

Factors Contributing to Poor Performance of Grade 4 Learners in English 2nd Language

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Abstract

The study aimed to investigate the factors that contribute to the poor performance of Grade 4 learners in English at three selected primary schools in the Oshikoto Region in Namibia. The qualitative approach was adopted in the form of a case study design. The data were collected through a semi-structured interview and document analysis. A sample comprising six (6) English teachers was chosen using purposive sampling. The data were analyzed using a thematic analysis approach. The study revealed that contributing factors to poor performance were language barriers, lack of resources, lack of motivation, and lack of training and workshops. The study recommends that the Ministry of Education, Arts, and Culture should provide teaching and learning resources, organize and offer workshops to teachers, and monitor compensatory programs.

INTRODUCTION

The children's academic performance in schools largely depends on the ability to read and write in the language used as a medium of instruction (Ithindi, 2021). English proficiency plays a greater role in learners' academic performance. The main problem that necessitated this study was the poor performance of learners in English second language in Grade 4 in the three selected schools. It was observed that learners in Grade 4 were unable to read, speak, or write in English as a second language. Despite several attempts by schools and the Omuthiya inspectorate office, learners' performance in English as a subject remained relatively low. Besides, no single study exists that investigated the factors that contribute to the poor performance of learners in English in Grade 4 at the case study schools. A substantial number of senior primary learners perform poorly in the English subject every year, thus triggered the researcher's interest to investigate the factors that contributed to the poor performance of Grade 4 learners in English and to find suitable strategies that might overcome the poor performance of Grade 4 learners in English subject.

To achieve the research objectives, the study sought to answer the following research questions.

1. What were the factors in teachers' views that caused poor performance in English among Grade 4 learners in the Omuthiya Circuit, Oshikoto Region?
2. What were the teachers' views on the effects of poor performance in English among Grade 4 learners in the Omuthiya Circuit, Oshikoto Region.?
3. What were the strategies that teachers suggested as solutions to overcome the poor performance in English among Grade 4 learners?

The significance of the study is multifaceted and extends to various stakeholders including teachers, school principals, and educational policymakers. The importance of this study lies in its potential to contribute to valuable insights and positive changes in teaching and learning of English 2nd Language. The study would also provide curriculum developers with insight into the benefits and challenges associated with teaching and learning English at the senior primary phase.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Factors that cause poor performance in English as a subject

1. Lack of training, motivation, and support

The work of literature establishes that training and motivation have a direct impact on learners' academic achievement (Nkandi, 2015; Negumbo, 2016; Ithindi, 2021). Learners who lack motivation perform poorly in English subjects. Less motivated learners do not put much effort into their schoolwork. It is believed that to work hard, learners need to be motivated and be praised for good work by their teachers or parents. Negombo (2016) propounds that training and motivation increase the desire for learning and commitment. Further, teachers need to motivate learners to work hard to achieve their full potential. So, where there is good motivation good performance follows suit. Demotivated learners lose the subject's interest and contribute to poor performance.

2. Overcrowded classrooms

A study conducted by Ithindi (2021) investigated the causes of poor performance in English second language found that large classroom sizes impact teaching and learning negatively. In the overcrowded classroom, teachers do not move freely to assist all the learners in need. It has been observed that in Namibia overcrowded classrooms, are a great concern mostly in rural primary schools contributing to poor learners' achievement. A study that was done in Namibia by Negumbo (2016) regarding how class size contributes to poor performance revealed that some primary schools have more than 40 learners in one classroom. This situation may lead to poor performance, poor learners' discipline, a lack of concentration during the teaching and learning process, and many others.

