

# The Language of Police Officers Matters: Factors Hampering Workplace English Writing Capability in the South African Police Services (SAPS)

Tebogo Johannes Kekana<sup>1</sup> and Malesela Edward Montle<sup>2</sup>  
University of Limpopo, SOUTH AFRICA<sup>1,2</sup>

---

## Article Info:

Received: 1 October 2022

Accepted: 23 August 2023

---

## Keywords:

basic police development learning programme,  
police cluster,  
police instructor,  
police recruit,  
standing order,  
workplace English writing competency

---

## Corresponding Author:

Malesela Edward Montle  
University of Limpopo, SOUTH AFRICA  
Email: [edward.montle@ul.ac.za](mailto:edward.montle@ul.ac.za)

---

## ABSTRACT

This article reports on the findings of an exploratory-based study about variables hampering adequate Workplace English writing competency of police officers in the South African Police Services (SAPS). The main assumption in this article is that this poor English writing proficiency that is tailored for the workplace in the as a result of many intertwined and interrelated factors. A quanti-qualitative research approach was adopted. Data was harvested using a questionnaire and in-depth interviews from 203 research participants from various police stations in Gauteng Province of South Africa. Thematic Content Analysis (TCA) was used for analysis of qualitative data. Quantitative data was analysed using SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences). The investigation was underpinned by Work Integrated Learning (WIL), Genre and NA (Needs Analysis) theories. The investigation found that there is a deficiency of expertise as far as pedagogy is concerned among police trainers. Furthermore, the study revealed that the absence of tertiary qualifications contributes to the problem. Language teaching in the SAPS training colleges is found not to be given adequate emphasis. Lastly, the over-dominance of physical training over academic teaching was also a challenge. This investigation underscores the crucial aspect of reflective research as a source of information.

*This is an open access article under the [CC BY](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/) license.*



---

## INTRODUCTION

Internationally there have been concerns about the poor English writing competency of police officers (Cochrane, 2004; Alhuqbani, 2014; Alqurashi, 2011) and in South Africa (SA), there is a paucity of literature in that area. Researchers such as Kekana (2015), Kekana and Mogoboya (2021), Williams (2012) and Sapa (2012) lament this gap. In the same vein, literature on police officers in the world seem to agree that among other things, inadequate English writing competency is the bane in effective police work (Ndenze, 2012; Qaddomi, 2013; Kekana, 2015; Ćetković, 2017; Kekana & Mogoboya, 2021). It bestrides between work and training. This is one the reasons why researchers such as Calteaux advocated when she said, “Members require language and communication training at various levels and for various purposes” (2003, p. 8).

English literacy plays a major role in the lives of police officers in the world today (Kekana & Mogoboya, 2021). Police officers write reports that can be used as evidence in the court of law and this is more reason

why they must have adequate English writing competency. Scholars such as Četković (2017) in her study titled ‘The Language of Police Reports: A Quest for Precision or a Bureaucratic Exercise of Language Degradation’ examined some of the linguistic features of police written language. In SA, this area has not been explored adequately and that is the rationale for this investigation. Paterson (2011, p. 287) posits that police studies are dominated by Western scholars. We believe that SA should also contribute in this body of knowledge, hence this study. In South Africa, reports such as the one by Ndenze (2012) entitled “Poor police literacy hampers justice” bear testimony to this challenge and this is one challenge that cannot be left to perpetuate in SA. Furthermore, Adonis (2019) also lamented this problem. Qaddomi (2013, p. 1120) also found that police and cadets need English for their work. In addition, it has been observed that some of the problems engulfing organisations do not necessarily lie with learning interventions programmes but with organisational issues (See Adonis, 2019; Ortu, 2019). In this study, one of the ‘organizational issues’ affecting South African Police Services (SAPS) that has an effect on English writing is the SAPS language policy that does not say anything about linguistic training of police recruits.

Blumberg, Schlosser, Papazoglou, Creighton and Kaye (2019) maintain that as far as the academic portion is concerned, recruits must demonstrate proficiency in various skills or fail that learning domain and most academies allow recruits to fail a certain number of domains and to remediate. They further maintain that police academy training has two general aspects, the academic component takes place in classroom settings and requires recruits (or, in some academies, “cadets”) to learn the basics of law. This is also part of the problem because it seems English writing is overlooked at the expense of the ‘basics of law’. This is a clear indication that writing as part of the skills package a police should possess is crucial. It is a serious deficiency if a police is not skilled in particular in English writing. This paper looks at the factors that hampers English writing capability of SAPS members with the aim to contribute in closing this gap of information. This is done because it is our firm believe that data from this study can contribute to understanding the challenges that perpetuate the challenge of inadequate English writing competency in SAPS, particularly from a SA point of view. In an attempt to achieve this aim, the study formulated two research objectives, namely:

- To determine the SAPS members’ perceptions on the factors that hamper their English writing competency
- To suggest feasible intervention measures to address the English writing challenges experienced by SAPS members

To achieve the above-mentioned aims, the researchers formulated the following two research questions:

- What are the factors that hamper SAPS members’ English writing competency as perceived by the members themselves?
- What are the feasible intervention measures that can be applied to address the English writing challenges experienced by SAPS members?

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **The Significance of Sufficient English Writing Proficiency in a Workplace Environment: A Police Case**

Every profession, occupation or trade has its own variety of language for effective communication (Chinwe, 2015) and this is tantamount to a speech community (See Yule, 2008, p. 23). Police officers learning about language and communication is one of the things they had to contend with when in training (Basturkmen, 2010; Coulthard and Johnson, 2007). The discussion of linguistics and education in police workplace is inseparable from the issue of training in SAPS training academies and other institutions relevant to police work and law enforcement. This is so because adequate writing is crucial for any workplace environment. Articulacy in English is a precondition for success and progression in many fields of employment in today’s world

(Richards, 2005, p. 1). This is one of the crucial factors that prompted this investigation. Furthermore, Brandt (2005) emphasises the importance of adequate English writing in a workplace. For police officers to deliver a professional service to the community, they need to be trained adequately. The South African government engages with this problem at a broader level through the National Development Plan of 2011. The 2030 vision of the National Development Plan with regard to police work (*National Planning Commission, 2011, p. 350*) in South Africa among other things, maintain that in 2030, police department as a professional institution would be staffed by highly skilled officers. This makes linguistic training of police officers very important. It has been observed that education is not usually viewed as the heart of a police training programme and this sometimes causes problems which some are linguistically related. How police officers are educated is very important across the world. For instance, in countries such as Belgium and Canada, police officers' education is viewed as very important.

The above-mentioned research about the challenges of SAPS police officers are also supported by Stevens (2005, p. 44) in his study. Furthermore, in highlighting the issue, the Auditor-General in SA Terence Nombebe in his audit outcomes of most spheres of government for the financial year 2011-2012 in an article by Madala Thepa in the *Sunday World* newspaper (2013) summarized the problem as follows, "People who are in government are beyond the ability to be trained and that is in the majority of the departments, skills are in short supply. There is no direct match of skills to the job. It is disheartening to observe the above finding regarding many government employees such as police officers. Therefore, the situation calls for an urgent intervention from both government and the institutions of higher learning in the country (South Africa).

