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The influence of learner-related factors on the academic performance of Grade 12 English (L2) Learners in the Oshikoto Region of Namibia

Abstract

The aim of this study was to examine learner related factors influencing the academic performance of Grade 12 learners in English Language (L 2) in Oshikoto region, Namibia. The English language is widely used in secondary/high schools in Africa given its global standing among languages in the world. However, since it is a second language, many learners face numerous challenges. Using purposive sampling, a sample of 52 participants was selected for the study and a mixed method approach was adopted in the collection of primary data. The data was analysed using contingency tables and supplemented with content analysis. Findings indicate that most Grade 12 learners lack English Language proficiency due to lack of English Language exposure, especially learners from poor socio-economic backgrounds. Findings further reveal that most English Language (L 2) learners in the selected schools were

subjected to poverty, coupled with large class sizes and lack of teaching aides. In addition, the findings show that the majority of respondents (75 %) agreed that Grade 12 learners found it difficult to understand the examination questions in English given that English is a second language to them. The differences in English Language (L 2) learners' performance lie in the differences in life experience of the learners concerned. Thus, socio-economic disparities influence children's English Language (L 2) learning outcomes. Amongst other recommendations is that learners should be exposed to debates and drama that target enhancement of English Language in the classroom.

Keywords: Academic performance, Exposure, Learner related factors, Socio-economic background, Language proficiency.

Introduction

The use of the English language at Secondary/high schools in Africa today is indispensable given its wide spread use globally (Rasheed, Zeeshan & Zaidi, 2017). Despite the growing need, learners encounter many challenges in learning the language since to many the English Language is a second language (L 2). Rasheed et al. (2017) claim that the English Language challenges faced by learners stem from their linguistic diversity and the fear to make mistakes while using the language. It should be worth knowing that there are different factors preventing learners from excelling in learning the English Language at schools, some of which include home-based, teacher-based and learner-based factors (Bascia, 2014).

The Government of Namibia has taken bold steps by investing more on education through the provision of funding in schools to improve learners' proficiency in the use of English. In Namibia, the Government annually allocates the largest portion of the national budget to education (MoE, 2015). This shows that the Ministry of Education (2016) made efforts in the provision of teaching and learning materials to improve the quality of education at secondary level. Despite such huge capital investments, there are concerns that learning outcomes have not improved as large numbers of the Namibian learners failed Grade 12 examinations and could not get admission into university. Consequently, this has led to a huge number of students dropping out of schools and ending up roaming the streets (MoE, 2010; MoE, 2011). Statistics show poor academic performance of Grade 12 learners (MoE, 2015) with below fifty percent in English Language (L 2). In 2015, at the national level, only 29.8 % qualified for entrance to University, while close to 30 % were ungraded in the English Language (L 2) (MoE, 2016). It is noted that with the emergence of a 'knowledge economy', there is little room for unskilled labour (Sargeant & Cowin, 2011). The above failure rate shows that poor academic performance, especially of Grade 12 learners of English Language (L 2), poses a challenge to the development of any country, especially developing countries such as Namibia (NPC, 2013; UNICEF, 2014; Government of the Republic of Namibia, 2015). The low academic achievement requires focused interventions to drastically improve academic performance (MoE, 2016; Millin, 2015), as significant bottlenecks in terms of learning outcomes are still evident in secondary education (UNICEF, 2014; MoE, 2015).

The poor academic performance in English Language (L 2) by Grade 12 learners in Namibian secondary schools has been a major concern to stakeholders in education over the past five years (MoE, 2015). The Ministry of Education required secondary schools to develop and implement an action plan in which all-educational regions performed better in the NSSCO and NSSCH examinations (MoE, 2010). Despite this arrangement, no significant improvement was made in English Language (L 2) and in general secondary education attainment level, as the total number of Grade 12 graduates who qualified for entry into University remained below 30 % nationally in the 2015 academic year (MoE, 2016). It is noted that students with low proficiency and no intrinsic motivation in English find it difficult to pass other subjects, which keeps

