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Assessing Lesotho High Schools Teachers' Content Knowledge of Teaching Narrative Composition Writing

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Abstract

Proficiency in English narrative composition is essential for developing learners' creative and critical thinking abilities. Teachers frequently face challenges, including insufficient training in narrative techniques, language barriers, and curriculum limitations that prioritise examinations preparation over creative writing. This study employed semi-structured interviews with 15 teachers from three academic specialisations—English Language and Literature, English and Geography, and English and Sesotho—to explore the extent of teachers' knowledge regarding plot structure, character development, and stylistic techniques.

Research findings reveal that only five teachers demonstrate high proficiency in these areas, while the majority show moderate to low understanding, particularly in teaching complex narrative structures and indirect characterisation. The research highlights the necessity for focused professional development and curriculum modifications to improve teachers' instructional skills in narrative writing, potentially leading to better student performance and engagement. These insights give direction for the formulation of teacher training and educational policies in Lesotho and comparable multilingual settings.

Keywords: Teacher Content Knowledge, Narrative Composition, English Language Education, Lesotho, Curriculum Constraints, Professional Development

Introduction

The importance of teacher content knowledge in shaping learners' learning outcomes is widely acknowledged in educational research. Content knowledge refers to the depth of understanding that teachers possess about the subjects they teach, which significantly impacts their ability to convey concepts effectively (Hill *et al.*, 2020; Hlaela & Jita, 2024)^[9, 10]. In narrative composition, specifically, teachers must be equipped with a robust knowledge base in narrative elements, such as structure, character development, plot structure and language techniques, to nurture learners' artistic and critical writing skills. Nevertheless, scholarship has revealed that teachers' content knowledge in particular domains can diverge significantly, swaying the quality and efficiency of teaching (Scherer & Nilsen, 2020)^[18]. This study examines the content knowledge of high school teachers in Lesotho, focusing on their ability to teach narrative composition and the associated instructional challenges.

With that said, it is important to highlight that teaching requires one to first understand purposes, subject matter structures, and ideas within and outside the discipline. Teachers need to understand what they teach and, when possible, to understand it in several ways (Shulman, 1992)^[20]. Comprehension of purpose is very important. The imperative in recent years about improving learner outcomes is also about improving the quality of the teaching workforce. In this regard, teacher quality is an important factor in determining gains in learner achievement, even after accounting for prior learner learning and family background characteristics. Predictors of teacher quality have typically included factors such as class size, certification, type of qualification, degrees earned, or years of experience. Another, less studied, indicator of teacher quality is the pedagogical knowledge and the content knowledge of teachers.

In English Language education, narrative composition is central for development of learners' expressive and critical thinking skills. Narratives need learners to appreciate plot structure, characterisation, setting, and other storytelling techniques to craft unified and appealing stories. For English language learners, for example, those in Lesotho where English is taught as a second language, narrative composition mastery correspondingly encompasses overcoming linguistic and cultural obstacles that can

hamper real storytelling (Sharma & Phyak, 2020) ^[19]. Teachers' profundity of content knowledge in narrative composition, therefore, is critical not only for supporting learners' language acquisition but also for aiding them accomplish literacy and intellectual mileposts. Content knowledge niches in this extent can lead to a minimal comprehension of narrative techniques, potentially upsetting learners' general writing proficiency and engagement with English literature.

The instructional quality in narrative composition is influenced not only by teachers' content knowledge but also by pedagogical content knowledge (PCK)—the synthesis of content mastery and teaching skills (Hlaela & Jita, 2024) ^[10]. Shulman (1987) ^[21] broached the concept of PCK, emphasising the need for teachers to possess knowledge of the subject matter and the skills to impart it efficiently. Contemporary studies accentuate the importance of PCK in aggrandizing learner outcomes (Hlaela, 2023), particularly in writing and composition, where teachers must balance content knowledge with an understanding of how learners learn to write (Grubaugh & Houston, 2021) ^[5]. In Lesotho, narrative composition is a part of the high school English curriculum and teachers' CK and PCK in narrative composition could play an influential part in talking to the exclusive learning needs of learners and nurturing critical thinking skills indispensable for academic accomplishment. Notwithstanding the recognised prominence of content knowledge, limited research scrutinizing the unambiguous challenges that teachers in Lesotho face in teaching narrative composition exists. Erstwhile research has primarily concentrated generally on language teaching in African contexts, highlighting issues such as limited resources, language barriers, and teacher preparedness (Chimbutane, 2021 ^[4]; Ekanjume-Ilongo, 2015). Nevertheless, narrative composition presents inimitable difficulties, demanding teachers not only to comprehend narrative structures but also to guide learners in developing voice, style, and character depth (Janks & Harley, 2020) ^[11]. Lacking a strong foundation in narrative techniques, teachers may find it puzzling to stimulate creativeness or efficiently engross learners in writing tasks, eventually impacting learners' impetus and attainment in narrative composition.