### **The Notions of "Linguistic Competence" and "Training"**

The notion of 'linguistic competence' was introduced by Noam Chomsky 1965. According to Chomsky as discussed in Tienson, the following has been noted, "The grammar of a language, considered as a theory of competence, is an idealization, and that speakers know the rules of the correct grammar of their language" (1983, p. 99). Chomsky (1957, p. 3) further argues in the following manner:

Linguistic theory is concerned primarily with an ideal speaker-listener, in a completely homogeneous speech-community, who knows its language perfectly and is unaffected by such grammatically irrelevant conditions as memory limitations, distractions, shifts of attention and interest, and errors in applying his knowledge of the language in actual performance.

What seems to be central in the above notion is that rules of grammar are important for one to be competent in a given language and this is also expressed eloquently by Hall when he says that "the language used by police in the execution of their duties can be thought of not just as a set of clichés, formulas and boilerplate, but rather as the particular set of them perceived to be appropriate to police work as a context of use by the officers who carry out that police work" (2008, pp. 67-68). The latter statement in the above quotation articulates to genre. According to Bhatia (2004), genre refers to language use in a conventionalized communicative setting in order to give expression to a specific set of communicative goals of a disciplinary or social institution, which give rise to stable structural forms by imposing constraints on the use of lexico-grammatical as well as discursal resources. However, this makes training very important in developing efficient police officers in SA particularly when it comes to issues like writing.

Indicating agreement with the above assertion, scholars such as Davis and Davis (1998) echoed that Training is the process through which skills are developed, information is provided and attitudes are nurtured in order to help individuals to become more efficient in their work. Thus, training comes in as a solution to deficient performance delivered by employees or when there is a need to change the way things have been done.

Mahaye (2010) also share the same sentiments pronounced above. Buntman and Snyman (2003) maintain that success of the SAPS is the strong focus placed on training. Training in SAPS like in any other institution of learning is governed or controlled to a large extent by its curricular under Basic Police Development Learning Programme (BPDLP). This is administered under Safety and Security Sector Education and Training Authority (SASSETA). The police trainees from this training programme obtain a Level Five National Qualifications Framework (NQF Level 5) aligned qualification (Montesh 2007, 14).

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Conceptual framework like all other research related concepts are looked upon differently by different scholars. This study is underpinned Genre theory of learning, Work Integrated Learning theory (WIL), and Needs Analysis framework (NA). The philosophy behind genre theory of learning is primarily based on the idea that texts can be classified into recognizable categories and these categories consist of various distinct aspects (Coulthard & Johnson, 2007). According to Bhatia (2004, 23), genre refers to language use in a conventionalised communicative setting in order to give expression to a specific set of communicative goals of a disciplinary or social institution, which give rise to stable structural forms by imposing constraints on the use of lexicogrammatical as well as discoursal resources. Scholars such as Ćetković (2017, 161) describes police language as a ‘variety of legal language’ and this articulates to the ‘conventionalised communicative setting’ expressed by Bhatia (ibid). Thus, the researchers firmly believe that because of the nature of this investigation this the principles from this theory of learning are very relevant in shaping and guiding this study. As far as WIL is concerned, the issue is that work and educational experiences combined have a potential to produce competent and productive workforce. The premise behind this theory is focused on student and it is said that students who are exposed to a workplace environment as a fragment of their training will absorb much better and gain more from their experience (See, Coll et al. 2009). This theory has been advocated by scholars such as Dewey (1983). CHE (Council on Higher Education) (2011) maintain that there has been interest in nurturing the learning process at a university that is not so much on didactic issues however one which is more situated, participative, and real-world oriented. This theory is relevant in this study because the idea is to determine those factors that hamper adequate workplace English writing competency of SAPS officers. Lastly, NA articulates to the needs of research subjects in a specific environment or context (See, Hutchinson & Waters 1987) and that makes it crucial and relevant to this investigation. This theory is selected since it proved to be imperative in helping to identify the needs of police officers in relation to the factors that hampers the delivery of those needs by the context, the institution, and the workplace environment. In essence, these theories were selected mostly because they articulated to the three spheres of the problem investigated and those are: the problems that are context based; the problems that are institutional based; and the problems that are workplace based. Thus, this theoretical framework was relevant and pivotal in providing a solid grounding to this study.

## METHOD

This study adopted a quanti-qualitative research approach as a research methodology. According to Creswell *et al* (2011), ‘Mixed methods’ is a research approach whereby researchers collect and analyse both quantitative and qualitative data within the same study. In this study, quantitative and qualitative data were mixed and analysed. In the context of this study, this research design was considered suitable for the purpose of determining factors that hamper adequate workplace English writing competency of SAPS officers.

### Population, Sample and Sampling Procedure

In this study, the population was SAPS police constables of all races and all sexes in Gauteng province and in the city of Tshwane. The sample for this study encompassed 203 police officers who underwent 24 months

police basic training. This sample comprised 94.6% African, 4.9% White and 0.5% Colored. All indicated that English was not their mother tongue. The investigation used a non-probability sampling method. Non-probability refers to quota sampling (Buckingham & Saunders 2004, 103). Furthermore, a convenience sampling method was also adopted.

### **Data Collection Instruments**

Two different techniques were selected for data collection purposes, that is, the questionnaire and the in-depth interviews as indicated earlier. Denscombe (1998) holds that to gain multiple perspectives on the phenomenon one can use multiple data collecting methods. The questionnaire had two parts. Part one (i.e Section A) of the questions in the questionnaire contained Likert-type scales, which is described as a self-rating scale (Neuman 1997, 259). Section A was formed of five (5) questions whereas section B was formed of thirteen (13) questions. In addition to the questionnaire, the interviews were also conducted to obtain in-depth information as well as to illuminate the data sought by the questionnaire (Creswell & Creswell 2018). The interview schedule comprised of eighteen (18) questions. The sequence during data collection was that research participants answered the questionnaire first and after two weeks moved on to the interviews and this was done to avoid carry over effect (see, Creswell (2003) Sequential-explanatory design). Furthermore, to address the issues of validity and reliability, these research instruments were tested through a pilot study (See, Silverman 1993; Vockell & Asher 1995).

### **Ethical Considerations**

Ethics is a vital component in any research. It does not matter whether the investigation involves human research participants or not. Thus the researchers applied various ethical considerations in this study and are explained in detail. The researchers sought the ethical clearance before commencement of the investigation from the Higher Degrees Committee in the Department of English Studies at the University of South Africa (this was during the time of this investigation) and the clearance was granted. In addition, the researchers also sought permission to conduct research in the SAPS at the Head Office of SAPS in terms of National Instruction 1/2002 to conduct the research within the SAPS environment by applying for that permission and the permission was granted. The right to privacy was maintained by the researchers by interviewing the research participants individually in a separate and secure place. Furthermore, this was achieved by indicating to the research participants that no names of will be mentioned in the reporting of the results of the study. Furthermore, the data provided was kept safe and private and it was only the researchers who had access to it. In addition, the researchers were also promised that they will be protected from harm. Thus, the researchers ensured that the research subjects were protected from any harm that might occur as a result of them participating in the study by applying the issues mentioned above. In addition to all the above mentioned, an informed consent was also obtained from the research subjects before commencement of the investigation. The above ethical considerations were also discussed in detail with the research participants indicate to them that the study followed approved and accepted ethical standards.