the students at a disadvantage (Fakeye, 2014). It should be remarked that there are a combination of factors that influence academic performance and vary from one academic environment to another, from one group of learners to the next, and indeed from one cultural setting to another (Mlambo, 2011). These include teacher-related, home-rated, school-based and learner-related factors (Bascia, 2014). While it is understood that all school subjects are of paramount importance to the socio-economic development of any society, it was not the intention of the researchers to identify and understand factors that influence the academic performance of all school subjects. The researchers focused on English Language (L 2), which is both a subject and the medium of instruction, as well as a core and pre-requisite subject for admission to institutions of higher learning (Urban Trust of Namibia, 2011). In all public schools in Namibia, English is a medium of instruction and is offered as a compulsory subject in compliance with Article 3 of the Namibian Constitution, which stipulates that the official language in Namibian schools shall be English. This means examinations are taken in English. Therefore, this study sought to examine only learner related factors that influence academic performance in English language (L2) in the Oshikoto region of Namibia. The main research question that guided this study is: What learner related factors influence academic performance in English Language (L 2) by Grade 12 Learners in Oshikoto region of Namibia? The overview of the literature review is the next section below, followed by the research methodology. The presentation of findings and discussion come next and is followed by the conclusions and recommendations.

Overview of literature review

It is known that there are different factors that influence the academic performance of learners in English Language (L2), including environment-related, home-based and teacher-related factors. Therefore, the review of literature is limited to these factors, and these are discussed in the sections below.

Environmental factors

The environment either works for or against us as we conduct our lives (Hitchcock & Hughes, 2013). According to Orlu (2013), the school environment includes school location, school facilities and school climate that have an impact on the learning outcomes of learners. Nampala (2013) argues that if learners experience the English Language (L 2) classroom as a caring and supportive place, where there is a sense of belonging, ownership and where everybody is valued and respected, learners tend to participate more fully in the learning process. Similarly, Ani (2017) and Misbah, Mohamad and Ya'acob (2017) point out that academic achievement of learners are not only influenced by the availability of the necessary teaching aids and resources, but also by the degree to which they are engaged as actors in the education process and their willingness to learn.

Juma (2011) links academic performance in examinations to a state of teaching and learning resources in schools. He notes just like Olanipekun, Atteh, Zaku and Sarki (2014) that students from poor backgrounds perform poorly in the examinations, because the poor are often in areas where schools are seriously deprived of vital facilities. Biama (2014) observes that the use of textbooks raises academic standards and increases efficiency of a school system. Similarly, Mwangi (2013) established that schools with sufficient physical facilities and instructional materials perform better than those not well equipped. Mwangi (2013) further concludes that lack of physical resources is strongly correlated with learners' poor academic achievement. It is generally believed that quality learning outcomes cannot be achieved if the resources and facilities are not available or are not in sufficient quantity and of good quality (Farooq et al., 2011; Mushtaq & Khan, 2012). However, it is important to note that schools with abundant resources may not always utilize them efficiently in raising the learners' levels of performance, while those with limited resources would efficiently utilize whatever they have to raise the learners' levels of performance (Mwangi, 2013; El-Omari, 2016).

Motanya (2011) observes that the poor learning environment in developing countries has been singled out as one of the major factors that lead to poor academic performance of learners in English Language (L 2). This is due to increased enrolment without further expansion of facilities, which leads to over-stretching of resources, which in turn affects the effectiveness of the teaching and learning process; resulting in poor academic performance of students in English Language (L 2) (Motanya, 2011). Uwezo (2011) indicates that the shortage of teachers has a strong negative influence on academic achievement of learners in school.

