

Factors influencing learners' performance in the Namibia Senior Secondary Certificate Ordinary Level English 2nd language

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Abstract

Proficiency in the English language serves as a pathway to accessing higher education opportunities for non-English natives. Their persistent underperformance in the national English second language examination remains a deeply disconcerting phenomenon. Since the learners are susceptible to factors influencing their academic performance, poor performance has been an inevitable fate for the majority. Therefore, this study explored factors influencing learners' performance in the Namibia Senior Secondary Certificate Ordinary Level English 2nd language final examination. The question is, what are the factors influencing learners' performance in the Namibia Senior Secondary Certificate Ordinary Level? The study adopted a qualitative research approach and interviewed 22 participants from secondary schools within Grootfontein circuit in the Otjozondjupa region of Namibia. Three of them were English second language teachers of the Namibia Senior Secondary Certificate Ordinary Level, three head of departments for languages, three school principals, nine learners, three school board members of the secondary schools, and one inspector of education. Larsen-Freeman's complex dynamic systems theory was used as a lens of the study. The study found that shortages of physical facilities and infrastructure, scarcity of English teaching and learning resources, and learners' backgrounds and motivation were major persistent factors contributing to poor performance in English. In addition, the study found limited exposure to English, stakeholders' blame games, and a lack of appreciation for each other's efforts as other factors sustaining poor performance in English. The elements include socioeconomic issues and scant technology. These factors were found to be diverse and complex, creating a dynamic context. The study concluded that the development of clear accountability mechanisms to address issues of blame games and promote a sense of shared responsibility for a holistic and sustainable approach to improving performance is earnestly required. The study recommends the implementation of a staff development scheme to improve the Namibia Senior Secondary Certificate Ordinary Level English second language academic results in an effective and efficient manner. The study also recommends that intentional investment in libraries, language labs, and multimedia resources be carried out in order to enhance English language exposure and practice and the implementation of motivation-enhancing strategies such as extracurricular English clubs, readathon programmes, or language immersion experiences.

Keywords: *Namibia Senior Secondary Certificate Ordinary Level, English 2nd language, poor performance, secondary school, teaching resources*

Introduction

Globally, countries using English as a second language are presented in the literature as having struggle with English proficiency. During the colonial era, India's education system was disrupted, and English became the official language after independence (Khan, 2021). However, learners struggle to be proficient in English when used as the medium of instruction (Halder, 2018). As a colony, Malawi got independence from the coloniser in 1964, but to date learners resort to vernacular such as Chichewa during lesson discussions due to trouble understanding English instructions and academic content in general (Reilly et al., 2022). Stiftung, et al. (2021) note that Namibia, gained independence from the oppressor on

March 21st, 1990. The education system in the pre-independence era was characterised by disparities and segregation based on racial ethnicities, socioeconomic classes, gender, origin, and other forms of privileges that perpetuated inequality, thus rendering it insufficient, albeit formal and incongruent with the citizens' needs (Stiftung, 2022). At that juncture, teaching and learning took place in selected indigenous languages in the first four grades, after which they then transitioned to the use of English or Afrikaans as medium of instruction. The use of Afrikaans was discontinued in Namibia after independence, and English became the official language and dominant medium of instruction (MOI) in

schools (Stell, 2021). Stell (2021) recalls that this was due to the fact that English satisfied the criteria of “unity, acceptability, familiarity, feasibility, science and technology, Pan-Africanism, wider communication” and “United Nations” (p. 8). The terms Pan-Africanism, wider communication, and United Nations are collectively used in this context to depict English as a language representing a tool that countries who are members of the Organisation of African Unity should agreeably use to effectively communicate widely to promote their ideology of Africanness (Wapmuk, 2021). In light of the above examples regarding India in South Asia, Malawi in Southeast Africa and Namibia in South-West Africa, it is logical to deduce that poor performance in English as a second language is a worldwide phenomenon that requires urgent intervention.

In Namibia, learners’ performance in English as a Second Language as a subject countrywide is worrisome (Tanga et al., 2019). The national statistics for 2021 show that out of 46 464 enrolled learners, 41% of them obtained E-U symbols (Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture, 2021). Verner (2019) agrees with Muyoyeta (2018) that symbols E–U are insignificant grades because they have less value in getting learners into universities. Thus, it is clear that “English is linked to success, power, and opportunities” (Simone, 2018, p. 3), and interventions geared towards improving the pass rate should be effected immediately. Therefore, this study aimed to investigate the persistent and emerging factors affecting learners’ performance in the Namibia Senior Secondary Certificate Ordinary Level (NSSCO) English second language. It strived to answer the question: What are the persistent factors influencing learners’ performance in the NSSCO English second language?