3. Learners' attitude toward English

The majority of prior research establishes that learners' ability and willingness to learn are determined by attitude (Langat, 2015, Kamati & Woldemariam, 2016; Normazidah et al., 2021). Drawing on Langat (2015), learners with a positive attitude tend to be motivated toward excellence in the subject. The researcher also observed that attitude plays a fundamental role in achieving success. This is because they enjoy, show interest and they value the subject. In their study, Kamati and Woldemariam (2016) establish that most children consider English as a foreign language. They further reiterated that for a child to be skillful in the English language, learning the skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing are needed and it involves devotion and commitment from the learners.

4. Lack of teaching and learning resources

In her study, Negumbo (2016) observes that a lack of resources is one of the challenges facing primary schools in Namibia. There is a lack of libraries, computer laboratories, and teaching and learning materials such as textbooks, and dictionaries in many primary schools in Namibia. The researcher as an English teacher has observed that teachers attempt to gather some teaching materials on their own due to a deficiency of teaching and learning materials at their schools. Similarly, Nkandi (2015) asserts that the English language requires teachers with the ability to search for information in different resources. This is because the English language places more emphasis on critical thinking skills. The researcher is of the view that schools should have available resources that could improve learners' English proficiency and academic performance. Despite that, some schools have sufficient resources but teachers do not utilize them effectively. Teachers need to adapt teaching and learning resources to suit their learners' learning needs.

Effects of poor performance of learners in English as a subject

1. Students' academic performance

Poor performance of learners in English can negatively impact learners' academic performance in the future. A study by Kamati and Woldemariam (2016) divulge that poor performance of learners in English can make students disadvantaged in their performance at institutions of higher learning due to low proficiency levels in English. Many researchers have examined the impacts of English language proficiency on four language skills, namely listening, speaking, reading, and writing, establishing that it deters the growth of students at the university level (Nkandi, 2015; Ithindi, 2021). It was established that university students cannot apply the English language properly within and beyond their classroom when working on academic issues. Equally, a study conducted by Ithindi (2021) on the performance of learners in English conveyed that the deficiency of proficiency in English impacts their achievement in different subjects at higher grades.

2. Students' attitude towards school and learning.

It was indicated that the negative attitude of the learners toward the English language was a major consequence of the poor performance of the students in lower grades. A previous study shows that the low achievement of learners in other subjects in Namibia was attributed as a consequence of students' poor performance (Negumbo, 2016). It was further revealed that most learners failed the examinations due to their poor performance in the English language at primary levels. It can be designated that poor performance in English could make learners develop negative attitudes toward English as a subject. Besides, poor performance in English can also make the learners hate the subject which can lead to dodging classes and absenteeism of learners. Also, the poor performance of learners in English has bad consequences on learners' behaviors because most of the learners who do not perform well in English as a subject are always aggressive during the lesson. A study by Nepando (2018) discovered that learners' poor performance in the English language had negative effects on their attitudes. This denotes that learners tend to develop negative attitudes toward their subjects.

3. Learners' participation in their school activities

Literature indicated that some learners in the public schools dropped out of school because of their poor performance in English subjects (Simasiku et al., 2014). Findings showed that the deficiency of participation in school activities by the learners carried out by the school was also reported as a result of poor performance of the students in English. Furthermore, an aggressive and ignoring attitude of teachers and parents resulted in poor performance of learners in the English language. The finding also divulged that teachers' and parents' frustration about their children was also one of the main consequences of low achievement of learners in English at both primary and secondary levels. Furthermore, learners can avoid participating in classroom activities and other activities in the school due to shyness and lack of interest. A study by Simasiku et al. (2014) shows that the deficiency of participation in school activities by the learners carried out in the school was also reported as a result of poor performance of the students in English. This implies that if learners do not perform well in their subject, they will rarely acquire knowledge for their life outside of schooling life.