Home-based factors

Home-based factors refer to many aspects, such as parental involvement, family socio-economic issues, family size, parents' level of education, qualifications of parents, home chores, religious background, values, interests and parents' expectations for their children (Bolu-Steve & Sanni, 2013; Musa, Nwachukwu, & Ali, 2016).). Some studies (e.g. Mwaura, 2014) have established how learners coming from diverse home environments are affected differently by such factors. Studies (e.g. Mwaura, 2014; Wanyama, 2015) have established that a good environment should be provided at home to enable learners to learn in school. Learners' success at school is closely related or linked to their home backgrounds (Mushtaq & Khan, 2012). Factors linked to the level of education of parents, family income and marital status are determinants of the academic performance and aspirations of learners in school (Mushtaq & Khan, 2012). It is generally argued that family socio-economic issues play a significant role in the education of the child either positively or negatively (Farooq et al., 2011; Mushtaq & Khan, 2012). Therefore, the higher the status of a family's socio-economic status, the more likely it is to motivate children to learn and perform better.

Learners whose parents make resources available at home such as books, and electronic resources such as television, computers, dictionaries, study rooms or tables perform better in English Language (L 2) compared to their counterparts from poor families (Smith, 2011). Komba and Bosco (2015) describe socio-economic status as a critical issue in many African communities where illiteracy and poverty levels are high, which limits parental involvement in their children's school work. In some cases, the academic performance of learners can also be attributed to their family health status. Many African communities are hard hit by the HIV / AIDS pandemic, which has a negative impact on the education of most of the affected learners (Komba & Bosco, 2015).

Teacher-related factors

Teachers are essential players in promoting quality education in schools because they are catalysts of change (Onyara, 2013). Teachers at all levels of the education system should have access to training and continuing professional development to enable them to participate locally and internationally in decisions affecting their teaching environments (Jepketer, Kombo, & Kyalo, 2015; Ewetan, & Ewetan, 2015). The quality of teachers in terms of qualifications, commitment, dedication, motivation and hard work determines largely the quality of education and academic performance of learners (Mwangi, 2013; Nampala, 2013; Wanyama, 2013). Some scholars (e.g. Dimmock, 2012; Nkandi, 2015) have reported that teacher training and qualifications, motivation, attitudes and age, have direct impact on the academic performance of learners. In Kenya, Musau (2004) examined how teacher related-factors influenced learners' performance in the Central Division of Machakos District of Kenya, and the research findings revealed that teachers' poor academic and professional qualifications contributed to poor academic performance of Grade 12 students in the division.

It is argued that learners' academic performance in English Language (L 2) depends on the teachers' knowledge and the effective application of pedagogy in the English Language (L 2) classroom (Nampala, 2013). Thus, for learners to perform well in English Language (L 2), the education system needs well trained, competent, knowledgeable, highly motivated, committed, and well behaved English teachers who know how to explain the subject matter to learners and how to vary the teaching approaches in which they teach to suit their English Language (L 2) classes (Nkandi, 2015). Generally, it is observed that a trained teacher has necessary pedagogical skills which promote learners' understanding, thereby promoting academic performance of a learner. Thus, quality teaching and learning of English Language (L 2) are directly linked to the quality of instructions delivered by English Language (L 2) teachers in the classrooms (Nampala, 2013; Nkandi, 2013; Onyara, 2013).

Learner-related factors

Learner-related factors refer to, amongst others, learners' attitude, lack of exposure to the English Language, family background, study habits, peer influence, and attendance of school and co-curricular activities (Fakude, 2012). Limited exposure to the English Language is detrimental to learners' academic performance. For that reason learners cannot produce sentences that are complex (Nkandi, 2015). They have language barriers; for example they do not pronounce English words clearly and they avoid the construction of complex sentences (Nkandi, 2015). As a result of language barriers, English Language (L 2) learners suffer from limited understanding of complex conversations in the English Language (L 2) classroom.

Nyamubi (2016) observes that a learner's ability and determination to achieve his or her academic targets influences their academic performance. Fakude (2012) concurs with Smith (2011) that lack of commitment, learners' independence in schools and peer influence has a strong negative influence on learners' academic performance in schools. In secondary schools, learners are far from the supervision of their parents, and at the same time are at the age of establishing social interaction and sexual relationships. Consequently, they tend to lose their aims of achieving good academic results (Fakude, 2012). In Kenya, Mwangi (2013) found that the major problem in learner achievement was the learners' attitude towards Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education. Similarly, Wanyama (2013) maintains that the major factor affecting learners' performance is the learner's attitude.