Theoretical framework

This study followed the lens of complexity theory. Complexity theory is regarded as a random, open-ended, dynamic, and flexible language theory (Friedrichsen, 2020). It is also perceived as a bundle of concepts and methods combined to identify, describe, examine, and handle the complexity and dynamism of the learning process of a second language, the learning environment, the heterogeneous agents, and other aspects that change from time to time (Amerstorfer, 2020). It was introduced into the language field by Larsen-Freeman less than three decades ago (Friedrichsen, 2020). It

is also called complex dynamic systems theory (Amerstorfer, 2020). It encompasses various aspects such as learners’ emotions, their learning strategies, and the learning materials that define their learning contexts, which could only be addressed by a holistic approach (Amerstorfer, 2020). The theorists believe that the other language theories do not acknowledge all other elements that affect second language scenarios. It is characterised by the belief that there is an interlanguage system that accommodates the emergence of change that occurs in the process of second language learning. Thus, it weaves together other second language theories to enhance the chances and ability to learn a second language (Friedrichsen, 2020). Complexity theory is considered suitable for this study because it is premised on the perception that foreign or second language learners have different needs and preferences because they are each faced with different circumstances in their context. As a result, they adopt different strategies to support their second language learning process and language development (Amerstorfer, 2020).

The use of complexity theory to understand and interpret data in this study was based on teachers’ ability to adopt holistic and contextualised approaches during teaching. The complexity theory was also based on their capacity to use various and suitable teaching strategies to accommodate each learner and improve English second language learning. Furthermore, it was based on their willingness to acquaint themselves with the context, personal situation, and circumstances of each learner to assist them accordingly. Moreover, it was based on their complex relationship with their learners as agents of second language learning. It was further based on learners’ ability to develop strategies to support their second language learning and acquisition process according to their needs and preferences as dictated by their circumstances.

Literature review

For the purposes of this study, the factors influencing learners’ performance in the English second language were divided into three groups: resource factors, educational system factors, and background factors, as elaborated below.

Facilities

Facilities are such things as textbooks, learning media, furniture, services, etc. (Ahmad, 2021). Each school should ideally be well furnished

with the needed facilities. However, Tanga et al. (2019) observed that developing countries are characterised by a scarcity of facilities, the aggregate of which results in an uncondusive teaching and learning environment that leads to poor performance in English as a second language. Ashikuti (2019) agrees that the failure rate is very high among the Namibia Senior Secondary Certificate Ordinary Level due to the unfavourable environment in which the inciting a concern to the public. As a result, Ithindi et al. (2020) reason that such an absence of educational facilities produces learners who lack evaluative skills due to poor training in reading and face trouble during examinations as they fail to understand instructions. Additionally, Ithindi et al. (2020) concur with Tanga et al. (2019) when they add that the unavailability of educational resources such as the internet and computers, in addition to badly stocked information centres or libraries, is the cause of poor performance in English as a second language.

Infrastructure

Anything used to satisfy human needs, such as buildings, drainage, transportation, irrigation, etc., falls under the term infrastructure (Ahmad, 2021). In terms of Article 20 of the Constitution of Namibia, schools should be furnished with the required resources by the state to ensure effective quality education (Stiftung & Namibia Scientific Society, 2018). This means that the state should establish conducive teaching and learning environments for its citizens.

Iimene (2018) clarifies that a supportive environment is one with adequate facilities and infrastructure. Tanga et al. (2019) argue that educational environments may enhance or prevent the goal of teaching and learning; they have to be regulated well and with much care to suit the needs of Namibia Senior Secondary Certificate Ordinary Level. This signifies that learners will perform well, particularly in English as a second language, when the school facilities support the teaching and learning, but the opposite will also be the end result when the environment is unsupportive. The reality is that schools in Namibia are insufficiently furnished with educational infrastructure to provide quality education. This means that the school environment does not support English as a Second Language teaching and learning (Tanga et al., 2019).