### **Data Analysis**

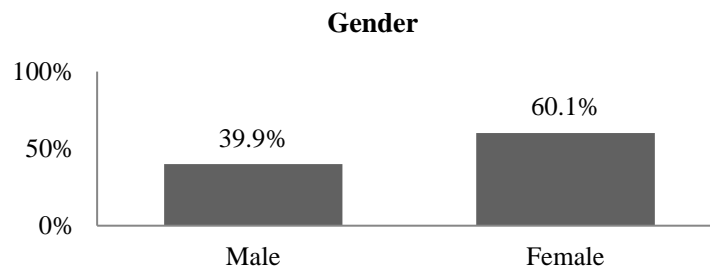
Questionnaire data were analysed using Statistical computer programme called SPSS while qualitative data were analysed making use of Thematic Content Analysis. The tools (data collection instruments in this study) utilized in this investigation are discussed in detail in section 4.2 above. (i.e. the section titled data collection instruments). A compressed findings from these two analyses follows.

## FINDINGS

In this section of the paper, the compressed findings are presented and discussed. This section is divided into section A and B.

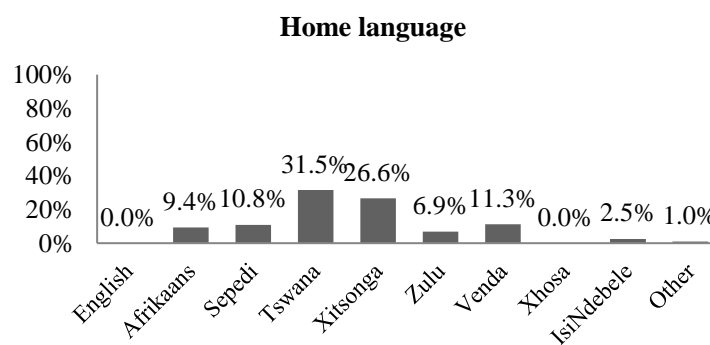
### Section A

This section presents the participants' biographical data which comprises gender, language, grade of learning English, attended school, language of instruction, highest qualification, skills, and employability duration. The data is illustrated as in Figure 1.



**Figure 1.** Gender of the research participants

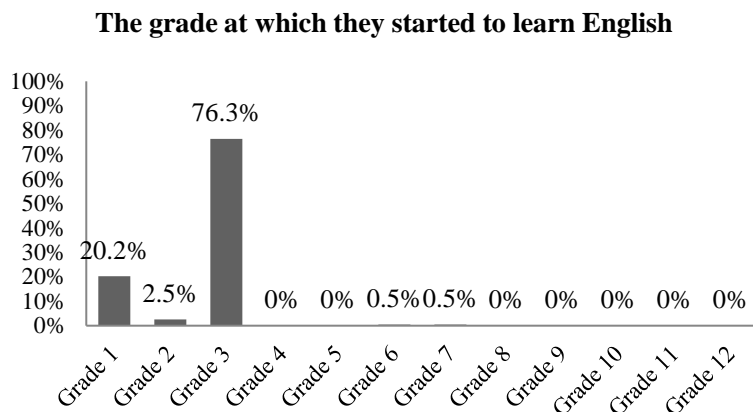
The police officers profile with specific focus on the elements that has the potential to hamper their English writing ability is presented and briefly discussed below. The aspect of the first language of the participants was considered because literature has shown that first language has the potential to aid or impede acquisition of another language including second language (e.g., Krashen 1982; Ellis 1994).



**Figure 2.** The participants' home language

The issue regarding the year the police officers started to learn English was considered because of the supposition that students who begin late to learn second language at school are likely to struggle with that language (e.g. Cenoz & Valencia 1994). After careful analysis the following emerged:

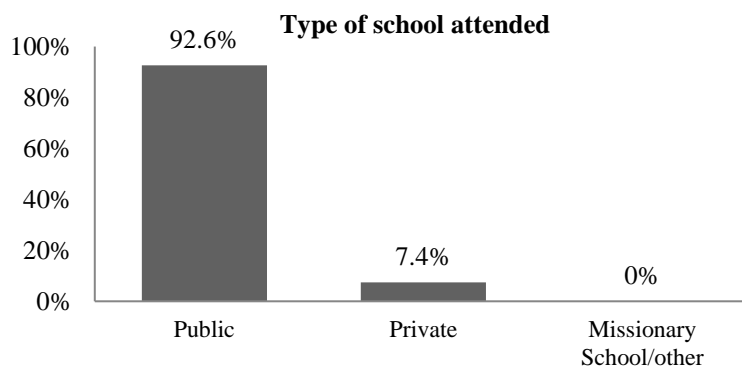
- It was discovered that the majority of the research respondents (76.4%) began to study English in Grade 3
- It was found that 41 (20.2%) of the research respondents mentioned that they began to study English in Grade 1.
- The other key finding which emerged is that five (2.5%) of the research subjects mentioned that they began to learn English in Grade 2.
- Furthermore, only one 0.5% of these research subjects mentioned that they began to study English in Grade 6.
- Lastly, again only one 0.5% of these research subjects mentioned that they began to to learn English in Grade 7. The summary of respondent's indications is indicated in Figure 3.



**Figure 3.** The grade participants started to learn English

The investigators were also interested in finding out the kind of school/s that the research subjects attended and this is because of among other things what Webb et al (2010, 279) allude to. In this investigation, the following emerged:

- Majority of the research participants (92.6% or 188) mentioned that they attended a public school.
- Furthermore, minority of them (7.4% or 15) mentioned that they attended a private school. Please see Figure 4 for a clear understanding.



**Figure 4.** The type of school the research participants attended

The other crucial information that the investigators were interested in pertains to the Medium of Instruction in a school/s. The following findings emerged:

- 81.8% mentioned that the medium of instruction at their secondary school/s they attended was English
- In addition, (15.3% or 31) of the research subjects mentioned that Medium of Instruction they were exposed to were two, namely English and Afrikaans.
- 1.0% or 2 of the research subjects mentioned that the Medium of Instruction during their high school education was Afrikaans.
- Lastly, minority of them (2.0% or 4) mentioned that the Medium of Instruction during their high school education was not English or Afrikaans but other language/s which they did mention by name. The scenario is clearly shown in Figure 5.

The other important variable that the investigators focused on in this investigation was the pass-percentage (with regards to English) that these research subjects obtained at Grade 12 and the findings indicate the following:

- Majority (58.6% or 119) of them obtained a pass percentage of 50-59,
- 16.3% or 33 of them obtained a pass percentage of 40-49

- Again the same number (16.3% or 33) of them obtained a pass percentage of 60-69.
- 4.4% or 9 of them obtained a pass percentage of 70-79.
- Furthermore, 2.5% or 5 of them obtained 80-89 pass percentage
- 1.5% or 3 of them obtained a pass percentage of 30-39
- Lastly, minority (0.5% or 1) of them obtained a pass percentage of 0-29. See Figure 6.