Besides, curriculum limitations frequently highlight examination preparation, which can limit chances for creative writing exercises and exhaustive consideration of narrative rudiments. This emphasis on standardised testing is predominant in numerous educational systems, including those in developing settings, where high-stakes examinations inspire pedagogical practices and limit suppleness (Adeosun & Oni, 2020) ^[1]. In Lesotho, this focus can pose substantial straits for teachers targeting a balance between examinations preparation and narrative composition skills. Teachers may feel careworn to emphasise examination-oriented skills, occasioning in a more inflexible, methodical slant to narrative teaching that confines learners' creative potential. Understanding how these limitations affect teachers' aptitude to teach narrative composition is indispensable for ascertaining areas where policy and curriculum reforms could augment instructional quality.

Given the influence of content knowledge on teaching quality and learner performance, evaluating teachers' proficiency in narrative composition is key for educational

enhancement in Lesotho. This study aims to assess the content knowledge of high school teachers in narrative composition, examining their mastery of narrative structure, character development, and stylistic techniques, and the challenges they meet. By identifying gaps in teachers' content knowledge and instructional barriers, the study seeks to underwrite to ongoing exertions to improve teacher training, curriculum design, and eventually, learner results in English language education in Lesotho. This research not only underscores areas for improvement within Lesotho's educational structure but also offers acumens pertinent to other milieus where English is taught as a second language.

Statement of the problem

The ability to effectively teach narrative composition is crucial for developing learners' writing skills and fostering creativity in high school English classrooms. However, the extent of content knowledge that Lesotho high school teachers possess in teaching narrative composition writing remains largely unexplored. This lack of insight raises concerns about the effectiveness of narrative writing instruction and its potential impact on learners' writing proficiency. This study seeks to assess the content knowledge of Lesotho high school teachers in teaching narrative composition writing, identifying both strengths and gaps to inform professional development initiatives and curriculum enhancement, ultimately aiming to improve learners' writing outcomes and communication skills.

Literature Review

Content Knowledge

Shulman (1986) ^[22] introduced the phrase pedagogical content knowledge and generated an entire and innovative groundswell of scholarly research on teachers' knowledge of their subject matter and the significance of this knowledge for fruitful teaching. In Shulman's theoretical framework, teachers need to perfect two types of knowledge: (a) content, also known as "deep" knowledge of the subject itself, and (b) knowledge of the curricular development (Hlaela & Jita, 2024) ^[10]. For the purpose of this study, focus was on one component of Shulman's model, being, pedagogical knowledge.

Pedagogical knowledge is the specific knowledge of teachers for generating operative teaching and learning environs for all learners (Hlaela & Jita, 2023; Koehler & Mishra, 2009 ^[12]; Shulman, 1987 ^[21]). Shulman (1986, 1987) ^[22, 21] further underscores content knowledge as the body of knowledge and information that teachers impart and that learners are projected to learn in a prearranged subject or content area, such as English language, arts, mathematics, science, or social studies. Simply put, content knowledge largely refers to the truths, ideas, philosophies, and ideologies that are taught and learned in definite academic subjects, rather than to related skills—such as reading, writing, or researching—that learners also learn in school (Shulman, 1992) ^[20]. Teaching all learners based on today's standards, teachers must profoundly comprehend content and compliantly so they can aid learners generate expedient cognitive maps, relate one idea to another, and address misapprehensions. Teachers need to appreciate how ideas link through fields and to daily life. Therefore, CK is the all-purpose details, substance, and basics of a subject or discipline that all teachers should know. In language arts, this is the fundamentals of language: Its construction,

constituents, and concepts like composition, grammar, and devices that language arts teachers must know.