Human resource factors

Patel and Annapoorna (2019) perceive human capital as referring to the abilities of humans. They say that investing in the abilities or knowledge of humans is a catalyst for economic growth. Alam et al. (2019) advise that the beginning point to success in any organisation, including schools, is to ensure the recruitment of trained human resources, i.e., teachers. According to Cobanoglu et al. (2018), the process of recruiting, training, developing, motivating, and evaluating human resources is called human resources management (HRM). They indicate that the realisation of the goals of an organisation (i.e., a school) depends highly on the mode of management of its human resources (the teachers). However, there is a shortage of quality-qualified teachers of English as a second language for the senior secondary school certificate at ordinary level in developing countries (Tanga et al., 2019).

Ashikuti (2019) echoes that there is a serious lack of qualified educators for the medium of instruction in Namibia. On top of that, Matengu (2021) reveals that before recent developments, there had not been in-service training for teachers to update their teaching skills and perform accordingly. Such training could help teachers incorporate new modes of teaching, such as the use of audio-visual aids and motivate learners (Mwaamukange, 2018). As a result, English teachers continue to be incompetent, lack motivation, and have no commitment. Such characteristics have a direct and negative impact on learners' performance in English as a second language in Namibia (Ashikuti, 2019). Therefore, providing access to continuous professional development will rescue the situation (Tanga et al., 2019).

Educational system factors

Curricular materials

Namibia's education system revised the NSSCO syllabus in 2016, the implementation of which was facilitated in 2020 (Ithindi et al., 2020). According to the Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture (2018), sufficient reading materials were suggested in the new syllabus, but Ithindi et al. (2020) argue that such materials are not supplied and that it is the prerogative of the teachers to obtain them, which in most cases proves difficult to access. Ashikuti (2019) echoes the same observation that access to teaching and learning media, specifically the Medium of Instruction (MOI), is a concern.

Consequently, NSSCO learners do not do much reading because the reading media is not supplied, and teachers are not motivated to emphasise reading even during the reading period. Ithindi et al. (2020) observed that each teacher uses different reading materials obtained from various sources resulting in the incoherent implementation of the national curriculum. The omission of reading materials for grade 11 could be interpreted that the education system in Namibia does not promote reading in secondary schools (Ithindi et al., 2020). Therefore, learners lack the reading skills and language skills that could help them do well in English second language examinations because they fail to understand instructions and comprehend the texts.

Khan (2021), giving an example of schools in India, explains that such practices lead to several unacceptable ones, such as: teaching English as a subject rather than a language or skill; confining the language learning to a selected set of vocabulary; focusing on the completion of the course workbook rather than on the mastering of the English second language; and laying a poor foundation at the senior secondary level. As a result, Khan (2021) foresees that such an education system produces learners who have useless vocabulary because the context in which they could be used is not created. As a result, such learners fail their English second language examinations. Ashikuti (2019) confirms that the failure rate in Namibia is very high in English as a second language.

Education policies: Default progression

The Namibia Senior Secondary Certificate Ordinary Level (NSSCO) is a syllabus for grades 10 and 11, which signifies that it is a course that stretches over and exists for two years. This syllabus has attractive aims that the ministry expects learners to demonstrate at the end of the duration. Among other things, learners should master all language skills, such as listening skills, speaking skills, reading skills, and writing skills, including grammar, and use English as a second language effectively in all aspects of life (Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture, 2018).

However, a learner in grade 10 in the Namibian education system, Mbudhi (2022), transitions to grade 11 whether they satisfy the competencies or not. According to Iimene (2018), such a move is called “automatic promotion” (p. 168). He further explains his worries that such default promotion has caused

learners to perform poorly in English as a second language over the years because they found it unnecessary to work hard. Ashikuti (2019) concurs with the foregoing observation that, currently, poor academic results are very high in Namibia. Moreover, automatic promotion policy has been objected to in Germany, the Netherlands, Luxembourg, Australia, Italy, France, Spain, and Switzerland (Tani, 2018) and in Rwanda (Mogale et al., 2022), as it advantages pupils with a good English background at the expense of those in a compromised situation. Automatic promotion policy practices miss the whole purpose of the syllabus, which is to nurture the ability of Namibia Senior Secondary Certificate Ordinary Level learners to master and utilise the English second language well to effect good communication orally and in writing (Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture, 2018). Reilly et al. (2022) made similar observations in Ghana and Malawi regarding language policy implementation, where English is used as a medium of instruction from grade 4 to tertiary level.

Reilly et al. (2022) stated that the two countries struggle with the idea of whether to adopt a monolingual (denoting English only as the medium of instruction) system in Malawi and a bilingual (using English in addition to one of the indigenous languages as a medium of instruction) system in Ghana. Currently, their policy implementation is both ambiguous and unsuccessful, and this context impacts learners’ performance in English as a second language. Namibia’s language policy could also be reduced to ambiguity and ineffectiveness as it does not give a clear direction for implementation at the moment, a situation that has caused very weak performance.