The literature review shows that most studies conducted have focused on the interaction of family (home) related factors, teacher related and school related factors. This shows that there is a dearth of literature on learner related factors. Therefore, this paper delves more into this area in order to understand possible learner related factors that contribute to learners' poor academic performance in English Language (L 2). The study also sought to suggest ways to improve learner performance in English Language.

Research methodology

Research paradigm and approach

The study used pragmatist paradigm because it allows the use of the mixed methods approach, which employs data collection strategies that involve collecting data in a concurrent or sequential manner using methods that are drawn from both quantitative and qualitative approaches to best address the research question as opined by Flick (2018). Pragmatists believe that reality is constantly re-negotiated, debated and interpreted to solve the problem under investigation (Creswell, 2015).

The study adopted a mixed methods approach in order to better understand the research problem. Given the nature of the research problem, which is poor academic performance of Grade 12 learners in English Language (L2), the mixed methods approach was deemed appropriate for the study. This approach to research is used when this integration provides a better understanding of the research problem unlike just a single method (Creswell, 2015). The mixed methods approach includes both qualitative and quantitative features in the design, data collection, and analysis (Mertens, 2015). Its significance is that the use of quantitative and qualitative approaches in combination provides answers to critical research questions of a qualitative and quantitative nature. This enabled the researchers to get answers to the research question and to gain understanding on the phenomenon of interest, which is learner related factors affecting these learners in Oshikoto Region of Namibia. Collecting numerical and non-numerical data was more appropriate to explain these learner related factors.

Research design

A research design is defined as a strategic plan or a logical arrangement undertaken in research that leads the research activity to its sound conclusion (Kumar, 2011). Similarly, Creswell and Creswell (2017) note that a research design is an overall strategy that is undertaken by the researcher to integrate different components of the study in a coherent and logical manner to effectively address the research questions. Simply put, a research design is the plan (blueprint), an overall structure for the procedures the researcher follows, that is the data collection instruments, collection and analysis of data. The researchers used the concurrent triangulation design to seek an understanding of factors influencing Grade 12 learners' academic performance in English Language (L 2) through triangulating data from multiple methods. The triangulation design, sometimes referred to as the convergent design, is described as a design that involves the collection of different but complementary data on the same phenomena (Edmonds & Kennedy, 2013). Thus, triangulation design is used for the converging and subsequent interpretation of quantitative and qualitative data. This provided a better understanding of the learner related factors that influenced the academic performance of these learners in English Language (L 2).

Sample and sampling procedure

The total of senior secondary schools in the Oshikoto Region is 15, and four senior secondary schools were purposively selected based on their pass rates in English Language examinations organised by the Department of Education of Namibia. A sample of 52 respondents was selected for the study, made up of all the 4 principals of the selected schools, eight Grade 12 English Language (L 2) teachers (two from each school), eight parents (two from each school), and 32 learners (8 from each selected school). The researchers used simple random sampling in the selection of the learners and teachers while the reputational approach was used in the selection

of parents. Therefore, according to Taylor and Bogdan (2015), the researchers' own purpose determines which settings and groups were most interesting and to yield the most insights into the learner related factors that influence academic performance of these learners.

Methods of data collection and analysis

The researchers adopted a survey method of data collection through the use of a semi-structured questionnaire, semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions as other primary methods of data collection. Questionnaires were distributed to principals and Grade 12 English Language (L 2) teachers. The first two parts (Part A and B) of the questionnaire sought demographic information of age, gender and working experience. Parts C and D contained questions on learner-related factors that influenced academic performance of Grade 12 learners in English Language (L 2). The English Language (L 2) Grade 12 teachers and principals were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed (SA=Strongly Agree, A=Agree, NS=Not sure, D=Disagree, SD=Strongly Disagree) with each given statement on the factors that potentially influenced Grade 12 learners' academic performance in English Language and to explain each of their choices.