English Teaching in Lesotho

In Lesotho, English Language is taught as a second language to the native language, Sesotho. According to Lesotho General Certificate of Secondary Education (LGCSE) - English Language syllabus, English Language is taught so that learners will be able to communicate appropriately, with a clear awareness of purpose, audience and register and to communicate clearly and develop ideas comprehensibly, at word level, at sentence level and at whole text level (NCDC & ECOL, 2019). Additionally, learners should be able to use correct spelling, punctuation and grammar and communicate ingeniously, using a varied range of vocabulary, sentence structures and linguistic devices (Moea, 2023) ^[13]. This is extra confirmation that learners are obligated to appreciate linguistic fundamentals such as; grammar, pronunciation, and vocabulary for ancillary purpose for the development of those skills (Baa'syir, 2013) ^[12].

The LGCSE English Language syllabus is categorised into two sections; the first part which is the writing part that is sectioned into two: Creative writing and directed writing, and the second part; sectioned into three parts- reading for ideas, reading for meaning and language proficiency. The focus of this study is on the first part under writing, specifically on creative writing. This is the case because that is where composition writing appears- narrative composition writing. According to this syllabus, when dealing with narrative writing, learners should be taught how to use diverse kinds of structure, for example, flashbacks, first and third person etc., develop plot, develop characterisation and punctuate direct speech for dialogue (NCDC & ECOL, 2019).

By merely studying these components to be taught to learners, it is evident that they are literary elements of fiction, which many teachers may not be familiar with and to, due to having different majors from Literature. There are teachers with double major of English and Sesotho, English and Geography, English and Religious education to mention but a few. For these teachers, these concepts may be foreign and as thus necessitate a labour- intensive effort to understand them before heading to teach them to learners. Also, those with English Language and Literature majors are very few because the subject is offered in very few schools in the country for the subject is an elective least found important in the school syllabus (Moea & Mahao, 2023) ^[14]. This emphasises that many teachers may not be conversant with what they are expected to teach as far as narrative composition is concerned and it becomes a laborious task on their side. This breeds a huge problem; because teachers are not comfortable with the literary jargon, they run away from teaching English Language to their other majors. I observed this happening from the high school I worked at- teachers running away from teaching English Language and overloading themselves with hours for their other majors. Apart from the foregoing information, those teachers who are compelled to teach English language (especially narrative composition) because the odds are against them, (I learned from my experience while I was a learner and from the chat I have had with the prospective teachers I now teach at the local teacher training college) they just tell learners that they know how to create a story, they studied that from

primary, having been writing compositions for many years, after all, composition writing is simply 'telling a lie'. They never tell the learners the how part; how to tell this 'lie', through the narrative tools from the introduction writing to the conclusion writing. Failure to provide learners with the nitty-gritties of narrative composition writing may also breed more problems encapsulated by the one major one-failing of English paper one. As earlier stated, many teachers do that and it translates into many learners writing narrative composition in huge numbers. However, year in and year out when the results are announced, English Language has been poorly performed in large numbers. It is from this observation that this study is entrenched: To assess the Content Knowledge (CK) of narrative composition writing from teachers.

Narrative Writing

Nqobile (2017) ^[17] defines narration as the telling of sequence of an event with beginning, middle and an end. That is, it is the type of writing that tells a story, real or imagined. A fiction narrative is a continuous narrative that is fabricated or imagined. Muhammad (2016) emphasises further narrative fiction is the narration of a succession of events. In this case, the term narration puts forward a communication process in which the narrative as a message is communicated by the addressor or to the addressee. The implication from the above definitions is that narrating a story, one is communicating and therefore the communicator or addressor or narrator ought to relentlessly have their listeners in mind to facilitate whatever communication they are conveying and make it understandable to and by the audience. This can be accomplished through the usage of apposite vocabulary for a narrative as the vocabulary for a narrative will vary from that of an argumentative.

Teaching Narrative Writing

Drawing from the foregoing paragraph, it is evidently the teacher's duty to teach their learners needed components of narrative composition, from the introduction to the conclusion and to correspondingly select wording that is suitable to a precise piece of writing, in this case, being a narrative writing (Neupane, 2014) ^[16]. This assertion is corroborated by Brooks (2015) ^[3] who contends that flow and clarity are significant in narrative composition writing where transitional words such as next, finally, during, after, and when should be operationalised. Needless to say, the style is a rapport between language and the purpose for which a specific piece is intended. The teacher therefore must arm learners with the germane skills of this writing type for the learners to not end up describing instead of recounting an event.