Language policies: Head of the department for languages

While Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture (2021) expects English second language teachers to report to the head of the department, the head of the department does not necessarily have to be a qualified English teacher or specialist. According to Reilly et al. (2022), such a policy implementation strategy is both ambiguous and will not yield good results. Teachers of English as a Second Language will not receive proper guidance and will not have confidence in the advice given to them. The head of department (HoD) should be an English Second Language (ESL) specialist at the NSSCO level to check teachers’ work and direct

them accordingly to ensure good performance (Almutairi & Shraid, 2021). As part of motivation, Kagema and Irungu (2018) advise stakeholders that rewarding teachers who do well motivates them to work hard to improve their academic performance.

Background of learners as factors

Vernacular/mother tongue

Hautemo et al. (2016), as cited in Ithindi et al. (2020), observed that a large number of pupils employ their home language after school. Additionally, Tanga et al. (2019) say that the foregoing is a clear indication that English is rather a foreign language to them. On top of that, Ahsan et al. (2020) also observe that usually all English-second language classes are composed of learners speaking divergent vernaculars. Hence, Iimene (2018) has grounds to assert that many pupils, above 80%, love using their vernaculars during learning, and close to 90% of them are comfortable conversing with educators in their mother tongue. Kisting (2012, p. 8), as quoted by Martins (2018), adds that “only 8%” of learners express themselves well in English, whereas the rest of society communicates in their mother tongue (p. 1). Therefore, Iimene (2018) indicates that such factors prohibit their exposure to English and cause learners to have a deficit in critical thinking and problems in understanding simple instructions. Also, it causes hindrance to interpreting examination resources given to them, resulting in very poor performance.

Research approach

This study employed a qualitative research approach. In a qualitative research approach, data gathering is dependent on participants explaining their opinions following ‘broad’ and ‘general’ questions asked of them. Shikalepo (2021) points out that “much of the data is rather narrative” (p. 109). Qualitative is a popular methodology (Mohajan, 2018) and is therefore widely used (Williams & Moser, 2019) In most cases, attention is placed on a particular phenomenon, to observe and contextually draw sense out of it using a sample and not a population (Nord et al., 2019).

In qualitative research approach meaning is dictated by the gathered data inductively (Williams & Moser, 2019). Chopra et al. (2018) elaborate that inductive reasoning is when data or examples are used to draw a conclusion. The approach allows room to collect data using “open-ended interviews” to inquire during

research. Interviews were used to gather data in this study. Mohajan (2018) agrees with Barrett and Twycross (2018) that interviews are characteristically friendly to qualitative research. A case study was used in this research to investigate factors that influence pupils’ performance in English second language examination of the NSSCO in Namibia. A case study is a research design that investigates a phenomenon in detail in its natural place (School, 2020; Shikalepo, 2021). However, it is important to ascertain that the boundaries between the phenomenon and the context are not distinct (Pathirana et al., 2020). It uses tools such as interviews, documents, observations, audiovisual or social media information (Creswell & Creswell, 2023) and zoom video conferencing (Archibald et al., 2019) to collect data that create clear context regarding a phenomenon that leads to new perceptions (Shikalepo, 2021).

Population of the study

Asante (2020) explains that “population” refers to a targeted group of people suspected to possess ongoing research data. Kinya and Were (2019) add that a population is a general group on which the study concentrates and relies to assist in making a summary concerning that population using extracted data, and it could be humans or just things. Sang et al. (2021) explains further that a population could also be perceived as “a sampling frame for a list of the population from which a researcher draws a sample,” which may include individuals whom he refers to as “elements of the population” (p. 79).

The population for this study was composed of 1153 (25 principals, 25 language HoDs, 25 NSSCO English 2nd language teachers, 325 school board members, 3 inspectors of education and 750 learners) found in the twenty-four secondary schools across Otjozondjupa region. Seven secondary schools are found in Grootfontein circuit, nine in Otjiwarongo circuit and eight in Okahandja circuit). These participants were purposefully chosen and presumed to possess the information required for this study.