4. Students' low motivation and school interest

A study by Nepando (2018) revealed that learners' poor performance in the English language has negative effects on the level of motivation of the learners and their interest in the school. Besides, it can be indicated that poor performance of learners in English can make learners develop low interest in learning, deficiency of motivation for learning, lack of concentration in learning, weak readiness to learn, and poor learning attitude. The researcher observed that learners who constantly perform poorly in English, end up with low self-esteem, low confidence, and being demotivated which makes them dodge lessons and eventually drop out of school. English can facilitate learners to develop courage and self-confidence to do their school work. If learners continuously fail in English, it leads to demotivation and low self-esteem towards their learning. The study by Nepando (2018) discovered that students' poor performance in the English language leads to low motivation for the learners. Low motivation and low self-confidence can make learners avoid putting more effort into their school which can lead to poor performance in their subjects.

Strategies to overcome poor performance in English as a subject

1. Use of teaching and learning support materials

Teaching and learning materials can lead to successful teaching and learning (Negumbo, 2016). For active teaching and learning to occur, appropriate materials need to be used to help learners attain the subject competencies. Literature establishes that adequate teaching and learning materials can aid teachers in giving quality classroom instructions (Simasiku et al., 2014). The teachers who constantly use teaching aids produce quality learning. Teaching resources enable the teacher to promote effective teaching and learning thereby arousing learners' interest to actively be engaged in the lesson presentation. Therefore, the researcher advocates that for learners' performance to be improved, English teachers need to use teaching and learning materials regularly to enable them to learn effectively and improve their academic achievement.

2. Using different teaching and learning strategies

Various scholars pointed out that some of the several teaching and learning strategies can be employed by teachers to improve learners' performance in English such as demonstration, discussions, cooperative learning, project work or role play, games, and others (Simasiku et al., 2014; Kamati & Woldemariam). It can be indicated that learners in the Namibia context need to be exposed to the language beyond the classroom to improve their English language. Other authors suggested augmented group activities to improve interaction among the learners during the language learning process (Dhillon & Wanjiru, 2013; Pandiyan et al., 2017). Similarly, Dhillom and Wanjiru (2013) recommend illustration and group activities such as group vocabulary games, debating clubs, and essay writing competitions. Pandiyan et al. (2017) share a similar sentiment advocating for school debates; the use of illustration, key terms, and vocabularies when teaching the English language. The amusing element in these types of activities makes the learning process fascinating.

3. Improve monitoring strategy

Effective school management and leadership are the key to good academic performance (Negumbo, 2016). This means that effective school management can make teachers and learners collaborate and inspire them to contribute positively to achieve the school's goals. Literature has established that school management and leadership play a crucial part in the success of the school (Simasiku et al., 2014; Neumbo, 2016). School principals have a crucial obligation to ensure that quality teaching and learning take place. It is further indicated that schools can operate well if they are appropriately managed. Consequently, enhances the learning outcomes of learners. Hence, the school management must ensure quality teaching and learning occur to improve learners' achievements.

4. Enhancing parental involvement

Parental involvement contributes to learners' performance (Negumbo, 2016). Parental involvement allows parents to look at their children's school activities, make suitable study time and space, check learners' homework, and show an interest in their school tasks. Parents must be engaged in their kids' learning by monitoring learners' schoolwork when they are at home and assisting them when they do their homework. The parents should be continuously informed about the progress of their children in school work and other learning difficulties the child faces at school learners can improve their performance if parents develop a routine in assisting their children in their school work and talk to them about their school activities and help them to comprehend that success requires hard work. These commitments can make a difference in their children's learning and may aid them to do well in their school work. The schools need to involve parents in the school activities by fulfilling learners' educational needs and assisting their children to achieve academic excellence

METHODS

This study adopted a qualitative research approach in the form of a case study design. The sample of this study comprised six (6) English teachers from schools in Omuthiya circuits in the

Oshikoto region to participate in the study. This study employed a purposive sampling method, only teachers who have been teaching English for more than three (3) years were selected to participate in the study. The study used two research instruments namely interviews and document analysis. A face-to-face in-depth interview with six (6) English teachers aimed at obtaining teachers' in-depth information on contributing factors to poor performance and strategies that can be implemented to enhance learners' academic performance in English at senior primary phase. After obtaining permission from the education director, the researcher made an appointment with the English teachers through their school principals to schedule the day for their interviews to avoid disrupting their lessons. The researcher recorded all interview sessions with the voice recorder, which was later transcribed. The researcher also obtained documents such as pass and fail statistics, and English syllabus from the principal's office to examine and record the data in the document analysis rubric. The data for both interview and document analysis were analyzed using the thematic analysis method.