From my experience of seven years as a high school English Language teacher, I noted that most of the problems faced by the LGCSE learners lie with paper one where a narrative composition is a component. This observation is consolidated by Hammer (2008) who observes that mistakes made by Poles in learning to write English Language are identical in that though learners come from diverse schools and background, the mistakes are consistent in their corruption of English Language. This is evidence enough to show one that problems concomitant with writing exclusively narratives, lie with failure to grasp English structures. This is further supported by Hayes and Flower

(2000) who contend that writing is essentially multifaceted therefore writers must concurrently contemplate an assemblage of characters during composition as well as writing task necessities, knowledge of audience, domain-specific knowledge, language use and tone.

Methodology

This study used a qualitative research design to explore teachers' content knowledge and challenges in teaching narrative composition in English. A qualitative approach was chosen to gain an in-depth understanding of the teachers' experiences, beliefs, and instructional practices, particularly in relation to their content knowledge and pedagogical approaches. By focusing on teachers from different academic backgrounds, this study aimed to capture a variety of viewpoints on narrative composition teaching. There were 15 urban high school teachers in Maseru urban and rural who participated in this study. These participants were selected based on their teaching focus and academic background, which included: Five teachers with a major in English Language and Literature, five teachers with a major in English and Geography and five teachers with a major in English and Sesotho. The distinction in majors among participants permitted for an exploration of variances and resemblances in teaching styles, content knowledge, and supposed challenges in teaching narrative composition. A convenience sampling method was used to select participants. Teachers were selected based on their accessibility and disposition to participate in the study. This approach was fitting given logistical limitations and the need to contact participants who were actively teaching narrative composition in English at the high school level. Although convenience sampling may limit generalisability, it offered practical admittance to teachers with applicable experience and knowledge. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews to allow for in-depth exploration of teachers' views while upholding a flexible structure. Semi-structured interviews provided an equilibrium between dependability across interviews and compliance to explore inimitable perceptions from each participant. The interviews concentrated on key areas pertinent to the study's objectives, including: Understanding of narrative composition: Teachers' definitions, knowledge, and perceptions of essential components in narrative writing, pedagogical approaches: Techniques and strategies used in teaching narrative composition and challenges and barriers: Difficulties faced in teaching narrative writing, particularly in relation to language barriers, content knowledge, and curriculum constraints and teachers' reflections on their own training and any extra support they felt would improve their efficacy in teaching narrative composition. The collected data were analysed using **thematic analysis** to categorise patterns and key themes linked to teachers' perceptions and challenges in teaching narrative composition. Ethical procedures were monitored to safeguard the rights and privacy of all participants. Participants were cognizant about the study's purpose, methods, and their right to withdraw at any time without consequence. Consent was gained preceding the interviews, and data were anonymised to safeguard participants' identities.

Findings and Discussions

Overall Content Knowledge Scores

All the teachers with English Language and Literature

confirmed a high level of content knowledge in narrative composition writing, displaying mastery in areas like narrative structure, character development, and stylistic language elements. Those in who majored in English and Sesotho scored at a moderate level, with adequate knowledge of narrative basics but struggling with deeper concepts, such as thematic development and literary devices. The teachers majoring in English and Geography scored low, revealing limited understanding of narrative composition elements, particularly with structuring narrative arcs and integrating creative techniques in their instruction. Teachers in high content knowledge group showed mastery in key narrative composition elements, including narrative structure, character development, and stylistic language use. Their proficiency enabled them to guide learners through multifaceted facets of storytelling, such as fashioning seasoned characters, developing an interconnected story arc, and using language that augments tone and atmosphere. The presence of teachers with high content knowledge is an encouraging finding because they function as strong instructional models who can introduce learners to advanced narrative concepts. They are possibly able to nurture learners' creativity and critical thinking by exposing them to erudite storytelling techniques, which can aid learners appreciate and reproduce high-quality narrative writing. However, with only five teachers at this level, it is apparent that these skills are not pervasive athwart the teaching population, restraining the comprehensive bearing on learners' narrative capabilities.