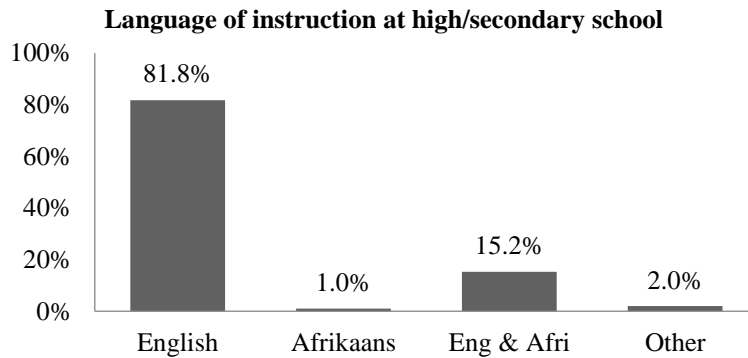


Figure 5. Language of instruction at secondary/high school

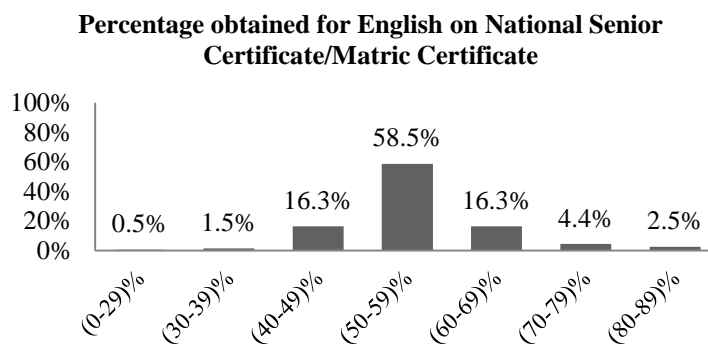


Figure 6. English in the National Senior/Matric certificate

It was crucial for the investigators to find out the qualification/s that the research subjects had or possessed and as far as this variable is concerned the following emerged:

- A staggering majority (56.2% or 114) of them had a Grade 12 certificate
- 17.2% or 35 of them had a Grade 12 certificate and other qualification/s (M+1).
- 21.2% or 43 of them had a national diploma.
- Lastly, a minority (5.4% or 11) of them had a bachelor’s degree from a university. See Figure 7.

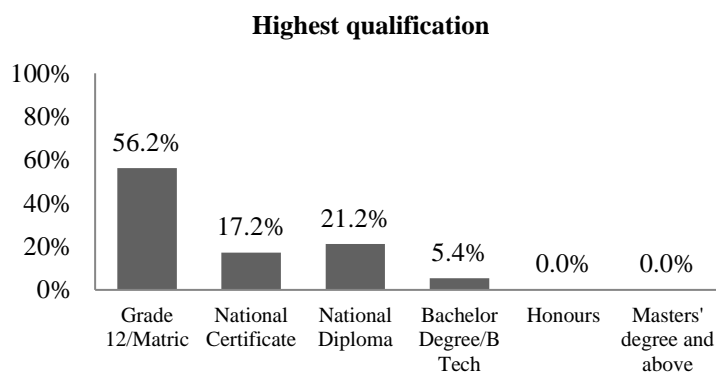
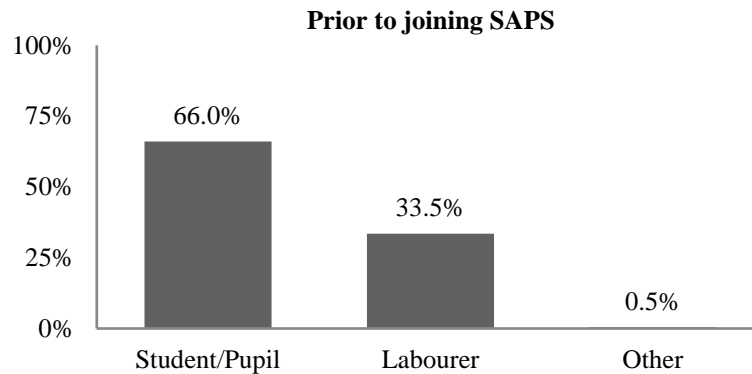


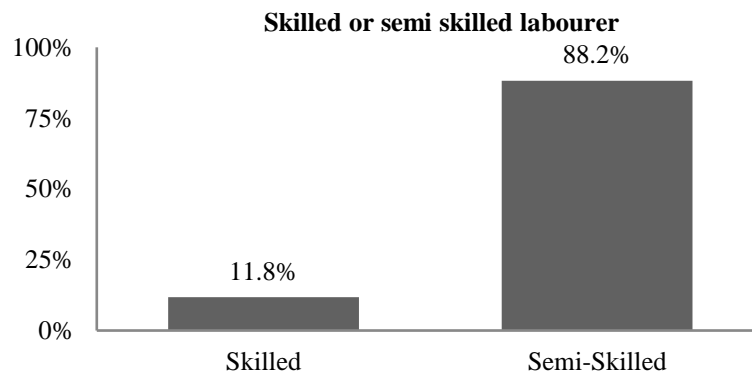
Figure 7. The participants’ qualifications



Participants were also asked about what they were doing before joining SAPS. A majority (66.0%) of the participants indicated that they were students/pupils and only 35 (17.2%) of them indicated that they were laborers before joining SAPS. Those that indicated that they were employed somewhere else, were asked if they were working as skilled or semi-skilled laborers. Minority (11.8%) them indicated that they were skilled laborers and the majority of them 88.2% indicated that they were semi-skilled laborers. See Figure 8 and 9.



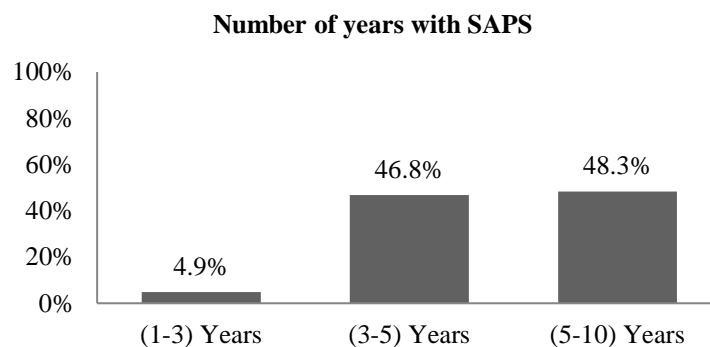
**Figure 8.** What the participants were doing prior to joining SAPS



**Figure 9.** Semi or skilled labourer before joining SAPS

The other crucial findings that came out with regards to the above mentioned variable are the following:

- The study found that majority of them (48.3%) had been employed by SAPS for a period of 5 and 10 years
- 46.8% or 95 of the research subjects had been employed within the SAPS for a period of 3 and 5 years.
- Lastly, minority (4.9% or 10) of them mentioned that they had been employed within SAPS for a period of 1 and 3 years. See The Figure 10.



**Figure 10.** Years in SAPS employment

The data discussed was very important in understanding the investigated phenomenon.

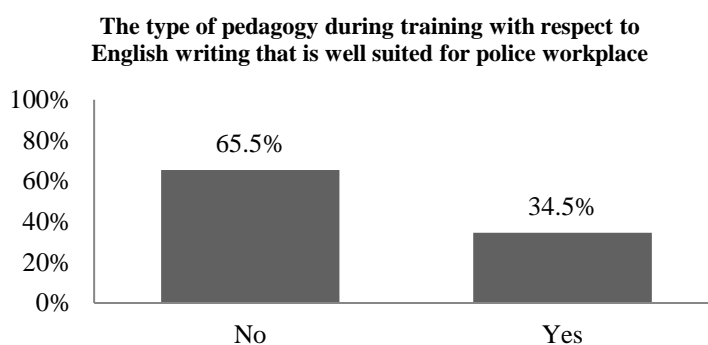
**Section B (Experiences and Perceptions)**

This section presents a compressed account of the main findings from both data sets (i.e. quantitative and qualitative).

*How do the police officers assess the pedagogy they have undergone in the course of their basic training with regard to English-writing?*

Research subjects were requested to present details about the sort of pedagogy they were exposed to. The following results emerged regarding the above variable:

- A majority (65.5% or 133) of them responded in the negative (i.e., they opined that the training was not aiding their English learning).
- Furthermore, a minority (34.5% or 70) of the research participants responded in affirmative (i.e., they opined that the training aided their English learning). The findings are further clarified in Figure 11.