Ethical consideration

The researcher first obtained permission from the education regional director in the Oshikoto region to conduct the study. The researcher further distributed the consent forms to the research participants and information sheet respectively. The researcher then explained the aim of the study, participants' rights, how the results would be handled and used, and how confidentiality would be ensured and maintained. The participants were requested to be free to ask any question if they wanted further information. The participants were also informed that their participation is voluntarily and were asked to sign the consent forms.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1: Factors that contribute to poor performance of learners in English in the Omuthiya circuit.

Themes	Sub-themes
Theme 1: Factors that cause poor performance in English in the Omuthiya circuit	Lack of resources Poor parental involvement Low motivation and support Lack of training and workshops
Theme 2: Effects of poor performance on learners' academic progress	Lead to poor English proficiency. Lead to a lack of participation in school activities. Lead to negative attitudes toward English as a subject Lead to low motivation and low self-confidence
Theme 3: Strategies to overcome poor performance in English.	Use of key terms and vocabulary Use different teaching strategies Use teaching materials and resources Give quality assessment and compensatory teaching.

Theme 1: Factors that contribute to poor performance of learners in English 2nd language in Omuthiya circuit.

When the participants were asked a question about what the causes of poor performance of learners are, this is what they had said;

1. Lack of resources

Participant T2 said, *"Many learners do not have enough textbooks as one English textbook is shared by up to five learners, we only rely on the chalkboard"*. In addition, Participant T5 indicated that *"Lack of teaching and learning resources is a problem across all subjects; the learners only rely on the notes provided by the subject teachers on the chalkboard"*. The above findings correspond with the findings from document analysis that there is a lack of teaching and learning resources at the

schools. A study by Negumbo (2016) also discovered that a lack of resources affects learners' performance. It was noted that a lack of resources might cause a lack of commitment and low morale among teachers and learners and can compromise the quality of teaching and learning in the school.

2. Poor parental involvement

Participant T1 indicated, *"Children living in rural areas do not get educational support from homes"*. Moreover, participant T4 added, *"Many parents do not put more effort into their children's education, many learners are from houses headed by old people"*. From the participants' responses, it can be observed that a lack of parental involvement in their children's education contributes to the poor performance of learners in English. The data from document analysis shows that only a few parents turn up to school when they are invited. Besides, a study by Nkandi (2015) confirms that students' English achievement can be influenced by parental involvement. Participants indicated that education should start from home, but due to the poor educational background of most parents of children in a rural school, this does not happen.

3. Low motivation and support

Participant T2 indicated, *"Learners do not put in extra effort in their learning which may be due to lack of motivation"*. In addition, participant T5 said, *"Despite that we award the best performers in English in each class on a termly basis, very little improvement is observed among learners"*. From the participants' narration, it can be inferred that a lack of motivation and support affects learners' confidence in learning English. Also, Nkandi (2015) reveals that learners need support to improve their performance in English. During the interview, participants indicated that lack of motivation is one of the factors that contribute to the poor performance of learners in English.

4. Lack of training and workshop

Participant T3 indicated, *"Most of the teachers at our schools are not well trained, especially on the revised curriculum; this makes it difficult to implement it effectively"*. Moreover, participant T2 stated, *"In most cases when the Senior Education Officer (SEO) visit schools to conduct classroom observation, they concentrate more on mistakes, oftentimes they do not listen and attend to teachers problems but they only blame teachers on errors they detected instead of helping the teachers to improve their teaching approach"*. Lack of training limits teachers to offer quality teaching. Data from the schedule for workshop attendance shows that only a few teachers attend training at the circuit and regional level. A study by, Ithindi (2021) discovered that teachers' content knowledge in English can be enhanced by training. Lack of training was mentioned by participants as a contributor to the poor performance of learners in English.