Teachers scoring at a moderate level possess satisfactory knowledge of narrative essentials, such as the beginning, middle, and end structure, simple character traits, and basic descriptive language. While they can offer a foundation in storytelling, these teachers habitually struggle with more nuanced features of narrative composition, such as thematic development and the use of literary devices like symbolism or metaphor. The limitations within this group affect learners' gravity of learning. These teachers may be able to assist learners construct basic narratives but may not entirely arm them to explore or express more composite ideas and themes. Without exposure to literary devices, learners' narratives may be deprived of layers and intricacy, making it challenging for them to engross readers or attain high scores in narrative composition tests. This group epitomizes a main target for professional development focused on innovative narrative techniques and thematic exploration to bridge the break between rudimentary storytelling and multifarious narrative skills. The other group of teachers, comprising both Sesotho and Geography majors, with low content knowledge faced challenges with important narrative composition elements, chiefly organizing narrative arcs and incorporating creative techniques. These teachers may rely on straightforward, standard approaches to narrative instruction, which could limit learners' creative communication and understanding of narrative subtleties. Teachers with low-slung content knowledge may struggle to lead learners in producing interconnected plots or dynamic characters, which can lead to learners creating disjointed or unfledged stories. This gap in content knowledge submits that these teachers may require foundational backing in narrative techniques, and in tactics for integrating creativity into their instruction. If unaddressed, this issue could hinder learners' progress as storytellers, as they may not get the guidance required to create engaging or well-structured

narratives.

Knowledge in Specific Areas of Narrative Composition

Plot structure

About eight (five Literature majors, 2 Sesotho majors and one Geography major) of teachers were found proficient in basic plot structure (beginning, middle, end), but only five (Literature majors) could efficiently teach complex structures like flashbacks or nonlinear storytelling. This exposes a noteworthy gap in content knowledge and instructional profundity among teachers. This inequality has numerous repercussions for both teaching practice and learner learning results in narrative composition. The bulk of teachers exhibit ease with teaching linear plot structures, expectedly because these structures are straightforward and align thoroughly with conventional narrative arcs that learners may find stress-free to understand. A linear structure, with a clear beginning, middle, and end, provides learners with a structured way to appreciate narrative flow, making it idyllic for presenting narrative writing. This style is vital for introductory learning, as it aids learners cultivate their understanding of main narrative components, such as exposition, rising action, climax, and resolution.

However, the limited capacity to teach multifarious narrative techniques, such as flashbacks, nonlinear storytelling, and in media res, puts forward that many teachers may lack the specialised knowledge or buoyancy essential to direct learners in crafting more sophisticated and dynamic narratives. Complex narrative structures frequently include innovative planning and a nuanced appreciation of story pacing, and a profound awareness of the reader's perspective and experience. These structures need not only an understanding of narrative fundamentals but also higher-order thinking skills, such as questioning timelines and managing manifold plot cobwebs effectively.

This gap means that while learners may develop ability in crafting artless, linear narratives, they may slip out on learning how to fashion nuanced, appealing, and polygonal stories. The absence of teaching in complex structures can curb learners' ingenuity and curb their aptitude to try-out with form and narrative techniques. Mastery of unconventional structures allows learners to reconnoitre more multifaceted themes and relationships, develop suspense, and afford depth to their narratives by exploring events out of chronological order. Likewise, learners missing experience to non-traditional storytelling methods might find it challenging to engage with literature or media that employ such techniques. This could eventually impact their critical reading skills, as they may struggle to analyse or appreciate stories that use flashbacks, multiple perspectives, or fragmented timelines.

A potential explanation for this gap is the scarcity of professional development opportunities that emphasise advanced narrative techniques within certain educational systems. Teachers often lack adequate training in the instruction of these techniques, necessitating both a conceptual grasp of narrative mechanics and effective classroom strategies. A contributing factor may be the curriculum's focus on standardised testing and assessment, which frequently prioritise simpler, more easily evaluated writing skills. This emphasis may cause teachers to prioritise linear narratives, which often correspond more closely with standard examination criteria, resulting in a lack of exploration of advanced techniques. Furthermore, teachers

lacking a specialisation in English or possessing expertise in alternative disciplines may exhibit limited familiarity with literary concepts related to complex narrative structures. Teachers with a background in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) may prioritise linguistic accuracy over literary creativity, which can influence their approach to narrative instruction.

Characterisation

The majority of teachers (11) could identify basic character traits; however, only six felt equipped to teach advanced characterisation techniques, such as the development of complex characters and the use of indirect characterisation. This indicates a notable gap in instructional depth concerning character development in narrative writing. This discrepancy highlights difficulties in facilitating learners' nuanced comprehension of character development, essential for crafting compelling and credible narratives. Fundamental characterisation skills, including the description of a character's physical attributes, behaviours, and clear personality traits, are essential. Teachers often assist learners in developing characters that correspond with typical descriptors such as "bold," "caring," or "annoyed," thereby facilitating the initial stages of character formation within a narrative framework.