**Figure 11.** Pedagogy in the SAPS training academy with reference to English writing

Furthermore, qualitative data in the form of interviews about the impact of the above variable was asked. The following two responses from the respondents were also noted: (1) *“The training I received is not enough when it comes to English writing.”* In addition to this, another one respondent responded as follows: (2) *“It was not enough cause they don’t teach us how to put the words they just teach us how to write the statement. If I remember very well there was no a subject were specifically for these things.”*

The Table 1 is selected responses from the respondents were noted (NB they are quoted verbatim).

**Table 1.** Answers from the interview respondents

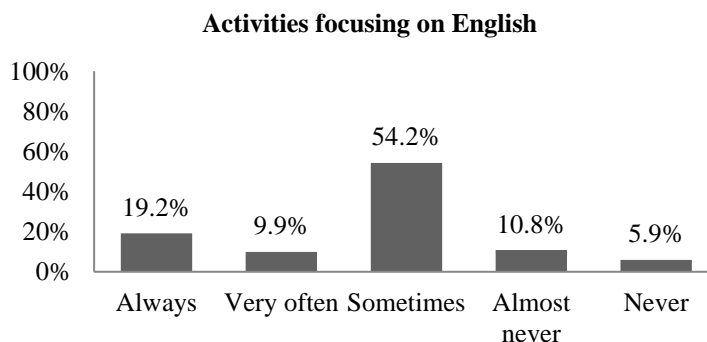
<p><b>Respondent 3</b>  <i>“(Nna) I think the trainers they are not teachers, so why do I expect them to teach English. They are not trained teachers finish”</i></p>
<p><b>Respondent 4</b>  <i>“It was not enough cause they don’t teach us how to put the words they just teach us how to write the statement. If I remember very well there was no a subject were specifically for these things.”</i></p>
<p><b>Respondent 8</b>  <i>“They did not teach us English writing but they did teach us the things we should know when we do things like writing a statement. These trainers are not like lecturers, no they not. Everyone has his or her own work like you.”</i></p>
<p><b>Respondent 10</b>  <i>“No they did not train to be teachers”</i></p>

*How often did the police officers have English writing tasks during their basic training?*

The other very important variable that the investigators were interested in was the frequency of English writing tasks during the research subjects' training. The following emerged with regards to that variable:

- 19.2% or 39 of them answered by choosing the category 'always'.
- 9.9% or 20 of them answered by choosing the category 'very often'
- A majority (54.2% or 110) of them answered by choosing the category 'sometimes'.
- 10.8% of them answered by choosing the category 'Almost never'

Lastly, a minority (5.9% or 12) of them answered by choosing the category 'never'. See Figure 12.



**Figure 12.** Rate of English writing activities

Furthermore, the research participants were asked about the frequency of activities focusing on English and the following responses were noted: (7) *"We were only trained on how to write statements or take statements that is all and not everyday."* In addition to this, another one respondent responded as follows: (11) *"We training physically too much and not too much in the classroom."*

The Table 2 is selected responses from the respondents were noted (NB they are quoted verbatim).

**Table 2.** Answers from the interview respondents

---

**Respondent 3**

*"We did not learn too much English because we did English in Matric"*

**Respondent 4**

*"I think they think we know English and that is why they did not teach too much of English."*

**Respondent 8**

*"They did not teach us English writing but they did teach us the things we should know when we do things like writing a statement. These trainers are not like lecturers, no they not. Everyone has his or her own work like you."*

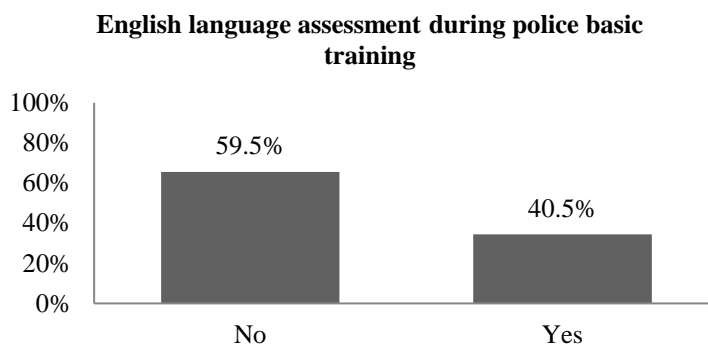
---

*Where the police officers informed of how their English language was going to be assessed?*

Investigators also wanted to find out if the research subjects were made privy to how their English writing skill was going to be evaluated. For this variable, the following emerged:

- A majority of them (59.5% or 120) indicated that they were not informed of how their English language was going to be assessed during their time of training.
- A minority (40.5% or 82) of them mentioned that they were informed.

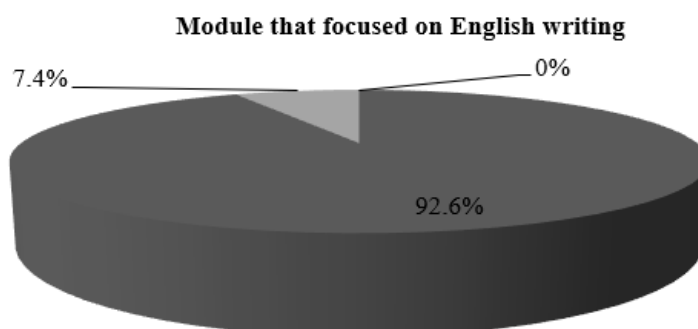
*Did the basic training curriculum that you went through had an English writing course?*



**Figure 13.** Assessment of English language during basic training

It was important for this investigation to also probe the variable about the availability of a course with the SAPS training programme specifically deal with the teaching of English writing that is tailored for police work. The following emerged regarding that variable:

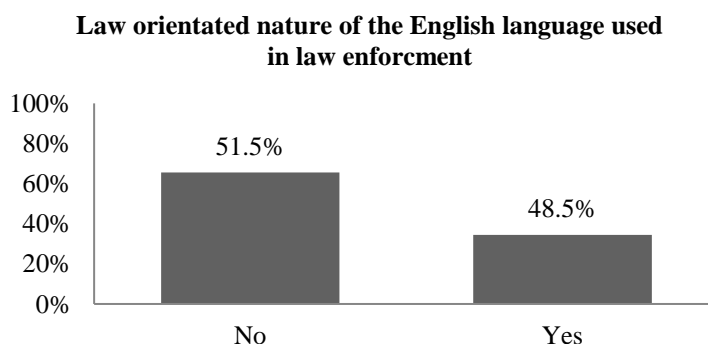
- A staggering majority (92.6% or 188) responded in the negative (i.e. there was no such a course or module).
- Only a handful (7.4% or 15) of them responded in the affirmative (i.e. there was such a course or module).
- 0% of them mentioned that they were not sure about such a course or module. See Figure 14.