Theme 2: The effects of poor performance in English as 2nd language on learners in Omuthiya Circuit

When the participants were asked to state the effect of poor performance of learners, they said

1. Leads to a lack of English proficiency

Participant T2 said, *"Learner who has good English language skills answer the questions in English well"*. While participant T3 added, *"I have a learner in my class who has good knowledge of English; this learner always perform well in her homework and tests"*. English proficiency improves learners' English knowledge, makes students think creatively, and independently, and understand various questions in their tests or examination. English language skills upsurge learners' confidence in thinking creatively and independently (Simasiku et al., 2014). Moreover, Participant T4 indicated, *"English proficiency has a long-term effect on learners' education."* In addition, Participant T6 stated, *"The reason why learners are still struggling with reading and speaking English in Grade 4, is the problem started at lower grades, if these learners could be assisted earlier, the problem could disappear by now and could able to perform well in English in future easily"*. The findings above concur with the findings of Simasiku et al. (2014) who indicated that English proficiency allows learners to learn how to resolve everyday life problems through the use of knowledge and language

skills in English. This implies that learners with good English language skills acquire good reasoning skills and interact well in their daily activities.

2. Lead to a lack of participation in school activities.

When the participants were asked the question of what effect does poor performance had on learners, they indicated as follows. Participant T5 stated, *"That learners who do not perform in their subject, oftentimes are not free to participate in other school activities"*, while T4 said, *"I always encourage my learners to join schools, we have lots of clubs in the schools such as social clubs, English clubs, but these learners do not show up, most of the time I tried to encourage them to join but they always refuse to come"*. Similarly, participant T6 stated that, *"My learners who do not do well in English, are always shy to participate in other school tasks, even if you pair them with others they hardly contribution"*.

From the participants' answers, it can be observed that low achievement in English has a bad consequence on the learners on other school tasks. As participants said, these learners always refrain from actively participating in classroom activities and other activities in the school. This finding corroborates the study by Simasiku et al. (2014) whose findings show that the deficiency of participation in school activities by the learners carried out in the school was also reported as a result of poor performance of the students in English.

3. Lead to negative attitudes toward English as a subject

In the question on the impact of poor performance in English on learners, the participant narrated that, it can result in learners developing negative attitudes toward the subjects. Below is what they had to say. Participant T3 said, *"Learners who do not perform well in English, oftentimes start hating the subjects. This may end up a learner developing a tendency of absenting or dodging English lesson"*. Similarly, participant T4 stated that, *"Learners who do not do well in English, do not enjoy English the lessons, every time you come to the lessons, this learner is just angry. I think is because of the negative attitudes the learner has toward the subject due to repeated failure"*. Participants reiterated that poor performance of learners in English has bad consequences on learners' behaviors because often the learners who do not perform well in their subject as always are aggressive during the lesson. These findings substantiate the findings by Nepando (2018) who discovered that learners' poor performance in the English language has negative effects on their attitudes.

4. Leads to low motivation and low self-confidence.

To the question of what is the impact of poor performance on learners, this is what the participants had to say. Participant 2 who stated, *"Learners who do not perform well in English always look less motivated and their confidence is down"*. Moreover, Participant 1 stated, *"There is this learner in my class, every time is point him to say something in the class, he covers his face with his hands and he speaks very low, I think he becomes demotivated because of low marks he always obtains in English"*. From the participants' responses, it can be deduced that English can facilitate learners to develop courage and self-confidence to do their schoolwork. These findings correlated with the findings of Nepando (2018) who states that students' poor performance in the English language leads to low motivation for the learners.