This foundation is crucial for early writing instruction, as it aids learners in understanding the fundamentals of developing recognisable, albeit basic, characters. Advanced characterisation techniques necessitate a comprehensive analysis beyond mere trait enumeration. Creating complex characters necessitates an understanding of psychological depth, motivations, and the internal conflicts that render characters multifaceted and relatable. Indirect characterisation, which involves revealing a character's traits through their actions, dialogue, and interactions with others, requires advanced instructional skill. A limited number of teachers feel adequately prepared to instruct these complex methods, thereby restricting learners' opportunities to engage with intricate character dynamics and subtleties in storytelling.

Learners who focus solely on basic characterisation may encounter difficulties in developing characters that are perceived as authentic and complex. Simplistic character traits may result in a deficiency of depth and development, hindering emotional or intellectual engagement with readers. In contrast, advanced techniques such as indirect characterisation facilitate richer and more immersive storytelling, enabling readers to infer a character's personality and development through the narrative. In the absence of instruction in advanced techniques, learners may fail to grasp how characters' actions and decisions propel the plot and illuminate deeper themes. Characters that experience development and exhibit complexity enhance a narrative, enabling learners to examine themes of change, conflict, and personal growth. The absence of these skills may lead to narratives that appear static or do not effectively engage readers. The discomfort in teaching complex characterisation may arise from insufficient teacher training in narrative composition, particularly among individuals lacking a literature background. Teachers specialising in English as a second language (ESL) or foundational language skills often prioritise language accuracy over literary analysis and creative methodologies. Curriculum limitations and a focus on examination-related competencies

may also play a role. In environments where evaluations emphasise straightforward responses, the nuances and creativity inherent in indirect characterisation may be afforded less instructional attention. Teachers may experience pressure to address curriculum mandates through simpler, more direct approaches. The resources available for teachers may lack comprehensive guidance on advanced literary techniques, resulting in a scarcity of models or frameworks to assist learners in developing complex characters. The absence of resources illustrating indirect characterisation or character development over time complicates teachers' ability to effectively guide learners.

Language and Style

Teachers exhibited differing degrees of comfort in instructing stylistic elements. 13 teachers could integrate suitable vocabulary for narrative writing; however, only seven were able to assist learners in comprehending the impact of diction on tone and mood. Only five teachers reported confidence in teaching punctuation and structure for dialogue, while many expressed uncertainty regarding conventions such as quotation marks and attribution verbs. Interestingly, most teachers can incorporate suitable vocabulary into narrative writing, which is a fundamental component of teaching methodology. The selection of vocabulary allows learners to communicate meaning with precision and effectiveness. This competency ensures that learners are exposed to vocabulary appropriate for various contexts and purposes, including descriptive language in narrative settings. Vocabulary instruction aids learners in selecting words that enhance clarity, thereby establishing a foundation for effective expressive writing. Teaching diction, defined as the intentional selection of words to influence tone and mood, necessitates a more sophisticated methodology. The observed gap indicates that numerous teachers may lack adequate preparation to instruct learners on how to utilise word choice to influence the reader's perception and emotional reaction. Tone and mood are conveyed through nuanced shifts in language, and comprehending the impact of diction on these elements is crucial for learners seeking to enhance the depth of their narratives. In the absence of this knowledge, learners may depend on basic or simplistic language, which fails to incorporate the complexity required for compelling and evocative storytelling.

A limited number of teachers expressed confidence in instructing learners on the structure and punctuation of dialogue, encompassing conventions such as quotation marks, attribution verbs, and paragraphing. Dialogue serves as a crucial instrument for character development and plot advancement; thus, mastering its technical elements is essential for crafting fluent, readable, and realistic interactions. In the absence of guidance on these conventions, learners may encounter difficulties in producing dialogue that is grammatically accurate, appropriately punctuated, and engaging. The low comfort level in teaching dialogue structure indicates that numerous teachers may lack the necessary training or resources to effectively instruct on these specific conventions. Ambiguity regarding punctuation and structure in dialogue may result in inconsistent instruction, ultimately depriving learners of the necessary skills to compose conversations that appear natural or effectively indicate changes in speakers or tone. Teachers without a background in literature or creative

writing may feel inadequately equipped to instruct on stylistic elements such as diction, tone, and dialogue conventions. Training in English as a Second Language (ESL) or basic grammar often prioritises accuracy and vocabulary over creative stylistic elements, resulting in tone and dialogue appearing secondary.