The second method of data collection was in-depth semi-structured interviews. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews with parents of Grade 12 learners doing English Language (n=8) as they did not take part in the focus group discussions (FGDs) and questionnaire. This reflects that each of the selected secondary schools was represented by parents (n=2). The interview schedule helped the researchers to get required information on the learner related factors and to understand how these positively or negatively influenced the academic performance of these learners. Finally, four focus group discussions were organised, one consisting of eight learners of each selected school through which learners' attitudes, feelings, beliefs, experiences and reactions were gauged. The advantage of focus group discussions is that they elicit a multiplicity of views and emotional processes within a group context as aptly described by Flick (2017) and Hitchcock and Hughes (2013).

Quantitative data, which was obtained from closed questionnaire items, was analysed using frequency tables and reported mainly in percentages. Qualitative data from open-ended questionnaire items, interviews and focus group discussions were analysed and used mainly to supplement the questionnaire data; to either buttress or refute observations made through the closed questionnaire items. To distinguish the four focus group discussions in the findings, these were coded FGL1 - FGL4, which stood for Focus Group Learners Number one to four.

Validity and reliability

The validity was determined by the extent to which the instruments covered the research aim. To ascertain content validity of the research instrument, the researchers consulted experts in the Faculty of Education at University X where these academics are based. The inter-rate method was used to establish the validity and reliability of the questionnaire. This involved giving the questionnaire to experts (professors) within the faculty of education to check its suitability (validity). The questionnaire was given to six experts who all agreed that the questionnaire was suitable. The same experts were also asked to rate the questionnaire out of 10. These ratings were correlated to see the degree of agreement (reliability). A co-efficient of 0.61 was obtained, indicating that, to a high degree, the six experts agreed that the questionnaire was reliable. After that, the questionnaire was test-run with a group of four English Language teachers to see if it worked as intended. After minor modifications, the questionnaire was adopted for use with the main study sample.

Data credibility and trustworthiness

Trustworthiness of qualitative data can be assured by the consistency, stability and repeatability of the informants' accounts as well as the investigators' ability to collect and record information accurately (Fakude, 2012). The credibility and trustworthiness of the qualitative data were ensured through triangulation of questionnaire, interview and focus group instruments. Data triangulation entailed the comparison of qualitative data received from structured interviews and focus group discussions with quantitative data from the questionnaires. The participants who provided the data reviewed the data record, interpretations, and reports of the researchers and they agreed and approved that their perspectives had been adequately captured and that the conclusions reached in the paper were credible. The researchers did constant consultation with respondents to understand the phenomenon under investigation better in order to produce results that were more credible. Through a two week prolonged engagement, the researchers built trust among the respondents. Respondents felt comfortable and, as such, disclosed information freely, which enriched the credibility of the study.

Ethical considerations

To meet the required ethical obligations, the researchers strictly complied with the ethical considerations presented here. These considerations involved getting permission to access the research site, obtaining informed consent from participants, ensuring voluntary participation, protecting participants from any kind of harm and ensuring anonymity and confidentiality of participants' personal information.

Findings and discussion

The findings of the study are presented and discussed simultaneously, beginning with the biographic data of the participants. This is followed by the findings on the learner related factors.

Biographic data of the respondents

The demographic information was based on gender, age and teaching experience. This was because the researchers sought to establish whether the above variables had an impact on Grade 12 learners' academic performance in English Language (L 2). The teachers were asked to indicate their age, gender and teaching experience. This was important because the researchers were interested in finding out whether the teachers' gender, age and teaching experience had an influence on the academic performance of Grade 12 learners. Table 1 shows the age range and gender of the teachers.

