an Asset-Based Approach." University of Kwazulu Natal, 2011.
- Nassimbeni, Mary. "Availability of Books as a Factor in Reading, Teaching and Learning Behaviour in Twenty Disadvantaged Primary Schools in South Africa." *South African Journal of Libraries and Information Science* 77, no. 2 (2011): 95–103.
- Neak, Piseth. "11. Self-Directed Learning: The Way Forward for Education after the COVID-19 Crisis." Edited by Kimkong Heng Sopheap Kaing Vutha Ros Koemhong Sol, 2020, 63.
- Ntombela, Berrington, Nomalungelo I Ngubane, and Samantha Govender. "Writing Approaches and Strategies Used by Teachers in Selected South African English First Additional Language Classrooms." *Reading & Writing-Journal of the Reading Association of South Africa* 11, no. 1 (2020): 1–8.
- Núñez, Juan L, and Jaime León. "Autonomy Support in the Classroom: A Review from Self-Determination Theory." *European Psychologist* 20, no. 4 (2015): 275.
- Owen, Susanne M, Gerald White, Dharmaputra Taludangga Palekahelu, Dian T Sumakul, and Eko Sedyono. "Integrating Online Learning in Schools: Issues and Ways Forward for Developing Countries." *Journal of Information Technology Education: Research* 19 (2020): 571–614.
- Payaprom, Sudarat, and Yupares Payaprom. "Identifying Learning Styles of Language Learners: A Useful Step in Moving towards the Learner-Centred Approach." *Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies* 16, no. 1 (2020): 59–72.
- Pineteh, Ernest A. "The Academic Writing Challenges of Undergraduate Students: A South African Case Study." *International Journal of Higher Education* 3, no. 1 (September 25, 2013). <https://doi.org/10.5430/ijhe.v3n1p12>.
- Plessis, Elize Du. "Student Teachers' Perceptions, Experiences, and Challenges Regarding Learner-Centred Teaching." *South African Journal of Education* 40, no. 1 (2020).
- Plessis, Pierre Du. "Problems and Complexities in Rural Schools: Challenges of Education and Social Development." *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences* 5, no. 20 (2014): 1109.
- Plessis, Pierre Du, and Raj Mestry. "Teachers for Rural Schools—a Challenge for South Africa." *South African Journal of Education* 39 (2019).
- Ramadhani, Yulia Rizki, Rizka Safriyani, Rini Kesuma Siregar, Elisa Evawani Tambunan, and Yuswin Harputra. "Investigating the Influence of Self-Directed E-Learning Toward Students' Academic Writing Ability." In *International Conference on English Language Teaching (ICONELT 2019)*, 143–47. Atlantis Press, 2020.
- Sadeghi, Bahador, Mohammad Taghi Hassani, and Ahmad Dashtaki Hessari. "On the Relationship between Learners' Needs and Their Use of Language Learning Strategies." *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences* 136 (2014): 255–59.
- Sriwichai, Chuanpit, and Bhornsawan Inpin. "A Development of the Writing Instructional Model Based on Blended and Self-Directed Learning to Promote EFL University Students' Writing Ability and Self-Directed Learning." *ASEAN Journal of Education* 4, no. 1 (2018): 117–37.
- Xiao, Yangyu, and Min Yang. "Formative Assessment and Self-Regulated Learning: How Formative

Assessment Supports Students' Self-Regulation in English Language Learning.” *System* 81 (2019): 39–49.

Yanti, Made Dama, Luh Putu Artini, and Luh Gede Eka Wahyuni. “Teacher’s Perception Of Self-Directed Learning And Efl Students’learning Autonomy During Covid-19 Pandemic.” *Jurnal Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris Undiksha* 9, no. 2 (2021): 112–19.

Zano, Kufakunesu. “Reading Comprehension Strategies of the EFAL Learners in the FET Phase: Teacher Perspectives.” *E-BANGI* 17, no. 7 (2020): 1–12.

### **ABOUT AUTHOR**

Mosebetsi Mokoena holds a PhD in Curriculum Studies (Language education). He is a Lecturer at the University of the Free State, QwaQwa Campus. His research interests lie in teaching and learning English as an additional language, advancing school enrichment programs and self-directed learning in rural contexts. His research advocates for appreciative lenses and emancipatory approaches towards rurality and rural education. He has published in national and international journals, book chapters and conference proceedings.