When the curriculum emphasises exam-oriented content, teachers may prioritise simpler, more easily assessable skills at the expense of complex stylistic techniques. Examinations frequently emphasise precise language, potentially causing teachers to prioritise vocabulary over the influence of word choice on tone, mood, or the subtleties of dialogue. Instructing on tone, mood, and dialogue structure necessitates particular resources, including sample texts that exemplify these components and visual aids that illustrate correct dialogue punctuation. In the absence of these materials, teachers may encounter difficulties in delivering effective instruction on stylistic elements. Learners lacking instruction on the influence of diction on tone and mood may create narratives that are overly simplistic, inadequately engaging readers or conveying the emotional depth of the story. Adjusting tone and mood through diction is crucial for crafting immersive narratives that engage readers. In the absence of guidance on dialogue structure, learners are likely to generate awkward and improperly punctuated dialogue, which can disrupt the narrative flow. Opportunities to develop characters and plot may be overlooked, as dialogue serves to reveal personalities, intentions, and conflicts without explicit description. The lack of dialogue instruction may lead to learner reluctance in incorporating conversations into their narratives, thereby constraining their narrative versatility and engagement.

Challenges Identified by Teachers

All teachers reported challenges in instructing English narratives attributed to language barriers, especially among learners whose primary language is Sesotho. Ten teachers reported inadequate training in narrative composition, especially regarding the integration of creative elements beyond fundamental storytelling. More than fifty percent of teachers indicated that the curriculum's emphasis on examination preparation restricts their ability to incorporate creative writing activities. The findings collectively identify several significant obstacles to efficient narrative composition teaching. The challenges highlight systemic problems in language instruction, teacher readiness, and curriculum design, which collectively restrict learners' opportunities to cultivate comprehensive narrative skills. All teachers recognise language barriers as a challenge, indicating a prevalent difficulty in bridging the linguistic divide between English and Sesotho, the primary language for numerous learners. In a multilingual context, teaching English narrative composition necessitates that teachers assist learners in comprehending both the structure and elements of storytelling, as well as the subtleties of English vocabulary, syntax, and style, which may vary considerably from Sesotho. Language barriers hinder learners' ability to articulate complex ideas in English, especially in creative writing, where fluency and linguistic flexibility are essential. Learners lacking fluency in English may encounter difficulties in crafting vivid descriptions, employing diverse sentence structures, or effectively conveying emotions in their writing. This issue may lead to diminished confidence

in learners' narrative abilities, thereby affecting their motivation and engagement with the subject matter.

Ten teachers report insufficient training in narrative composition, particularly in the integration of creative elements, indicating a significant need for professional development that extends beyond fundamental storytelling skills. Teachers may grasp the fundamentals of linear narratives yet may lack preparedness in incorporating creative storytelling techniques, including diverse narrative perspectives, symbolism, and intricate plot structures. The absence of training impairs teachers' capacity to deliver comprehensive and diverse writing instruction. Creative elements are crucial for enhancing learners' narrative skills, enabling them to explore voice, character depth, and thematic complexity. Inadequate teacher confidence in these domains may hinder learners' opportunities to develop engaging, unique, and impactful narratives, thereby restricting their capacity to progress beyond formulaic writing.

More than fifty percent of teachers report feeling limited by a curriculum that emphasises exam preparation at the expense of creative writing activities. Many educational systems prioritise exams that assess structured, straightforward answers, which limits teachers' capacity to include activities that promote imagination and experimentation in writing. This examination-centered approach may adversely impact learners' narrative development. It promotes an emphasis on adhering to fundamental writing standards instead of fully engaging with the possibilities of creative storytelling, which could foster critical and imaginative thinking among learners. Insufficient involvement in creative activities may adversely affect learners' motivation, as writing is perceived primarily as a task centred on assessment criteria rather than as a means of personal and artistic expression.

Impact on Learner Performance

Teachers observed that learners frequently exhibit subpar performance in the narrative composition portions of assessments. Approximately 70% of learners consistently struggle with crafting coherent narratives, linking plot events, and employing descriptive language, according to the teachers interviewed. A significant challenge for learners is the development of coherent narratives. Coherence in writing necessitates that learners systematically arrange their ideas and uphold clarity across the narrative. Lack of coherence in narratives can result in disjointed or confusing experiences for readers, hindering their full engagement with the story. The challenge of attaining coherence may arise from insufficient guidance in structuring plot events or comprehending narrative progression. Learners may lack clarity in structuring a coherent beginning, middle, and end, which can impede their capacity to produce a story that appears complete and unified. Their narratives may lack the necessary progression to maintain reader engagement, thereby affecting exam performance and overall writing quality. Numerous learners encounter difficulties in connecting plot events, a skill that necessitates comprehension of the interrelations among events within a narrative structure. Effective plot linkage enables readers to comprehend the logical progression of a narrative, where each event seamlessly transitions to the subsequent one, culminating in a climax. The challenges in this domain may stem from inadequate exposure to varied narrative

structures, restricted practice in event sequencing, or insufficient instruction on developing cause-and-effect relationships within narratives. In the absence of these skills, learners may produce narratives that appear fragmented or arbitrary, lacking the necessary narrative drive and tension to maintain reader interest and effectively convey a coherent story arc.