**Figure 14.** Module that deals with English writing

The research participants were further asked if they think law orientated nature of the English used in police profession makes it difficult for them to learn English writing more effectively and the following emerged:

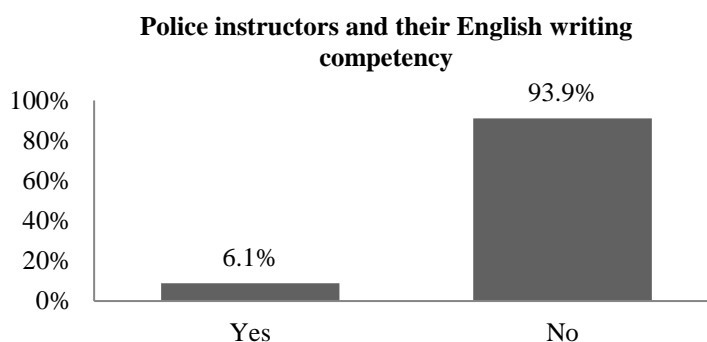
- A majority of them (51.5% or 112) mentioned that they do not think the law orientated type of English makes it difficult for them to write well in English
- Minority of them (48.5% or 97) opined that the law orientated nature of the English language makes it very difficult for them to study English language. See Figure 15.



**Figure 15.** Law orientated language in the police profession

*Do the police officers perceive the police instructors during their basic training to be well suited to teach English writing?*

The subjects were also asked if they think their police instructors had the ability to teach English writing. Majority of them 93.9% opined that they think that their police instructors did not have the knowledge to teach English writing and they even went further to say that some of the police trainees ‘know English better’ than the instructors. It is only a handful (6.1%) of the subjects who indicated that they think that the police instructors have the knowledge to teach English writing. The above assertion is illustrated in Figure 16.



**Figure 16.** Ability of police instructors to teach English writing

Furthermore, the Table 3 responses were also noted.

**Table 3.** Answers from the interview respondents

**Respondent 3**

*“(Nna) I think the trainers they are not teachers, so why do I expect them to teach English. They are not trained teachers finish”*

**Respondent 9**

*“Police trainers are not English teachers but they do help or try and let me just say they try a lot to do the right thing.”*

**Respondent 8**

*“They did not teach us English writing but they did teach us the things we should know when we do things like writing a statement. These trainers are not like lecturers, no they not. Everyone has his or her own work like you.”*

**Respondent 10**

*“No they did not train to be teachers”*

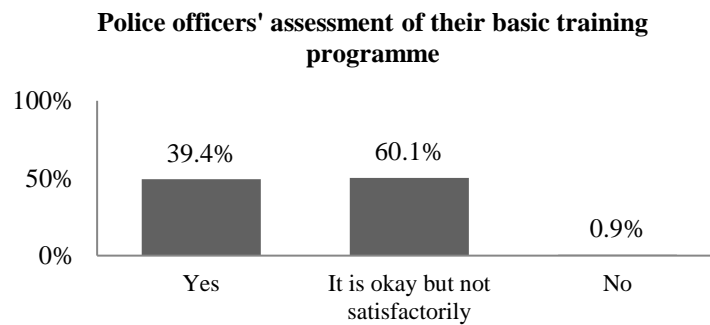
*How do the police officers assess the police basic training they went through in terms of preparing them well for writing in English?*

The research participants were also asked about how they feel about their basic training regarding English writing. Some of them 39.4% opined that they think that basic training at its current form is fine with regards to the teaching of English writing. However, majority of them (60.1%) indicated that even though they feel that the basic training at its current status offer them English writing knowledge, it is not equipped enough to teach English writing satisfactorily. It is only a minority 0.9% who indicated that they think the basic training they went through was not teaching them English writing. This result is clearly shown in Figure 17 below.

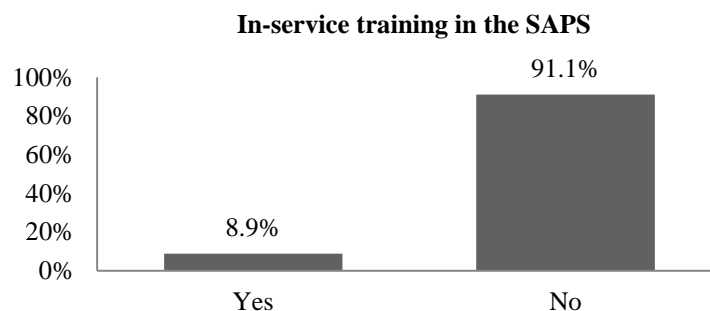
*Have you ever received an in-service training with specific focus on English writing skill?*

The participants were not pleased with the kind of in-service training they got regarding English writing during their time as SAPS employees. In response to the above question, the following emerged:

- A majority of them (91.1%) responded in the negative
- Only a handful (8.9%) of the research subjects responded in the affirmative. The findings are illustrated clearly in Figure 18.



**Figure 17.** Assessment of the basic training



**Figure 18.** In-service training in the SAPS

## DISCUSSION

The study investigated factors hampering adequate English writing competency of police officers. There is a supposition that if students start to learn English too late in their school years the greater the chances that they will struggle. In this study it was found that most of the respondents started to learn English in Grade 3. Therefore, this variable does not apply as a factor that contribute to the in-adequate English writing ability of police officers (because they started to learn English very early according to SA standard). It is also found that the majority of the respondents attended public school.

The above discussed finding is important because the Minister of Basic Education in SA, Ms Angie Motshekga once cited poor English skills as a major contributing factor to 'miserable' 2009 matric results (Davids, 2010) and this correlates with the fact that most of the police officers (134 or 66.0%) in this study came into the police academy straight from school. It is found that fifty-three (18.3%) brought inadequate English writing competence to the academy (p.2). This percentage is significant, therefore supposition that poor English competency emanating from matric or high school indeed hampers adequate English writing competency of police officers. The majority (81.8%) of them had English language instruction at school but this seems not to have helped in improving their English writing competency.

In addition to the above, there are very salient findings that came out and they are discussed below. The other issue that came out and is key is the lack of a course within the SAPS basic training curriculum. This is a very

crucial finding. The hindrance highlighted above articulates to Stevens (2005, 151) cry about the inadequate training provided by the SAPS when he echoed the following words: ‘The chief question then becomes, are the SAPS curricular as contained in their training programmes relevant or not?’

The second key finding relates to pedagogy. With respect to pedagogy, it has been found that a majority (65.5% or 133) research subjects were not happy. Therefore, this finding renders pedagogy in SAPS training academies to be also a hampering factor. This is a problem which occurs in a situation where you find one instructor teaching more than one course even though he is not an expert in the other course (e.g., Rauch 1992). This problem can to a large extent be lessened by adopting the Language and Content Integrated Learning Approach (LCIL) in their training academies.

The other key finding in this study was that the respondents were not made aware of how assessment of their English language was done during their training. 54.2% of the police constables had only minimal experience with writing when they left the academy. Most of the police officers, it appears, arrive with little writing baggage in the SAPS workplace. This finding articulates to the SAPS training curriculum developers as far as re-circulation is concerned. It also underscores the importance of time frame in the SAPS training academy. Police officers come to the police training academy with English writing deficiencies which they have inherited from their pre-academy writing experience, they are expected to address their English writing problem within a very short time.

The above discussed finding concurs with Rauch (1992) who found that that the work of curriculum development is done primarily by members of staff of the Pretoria Police College. He further stated that these members of staff have the closest liaison with SAP Headquarters and Head Office Training Division and they are generally assumed to be the senior partner in their relationships with staff in the other colleges. He further lamented by saying that that a major problem with the curriculum which was existing then was that it had been highly theoretical, with very little practical application of the academic course materials and the also the curriculum is easy and boring (Rauch 1992, p.30).