Table 1: Age and gender of the teachers (n=8)

Age ranges of teachers	Gender		Total	Percentage
	Male	Female		
25-30	1 (12.5 %)	2 (25 %)	3	37.5 %
31-36	1 (12.5 %)	3 (37.5 %)	4	50 %
37 and above	--	1 (12.5 %)	1	12.5%
Total	2	6	8	100%

Half (50%) of the teachers were in the age bracket of 31-36 years. Three teachers (37.5 %) were between 25 and 30 years, while only one teacher (12.5%) was 37 years or above. All teachers in this study were young, hence energetic and active in their work. Although all Grade 12 English Language (L 2) teachers were relatively young, no improvement was made in the performance of Grade 12 English Language (L 2). Generally, most young teachers excel in their performance (Wanyama, 2013). Thus, these teachers could have positively influenced Grade 12 learners' academic performance in English Language (L 2). For Wanyama (2013) young teachers in most schools had positive impact on learners' learning outcomes. Table 1 above also shows the gender of the teachers. There was one male (12.5%) and two female (25 %) teachers aged 25 to 30; one male (12.5 %) and three female (37.5%) teachers aged 31 to 36 and one female teacher (12.5%) aged 37 and above. These figures show gender imbalance in favor of females. These observations confirm findings of many studies (e.g. Onyara, 2013; Biama, 2014) which indicate that generally, there are more female than male teachers in both primary and secondary schools. In Canada and other western countries, gender distribution in higher education has switched from an imbalance in favour of men to an imbalance in favour of women over the last two decades (Organization for economic co-

operation and development, 2003). The findings of this study show gender imbalance in the recruitment of teachers in senior grades such as Grade 12. More female teachers were recruited in the senior grades than their male counterparts. However, Nampala (2013) notes that female teachers have been found to be generally soft-spoken and are, therefore, not taken seriously by their learners. The researchers are of the view that, although the academic attainment does not warrant strength more than care and love, female teachers are not as strong compared to their male counterparts. Their gender may negatively influence the Grade 12 academic performance in English Language (L 2). Olanipekun (2015) argues that gender specific does not has an impact on learners' academic performance.

Table 2 below reveals the teaching experience of teachers in years. Twenty-five percent of the teachers had experience of one to five years and those with experience within the range of six to 10 years made up 62.2 percent. Finally, 12.5 percent of the teachers had 11-15 years of teaching experience. These ranges of years of experience are shown on table 2 below.

Table 2: Years of teaching experience of teachers (n=8)

Ranges of years of teaching experience in Grade 12 English Language (L 2)	(n=8)	Total	Percentage
1-5	2	2	25 %
6-10	5	5	62.5 %
11-15	1	1	12.5 %

The teachers' years of experience presented on table 2 above ranged from five to 15 years. All schools in this study were staffed with experienced English Language (L 2) teachers. The findings are in line with Ewetan, and Ewetan (2015) who maintain that the availability of experienced English Language (L 2) teachers in a school is very important for better learner academic performance in English Language (L 2). Similarly, all the four principals were relatively young (31-40 years) with principal experience ranging from one to four years. The principals' limited experience in leadership could have been a contributing factor to the poor academic performance of Grade 12 learners in English Language (L 2). The principal's job requires not only an understanding of the educational process at the classroom level, but also the skill to coordinate the efforts of a staff complement that includes teachers, other administrative personnel and other professional and non-professional staff (MoE, 2005). Since most principals held teaching positions before becoming principals, it means they have both administrative and teaching experience. To some extent, this should assist them to produce good results in their schools.

It is generally known that social phenomena like education are dynamic. The knowledge or skill that a teacher learnt ten years ago may no longer be relevant to the new challenges or new problems that emerge today. The classroom also keeps on changing.

New problems arise and new challenges emerge. We live in the 21st century, an era characterized by new technologies. Thus, new solutions are needed, because the old solutions (skills / knowledge) may not be helpful today. For this reason, the present study assumed that the younger teachers and principals in the present study were supposed to produce good results. Yet the results have failed to reflect this over the years.

4.2 *Learner-related factors*

The results of the teachers and principals' views on learner-related factors that influence the academic performance of Grade 12 learners in English Language (L 2) are presented on Table 3 below. As described in the research methodology, SA (strongly agree) and A (agree) were collapsed to show agreement or positive attitudes while SD (strongly disagree) and D (disagree) were also collapsed to show disagreement with the statement or to show negative attitudes. The neutral point (not sure) was left out in order to make the results directional as suggested by Creswell and Creswell (2017).