Theme 3: Strategies to overcome poor performance of learners in English 2nd Language in Omuthiya circuit

1. Use key terms and vocabulary

To the question of what can be done to overcome the poor performance of learners in English participants suggested the following. Participant T3 indicated that *"Teachers need to design posters with key terms and basic vocabularies and paste them on the wall; this will help learners to capture these terms"*. He further indicated that *"Teachers can also reinforce learners to know key terms and vocabularies by offering rewards"*. In addition, participant T5 stated, *"Learners need to know English vocabulary to solve problem activities better"*. She further added, *"Like me, I instructed my learners to*

write the vocabulary on the last page of their summary book". The use of key terms is essential in learning the English language. Pandiyan et al. (2017) divulge that key terms influence success in learning. During the interview, participants mentioned that learners need to be taught how to identify and interpret key terms and learn vocabulary to understand questions.

2. Use different teaching strategies

When the participants were asked to propose the best strategies to overcome the poor performance of learners in English, they proposed that teachers use different teaching strategies, below is what they said; Participant T1 said, *"I used various teaching methods for my lesson presentation, for instance when I was teaching the topic of countable and uncountable nouns I gathered a lot of bottles which I distributed to groups during the lesson and instructed learners to discuss, identify countable and uncountable nouns" and do a group presentation*. In addition, participant T3 explained, *"Using different teaching methods helps learners to develop a better understanding. I used group work, pair work, demonstrations, and group presentations to teach my learners"* Teaching strategies facilitate English learning. Literature indicates that using different teaching methods is the best strategy to accommodate all learners to learn the English language (Negumbo, 2016). The participants cited the use of various teaching methods to explain English terms to learners to help them get a correct interpretation of them correctly.

3. Use teaching materials and resources

When the participants were asked to propose the best strategies to overcome the poor performance of learners in English, they proposed that teachers use different teaching strategies, and below is what they said; Participant T3 indicated, *"Since we have school laptops, sometimes I borrow a laptop for my learners to watch the English-related video. The learners like video, they concentrate when watching them"*. Meanwhile, participant T1 stated, *"I used printed materials with pictures which I use to give to my learners. Sometimes I use the school overhead projector to allow my learners to see pictures and videos"*. It can be observed from the participants' responses that the use of teaching and learning materials is the key to effective learning. Work of literature advocated that teaching materials lead to effective learning (Dhillon & Wanjiru, 2013; Nkandi, 2015; Negumbo, 2016; Ganaprakasam & Karunaharam, 2020). Participants indicated that teaching and learning materials are greatly useful as they help learners to concentrate and develop their English language skills.

4. Giving quality assessment and compensatory programs

To the question of what can be done to overcome the poor performance of learners in English participants suggested as follows; Participant T1 explained, *"Teaching English needs a lot of commitment and sacrifice. I remain with my learners after school to give remedial teaching and do assessment"*. Besides, participant T4 indicated, *"The school has a remedial timetable that takes place during the afternoon to assist learners with learning difficulties"*. The findings above correspond with Pandiyan et al. (2017) findings that discovered that assessment is the best strategy for developing students' English proficiency. Data from document analysis revealed that compensatory programs are available to assist learners with learning difficulties. This denotes that assessment strategy and compensatory program act as a greater potential to advance students' perceptions of English as a subject.

CONCLUSION

From the findings, it can be concluded that poor performance of learners in English in Grade 4 at the studied schools was caused by multiple factors such as lack of resources, lack of parental involvement, lack of motivation and support, and lack of training and workshops. The study discovered that poor performance of learners in English has long-term effects on learners' education as it can lead to poor English proficiency, Lead to a lack of participation in school activities, negative attitudes toward English as a subject, and low motivation and low self-confidence. The study recommends that teachers should give more speaking and reading activities to learners, allow more

practice, design suitable quality assessment activities, use different teaching strategies, use key terms, and use more teaching aids to improve learners' performance in English.

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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