The other finding is that the respondents emphatically expressed dissatisfaction in relation to English competency of their instructors. The police instructors’ knowledge was, thus, quite limited to teaching English writing. Therefore, lack of expertise regarding English language by the police instructors is also a hampering factor. This finding concurs with the finding by Rauch (1992) who found that in some police training academies, one instructor teaches more than one course. In the same study by Rauch (ibid) it was also found that the instructors have the perception that they are there to train them and not to ‘give students and education’. This perception is a serious hindrance and if SAPS is serious about improving the quality of police recruits, it needs to be corrected.

The other key finding though unexpected was that generally there seems to be a lack of in-service training programs with a specific focus on English writing for law enforcement purposes. This is reflected by a staggering 91.1% of the research respondents who indicated that since they joined SAPS they never had an in-service training that deals with English writing in police work place. 48.3% have three to five years in the SAPS. This is a long time to have not received any form of an in-service training that deals with English writing in the police workplace. This finding also concurs with the findings in the study by Vergie (2006). Vergie (ibid) in his study titled “*die diskrepansie tussen taalbeleid en –praktyk: implikasies van taalhoudings van sapd-konstabels in Gauteng*” found lack of language training in basic police training as well as in-service training.

The other hampering problem found in this study is that of police officers without academic qualifications. Academic study is very important in improving English writing competency. It is found that 56.2% of police officers do not have academic qualifications. This finding confirms the finding of Paterson (2011, 288) who found that part of the reason for the lack of reform is the resistance from police officers to academic study.

The law orientated English language used for law enforcement purpose also contributes to the problem. In this study, it is found that a significant number of the research respondents (48.5%) agree that the law orientated type of English in police profession contributes to their difficulty in English writing. This finding also renders English for law-enforcement purposes to be one of the hampering factors. This finding confirms the assertion that police trainees develop a common language which they express themselves (Alpert and Moore, 1993). The other contributing problem related to this is the one found by Candlin, Bhatia and Jensen (2002) in their study titled 'Developing legal writing materials for English second language learners: problems and perspectives where they found that the currently available legal writing books are generally unsuitable for use in contexts such as EALP (English for Academic Legal Purpose). King in the article "Making the right statement," written by Donald Hiscock (2003), holds that 'expression in (both written and spoken modalities) plays an important role in police work and police officers should be taught how to express evidence in a form that can withstand legal cross examination'.

## CONCLUSION

This study set out to investigate and identify factors hampering adequate workplace English writing of police officers in the SAPS. It further examined the interface of these factors. It was founded based on the plethora of literature which has shown that police officers in the world lack adequate workplace English writing competence (e.g., Ndenze 2012; Miller and Pomerence 1989; Payam 2006; Alhuqbani 2014; Aulizio & Sheehan 1992; Sezer 2004; K-Romya 2006; Pettaway 1994). Furthermore, the study found that there is an array of intertwined and interrelated factors that combine to hamper the adequate English writing competence of police offices in the SAPS. These factors are located in three areas namely, institutional based, workplace based and context based. Therefore, it is imperative that SAPS as a department provide necessary intervention measure to help lessen the perpetuation of the problem investigated. This study could be used as base to further inquiries regarding factors that hamper adequate writing in law enforcement environments. Furthermore, this study could serve as a 'reflective inquiry' (see Keating, Robinson & Clemson 1996) into the factors that hamper adequate English writing competency of police officers. English writing deficiency in SAPS will perpetuate.

### Limitations of the Study

The following key limitations to this study are discussed below. This study is limited with regard to the focus of the topic, the sample, the geographical area, the research instruments and data gathering methods. The sample in this study was limited to only South African police constables who were based in the three purposefully selected police clusters in Gauteng province, South Africa. The only police constables who participated in this study were appointed in SAPS in terms of the South African Police Service Act of 1995. Police officers such as metro police officers and police reservists did not form part of this study. Only 203 police constables participated in this study. This study is limited in this sense. Furthermore, this is a case study regarding the police constables in a selected geographical region and it is limited in that sense. In conclusion, despite these limitations, the researcher trusts that findings in this study are reliable and generalizable to other police constables with similar background in other police clusters in South Africa. It is hoped that these limiting factors can be circumvented or lessened so that the phenomenon investigated can be better understood from different expanded variables.



## REFERENCES

- Abo Mosallem, E. (1984). English for police officers in Egypt. *The ESP Journal*, 3(2), 171-181.
- Adonis, B. (2019) *Workplace literacy practices of clerks in the South African Police Services (SAPS)* [Unpublished master's thesis]. University of Cape Town.
- Alhuqbani, M. (2014). An investigation of the English language needs, motivations, and attitudes of Saudi police cadets. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics & English Literature*, 3(2), 201-213. <http://dx.doi.org/10.7575/aiac.ijale1.v.3n.2p.201>
- Alpert, G.P., & Moore, M.H. (1993). Measuring police performance in the new paradigm of community policing. In G. P. Alpert, & A. R. Piquero (Eds.), *Community policing: Contemporary readings* (pp. 215-232). Prospect Heights: Waveland Press, Inc.
- Alqurashi, F. (2011). Teaching English for police purposes in Saudi Arabia: An exploratory study. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, 2(4), 844-849. <https://doi.org/10.4304/jltr.2.4.844-849>
- Aulizio, M. & Sheehan, K. (1992). Writing reports in an age of lawsuits. *Law and Order*, 40(3), 112-114.
- Basturkmen, H. (2010). English for the Police. In H. Basturkmen (Ed), *Developing courses in English for specific purposes* (pp. 71-87). London: Palgrave Macmillan. [https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230290518\\_5](https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230290518_5)
- Bhatia, V. (2004). *Worlds of written discourse. A genre-based view*. New York: Continuum.
- Bhatia, V.K., & Nodoushan, M.A.S. (2015). Genre analysis: The state of the art. *International Journal of Language Studies*, 9(2), 121-130.
- Blumberg, D.M., Schlosser, M.D., Papazoglou, K.P. Creighton, S., & Kaye, C.C. (2019). New directions in police academy training: A call to action. *International Journal of Environment. Research and Public Health*, 16(24), 1-14.
- Brandt, D. (2005). Writing for a living: Literacy and the knowledge economy. *Journal of Written Communication*, 22(2), 166-197. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0741088305275218>
- Buckingham, A., & Saunders, P. (2004). *The survey methods workbook*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Buntman, F., & Snyman, R. (2003). Policing in a diverse and multicultural society: The South African case. *The Journal of Police & Society*, 7, 199-231.
- Calteaux, K. (2003). *Synopsis of available language-related research data on SAPS*. South African Police Services. [http://www.saps.gov.za/saps\\_profile/components/language\\_management/downloads/synopsys\\_lang\\_research121103.pdf](http://www.saps.gov.za/saps_profile/components/language_management/downloads/synopsys_lang_research121103.pdf)
- Candlin, C. N, Bhatia, V. K, & Jensen, C, H. (2002) Developing legal writing materials for English second language learners: Problems and perspectives. *English for Specific Purposes*, 21(4), 299-320. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0889-4906\(01\)00029-1](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0889-4906(01)00029-1)
- Cenoz, J., & Valencia, J. (1994). Additive trilingualism: Evidence from the Basque country. *Applied Psycholinguistics*, 15(1), 195-207.
- Ćetković, S. (2017). The language of police reports: A quest for precision or a bureaucratic exercise of language degradation. *Círculo de Lingüística Aplicada a la Comunicación*, 71, 159-176. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5209/CLAC.57308>
- Chinwe, U.V. (2015). The English language of the Nigeria Police. *Journal of Education and Practice*, 6(22), 1-3
- Chomsky, N. (1957). *Syntactic structures*. The Hague, Mouton and Company.
- Cochrane, J. (2004). *Between you and I: A little book of bad English*. Cambridge: Icon Books.
- Coll, R., Eames, C., Paku, L., Lay, M., Ayling, D., Hodges, D., Ram, S., Bhat, R., Fleming, J., Ferkins, L., Wiersma, C. & Martin, A.J. (2009). *An exploration of the pedagogies employed to integrate knowledge in work-integrated learning in New Zealand higher education institutions*. Wellington, New Zealand: Ministry of Education.
- Coulthard, M., & Johnson, A. (2007). *An introduction to forensic linguistics: Language in evidence*. London: Routledge.
- Council on Higher Education. (2011). *Work-integrated learning: Good practice guide*. Pretoria: Council on Higher Education.
- Creswell, J.W. (2003). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods approaches* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- Creswell J.W., & Clark, V.L.P. (2011). *Designing and conducting mixed methods research*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- Creswell, J., & Creswell, J. (2018). *Research design: A qualitative, quantitative & mixed method approaches* (5th ed.). Thousand Oaks: Sage Publicatios.
- Davids, B. (2010). The state of education in South Africa. *The New Negotiator*, 3(3), 1-7.
- Davis, J. R., & Davis, A. B. (1998). *Effective training strategies: A comprehensive guide to maximizing learning in organizations*. San Fransisco: Berrett-Koehler.