Table 3: Responses of principals and teachers (n=12)

Responses					
Statement	SA	A	NS	D	SD
Most of the Grade 12 learners find it difficult to understand the examination question papers in English Language (L 2).	4	5	3		
Most of the Grade 12 learners have poor English background from lower grades, which makes it difficult for them to understand examination question papers in Grade 12 English Language (L 2).	9	3	--	--	--
Most of the Grade 12 learners believe that English is difficult to understand.	6	4	2		--

Table 3 indicates that four respondents (33.33 %) strongly agreed that most of the Grade 12 learners find it difficult to understand the examination question papers in English Language (L 2), five (41.67 %) agreed and three (25 %) were undecided (unsure). These results show that the majority of the respondents (75 %) agreed that Grade 12 learners found it difficult to understand examination questions in English. The main reason given for this is their poor background in English since it is a second language to them. The observations from the questionnaires concur with a research study conducted in Namibia by the Ministry of Education through NIED, an organ of the Ministry of Education, which revealed that a high proportion of learners in Namibian schools were confused by the second language (English Language) (MoE, 2011).

Literature (e.g. Bolu-Steve &Sanni, 2013) also reveals that poor background in English Language (L 2) was also a negative influence. Some studies (e.g. Mwaura, 2014) established how learners coming from diverse home environments are affected

differently by such variations. Studies, such as Wanyama (2015) recommend that a good environment be provided at home to enable learners to learn in school. It appears that learners' success at school is closely linked to their home backgrounds (Mushtaq & Khan, 2012). Factors linked to the level of education of parents, family income and marital status are determinants of the level of academic performance and aspirations of learners in school (Mushtaq & Khan, 2012).

In the identification of factors that influence the academic performance of Grade 12 learners in English Language (L 2), parents (50 %) identified lack of exposure to English as one of the main factors that negatively influence the academic performance of Grade 12 learners in English Language (L 2) in the Oshikoto Region. Findings from parents agreed with the research findings of a study conducted in Kenya by Onyara (2013), which indicated that lack of exposure to proper learning environment, which makes teaching and learning in secondary schools comfortable resulted in the poor academic performance of learners.

Table 3 shows that all 12 respondents (100 %) agreed that most of the Grade 12 learners have a poor English background from lower grades, which makes it difficult for them to understand examination questions in Grade 12 English Language (L 2). Their poor background in English Language is due to lack of exposure to English Language from lower primary education. Literature (e.g. Töttemeyer, 2010; Urban Trust of Namibia, 2011) highlights lack of exposure to English Language due to the *Language Policy for Schools*, which was implemented in Namibian schools in 1992. The implementation of English as a medium of instruction in Namibian schools is a major cause of poor academic performance, which the Namibian Government has over-looked (MoE, 2008). The results from the semi-structured interviews with parents and focus group discussions with learners support the observations from the questionnaires. Parents also felt that lack of exposure to English was one of the critical factors that negatively influenced the academic performance of Grade 12 learners in English Language (L 2). Parents felt that although English was the medium of instruction, not many learners had the opportunity to speak, to use or to listen to proper English being spoken outside the classroom. Learners also indicated that the use of English at home was very rare. They did not communicate in English in the villages. They indicated that in some instances, if one spoke English to people around them, they could think that one was insulting them. Therefore, the use of English outside the classrooms, especially in the village, was sometimes a taboo.

Table 3 also shows that the majority of the respondents (10 - 83.33 %) agreed that most of the Grade 12 learners believed that English was difficult to understand. Respondents explained that most of the Grade 12 learners had poor English background because of lack of exposure to English. Onyara (2013) notes the importance of exposing learners to a variety of teaching and learning resources if they are to improve their English. Onyara (2013) also indicates that learning involves interaction of students with the environment and teaching and learning resources, which include, among others, classrooms, laboratories, libraries, playing fields, textbooks. Indeed, physical resources go a long way in creating conducive environments that promote effective teaching and learning.