Descriptive language is crucial for enhancing narratives, as it enables readers to visualise scenes, comprehend character emotions, and experience immersion in the setting. A considerable number of learners demonstrate insufficient proficiency in employing vivid language, resulting in narratives that may appear flat and unengaging. This difficulty can be linked to a restricted vocabulary, insufficient practice with sensory language, or a focus on fundamental language skills rather than creative expression in educational settings. Insufficient descriptive language skills may lead learners to utilise basic, superficial descriptions that do not effectively communicate mood or atmosphere, thereby diminishing the emotional resonance of their narratives.

Conclusion

The study revealed significant insights into the content knowledge of Lesotho high school teachers concerning narrative composition instruction. A critical finding was the varying degrees of mastery over essential narrative writing elements, such as plot structure, characterization, and language use. While some teachers demonstrated high levels of competency in these areas, a notable percentage showed moderate or limited understanding, particularly regarding advanced techniques like complex plot structuring and the use of literary devices. This gap indicates a disparity in content knowledge that could impact learners' writing outcomes, as learners may lack exposure to comprehensive narrative techniques essential for high-level narrative composition.

Another essential finding was the influence of language barriers and curriculum constraints on effective instruction. Given that English is a second language in Lesotho, both teachers and learners face challenges in mastering complex narrative language and style. Furthermore, the curriculum's emphasis on exam preparation restricts opportunities for creative expression, limiting learners' ability to engage deeply with narrative writing beyond standard test expectations. Combined, these factors contribute to the reported struggles learners face in narrative composition exams and hinder their development of sophisticated narrative skills.

The study also identified professional development needs among teachers. Many reported inadequate training in narrative composition instruction, particularly regarding creative teaching methods and advanced narrative techniques. This shortfall underscores the need for targeted training programs to empower teachers with the knowledge and skills necessary for effective narrative instruction, which could translate to enhanced learner outcomes in English writing.

Recommendations

Workshops and training sessions should be developed focused on advanced narrative techniques, such as complex plot structures, characterization, and the use of figurative language. This targeted training will equip teachers with

tools to teach narrative composition effectively and to foster creativity among learners. Also, training that integrates language and narrative pedagogy should be provided, emphasising strategies for teaching English narrative techniques within a multilingual context. This could include bilingual resources to bridge the language gap, enabling both teachers and learners to gain confidence in English narrative writing. Additionally, curriculum should be modified to allocate time for creative writing exercises that are not solely exam-focused. Allowing learners to engage in free writing, storytelling, and character creation activities will help develop narrative skills that go beyond memorization and standard formats. It is also recommended that a curriculum that balances examinations preparation with the development of broader writing skills be put in place. This approach would allow teachers to support learners in meeting exam requirements while also enhancing their narrative abilities through varied and dynamic writing exercises.

Likewise, Development and distribution of teaching materials that provide detailed guidance on narrative composition techniques, including examples of strong narrative structures, dialogues, and descriptive language should be done. These resources would support teachers in delivering more effective and structured narrative writing lessons. Given the multilingual environment, creation of bilingual resources to assist teachers in navigating English language barriers is necessary. Resources in both English and Sesotho can provide scaffolding for teachers and help clarify complex narrative concepts for learners. The implementation of a system for continuous assessment of teachers' content knowledge and pedagogical strategies would make easy regular feedback. Regular evaluations and constructive feedback will help monitor progress and identify further training needs to enhance teachers' narrative composition instruction skills.

I encourage educational policymakers to prioritise narrative composition within the curriculum and provide adequate resources and training for teachers. By making narrative writing a focal point, institutions can help close the content knowledge gap and improve learner writing outcomes. I additionally advocate for school administrations to support initiatives that enhance English narrative composition instruction. This could involve dedicated time within the curriculum, access to writing resources, and encouragement for creative expression in English classes.

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