- Denscombe, M. (1998). *The good research guide: For small-scale social research projects*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Dewey, J. (1938). *Experience and education*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Hall, P. (2008). Policespeak. In J. Gibbons and M. T. Turell (Eds), *Dimensions of Forensic Linguistics* (pp. 67-94). Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Hiscock, D. (2003, August 5). Making the right statement. *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2003/aug/05/furthereducation.uk>
- Hutchinson, T., & Waters, A. (1987). *English for specific purposes: A learning-centered approach*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Keating, C., Robinson, T., & Clemson, B. (1996). Reflective inquiry: a method for organizational learning. *The Learning Organization*, 3(1), 35-43.
- Kekana, T., & Mogoboya, M. (2021). Workplace English writing needs of police constables in South Africa: Implications to teaching and learning in police training academies in Gauteng province. *Journal of African Education*, 2(1), 83-104. <https://doi.org/10.31920/2633-2930/2021/v2n1a4>
- Kekana, T. J. (2015). *Workplace English writing needs: a case study of perceptions and experiences of police constables at selected police clusters in the Gauteng Province, South Africa* [Doctoral dissertation, University of South Africa]. University of South Africa Institutional Repository. <https://uir.unisa.ac.za/handle/10500/19685>
- Krashen, S. (1982). Theory versus practice in language training. In R. W. Blair (Ed.), *Innovative approaches to language teaching*. (pp. 15-30) Rowley, MA: Newbury House Publishers.
- K-Romya, P. (2006). Deficiency of communication in English as major hindrance for tourist police in Thailand. Published by EDU-COM 2006 EDU-COM *International Conference. Engagement and Empowerment: New Opportunities for Growth in Higher Education*, Edith Cowan University, Perth.
- Mahaye, F. C. (2010). *Factors that promote or hinder success on new-entry constables during their first six months within South African Police Services* [Master's thesis, University of Zululand]. University of Zululand Repository. <https://hdl.handle.net/10530/601>
- Miller, M., & Pomerence, P. (1989). Police reports must be reader based. *Law and Order*, 37(9), 66-69.
- Montesh, M. (2007). *A critical analysis of crime investigative system within the South African criminal justice system: A comparative study* [Doctoral dissertation, University of South Africa]. University of South Africa Institutional Repository. <http://hdl.handle.net/10500/1272>
- National Planning Commission (2011). *National development plan (NDP) vision 2030*. The Presidency. Republic of South Africa. [https://www.nationalplanningcommission.org.za/National\\_Development\\_Plan](https://www.nationalplanningcommission.org.za/National_Development_Plan)
- Ndenze, B. (2012, September 6). Cops battle to take down statements. *IOL News*. <http://www.iol.co.za/news/crime-courts/cops-battle-to-take-down-statements-1.1377111>
- Neuman, W. L. (1997). *Social research methods: Qualitative and quantitative approaches* (3rd ed.). Boston: Allyn & Bacon.
- Ortu, C. (2019). Saps-Speak: The language of the South African police in the post-apartheid era. *International Journal of Language Studies*, 13(4), 125-140.
- Paterson, C. (2011). Adding value? A review of the international literature on the role of higher education in police training and education. *Police Practice and Research: An International Journal*, 12(4), 286-297
- Payam, M. (2006). Opinions of preparatory students, graduates and lectures at police college on their foreign language needs. *Journal of Arts and Sciences Say*, 6(1), 157-179.
- Pettaway, M. (1994). *The development of the new orleans police department written communication test* [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. Tulane University.
- Qaddomi, H. A. (2013). English for specific purposes in Palestinian context: Determining EFL cadets' needs at Al Istiqlal University. *Journal of Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, 3(7), 1110-1122.
- Rauch, J. (1992). *South Africa's police basic training: a preliminary assessment*. Unpublished paper. Centre for the study of Violence and Reconciliation.
- Richards, J. (2001). *Curriculum development in language teaching*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- SAPA. (2012). SA youth losing faith in police. Retrieved from [http://www.witness.co.za/index.php?showcontent&global%5B\\_id%5D=82558](http://www.witness.co.za/index.php?showcontent&global%5B_id%5D=82558) Accessed on the 29th July 2012.

- Sezer, S. (2004). *An investigation of the occupational English language needs of Turkish police officers* [Unpublished master's thesis]. Bilkent University.
- Silverman, D. (1993). *Interpreting qualitative data: Methods for analysing talk, text and interaction*. London: Sage.
- Stevens, G. P. (2005). *Training and selection of police officers: Toward a community police model* [Doctoral dissertation, University of South Africa]. University of South Africa Institutional Repository. <http://hdl.handle.net/10500/1757>
- Thepa, M. (2013, April 28). A-G flunks SA's public servants. *Sunday World*. <http://www.sundayworld.co.za/news/2013/04/28/a-g-flunks-sa-s-public-servants>
- Tienson, J. (1983). Linguistic competence. *Transactions of the Nebraska Academy of Sciences and Affiliated Societies*. 259(11), 99-104. <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/tnas/259>
- Vergie, M.P. (2006). *Die diskrepansie tussen taalbeleid en –praktyk: implikasies van taalhoudings van SAPD-konstabels in Gauteng [The discrepancy between language policy and practice: implications of language attitudes of SAPS constables in Gauteng]* [Doctoral thesis, University of Johannesburg]. The University of Johannesburg Institutional Repository. <https://hdl.handle.net/10210/755>
- Vockell, E.L., & Asher, J.W. (1995). *Educational research*. (2nd Ed.). London: Prentice Hall.
- Webb, V., Lafon, M., & Pare, P. (2010). Bantu languages in education in South Africa – Ongekho akekho! The absentee owner. *Language Learning Journal*, 37(3), 273-292.
- Williams, D. (2012, Septembr 6). 4,900 detectives not trained for job. *Sowetan Live*. <http://www.sowetanlive.co.za/news/2012/09/06/4900-detectives-not-trained-for-job>
- Yule, G. (2008). *The study of language*. London: Cambridge University Press.