Mwangi (2013) conducted a study in Kenya, and it revealed the importance of teaching and learning resources in the performance of learners. In his study, Mwangi (2013) determined the extent of the physical facilities in influencing learners' performance in Kenya Certificate of Primary Education in Tetu District, Nyeri County. The study established the positive effects of provision of teaching and learning resources on pupils' performance in Kenya Certificate of Primary Education in Tetu District, Nyeri County.

Regarding the interpretation of examination questions, learners were asked to explain whether they faced any challenges. Their responses were far from what was expected. They explained how they misinterpreted the examination questions. A learner explained:

I find it difficult to interpret questions, especially during examination that I do not need to ask from anyone. I get confused when the question requires me to explain or analysing a concept (FGL1)

Another learner added:

I do not like to speak in English, not to talk of writing. How I wish I could be asked to) express myself all the time using my first language (FGL3).

These findings seem to confirm what was revealed by the parents who participated in the semi-structured interviews as they indicated that most of their children were not exposed to the English language outside the classroom. Studies (e. g. Urban Trust of Namibia, 2011; Nkandi, 2015) warn that if learners have a low level of proficiency in English, they will always be at a disadvantage when it comes to taking examinations in English. It can, therefore, be concluded that learners' performance in examinations in Namibia was negatively affected by the practice that most of the examinations were taken in English (Urban Trust of Namibia, 2011).

The learners in the focus group discussions refuted the issue or belief that English was difficult. They indicated that English Language required only practice by engaging in competitions and reading a variety of reading materials such as newspapers, listening to the national radio and watching TV to expand their vocabularies. One of the learners in a focus group reiterated:

We need to practice English by speaking it all the time. At school, most of us speak in our first language even during English lessons. We need storybooks to practice reading in English and dictionaries to learn new words. The school library has no such books (FGL4).

In Kenya, Onyara (2013) notes the significance of teaching and learning resources to enhance the quality and relevance of skills imparted to learners. He stressed that through such things as TVs, learners develop their vocabularies, strengthen their English Language proficiency and master language skills. Learners felt that practice makes perfect. The importance of a dictionary in a school as a teaching aid and critical

tool was highlighted in the focus group discussions. The learners' sentiments concurred with observations in Kenya by Onyara (2013) who highlighted the importance of physical materials and learning materials such as dictionaries and textbooks on the performance of learners in the examination.

Conclusion and recommendations

The findings showed that most teachers and Grade 12 learners doing English Language (L 2) lacked English Language proficiency due to lack of exposure to the English language, especially from their lower educational level. Similarly, it was revealed that poor socio-economic backgrounds of some learners contributed enormously to the learners' poor academic performance in English Language (L2). Most of the parents and learners stated that some of the learners were afraid of speaking English outside the classroom for fear that others who could not speak English would misinterpret what they were saying as insulting. However, the learners noted that English was not difficult as such but what was needed is continuous practice. The above factors cannot be solely blamed for the poor academic performance of these learners in English Language as a subject. Therefore, there are other contributing factors, which have not been explored in this paper and include inadequate infrastructure such as libraries, playgrounds, language laboratories and study halls. Inadequacy of such facilities negatively influenced learners' academic performance. It would appear that the use of English as the only medium of instruction is not working well in Namibia.

The following recommendations have been proposed to enhance learners' academic performance in English Language. First, it is necessary that schools reinforce the use of the English language inside and outside the classroom as a means of enhancing the exposure of learners to the English language. This could be through the provision of newspapers, novels and short stories within the school environment. Outside the school, the learners could be encouraged to watch educational TV programmes and speak English with their peers and parents. As the saying goes, "practice makes perfect". Secondly, teachers should actively involve learners in the learning of English Language through such methods as debates, drama and other classroom interactive activities. Furthermore, whenever there are parent-teacher meetings, schools should sensitize and encourage parents to participate in the education of their children. In addition, the schools should organise regular meetings with parents to discuss with them their children's progress and how these learners could be assisted to learn and master the English language. Finally, the Ministry of Education, in collaboration with the Directorate of Education, should consider the first language(s) as language(s) of instruction at the primary and secondary school levels.

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