Sampling methodology

A sample is a population segment that a study intends to extract information from (Nanjundeswaraswamy & Divakar, 2021). Sampling, on the other hand, is the process of selecting a subset of the population targeted by the study (Shikalepo, 2021). Mweshi and Sakyi

(2020) clarify further that it is a discrimination exercise that establishes boundaries by excluding the unwanted from the wanted population. It is a pre-requisite and an unavoidable process in academic studies. Scientific research is confined to only two modes of sampling, namely probability sampling and non-probability sampling (Shikalepo, 2020; Mweshi & Pillay, 2021). It is, therefore, safe to deduce that sampling procedures entail the steps adhered to when choosing a method suitable for determining the right sample from an identified population. This study opted to employ a purposive sampling technique, which is encapsulated in a non-probability sampling method. Non-probability sampling, according to Shikalepo (2021), requires the researcher to be exclusively selective of the sample from the marked population. According to Pietilä et al. (2020), purposive sampling is an intentional and decisive technique and is “useful for building an appropriate sample” (p. 47).

The researcher selects a sample of people who have the necessary information to answer the questions. However, those individuals should be familiar with the phenomenon being studied. Johnson et al. (2020) concur with Shikalepo (2021) that non-probability sampling is easy, cheap, and helpful to qualitative research. The sample of this study was composed of 22 participants, of whom 3 were NSSCO English 2nd language teachers, 3 HODs for languages, 3 school principals, 9 learners—three from each of the three focus groups, three school board members, one from each of the three secondary schools in Grootfontein, and 1 inspector of education—were purposefully chosen. These secondary schools are within town and reach in Grootfontein circuit, which proved prudent on resources. Poor performance in the NSSCO English second language was prevalent in the selected schools.

School one had 13.5%, school two 25.6%, and school three 62.5% of the NSSCO English second language learners who obtained E-U in 2020 (NSSCO Statistics, Otjozondjupa region, 2020, 2021, 2022). In 2021, school one had 22.3%, school two had 0.7%, and school three had 3.3%. In 2022, school one had 22.3%, school two had 3.3%, and school three had 0.2% of the learners who obtained E-U symbols

Findings

Below is Table 1 depicting the findings placed into one theme emanating from the collected data.

(NSSCO Statistics Otjozondjupa region, 2020, 2021, 2022). Despite academic performance fluctuations perceived amongst the three selected secondary schools in Grootfontein circuit, the data indicate that poor performance was evident in Grootfontein secondary schools, particularly in NSSCO English as a second language.

Data collection method

Data analysis

Qualitative data was gathered using in-depth face-to-face individual interviews using semi-structured questions. Lester et al. (2020) explain that a universal method of qualitative data analysis does not exist. This signifies that, depending on the dynamism of the study, it is the prerogative and discretion of the researcher to determine the right mode of data analysis. Therefore, this study utilised a thematic analysis of the data. As asserted by Clarke et al. (2020), thematic analysis (TA), is a technique for detecting, examining, and explaining the “patterns of meaning (themes) within qualitative data” (p. 3).

According to Philipsen et al. (2019), this mode of analysis involves examining data to detect “specific patterns, similar, and contrasting ideas contained in the data set, after which it is arranged into appropriate categories” (p. 48). They regard the process as descriptive. Therefore, the gathered data were sorted into categories according to the research questions, examined to detect patterns, described as patterns, and interpreted as such. They also add that thematic analysis is popular among academics and is widely employed, because the themes are conveniently emergent of the collected data as determined by the data gathering instruments used.

Furthermore, Lester et al. (2020) assert that thematic analysis is convenient in qualitative research because it is perceived as “an umbrella term that captures within it a set of very different approaches to analysis” (p. 95). The foregoing agrees with Braun and Clarke (2021, p. 3), who assert that “TA” is compatible with a wide range of research methodologies. They further explain that thematic analysis is easy, orderly, and allows the researcher to be elaborative with data, which makes the “analysis process transparent” (p. 98).

Table:1: Persistent factors influencing learners’ performance in the Namibia Senior Secondary Certificate Ordinary Level English 2nd language.

Theme/s	Sub-themes
1. Persistent factors influencing learners’ performance in the Namibia Senior Secondary Certificate Ordinary Level English 2nd language.	Sub-Theme 1.1: Teacher training institutions and the quality of produced teachers Sub-Theme 1.2: English Across the Curriculum Sub-Theme 1.3: Professional development programs Sub-Theme 1.4: Education policy/Language policy Sub-Theme 1.5: Teacher learner ratio- Overcrowded classes/classrooms Sub-Theme 1.6: Teacher transfer and attrition rate of teachers Sub-Theme 1.7: Teacher motivation Sub-Theme 1.8: Teachers’ unions Sub-Theme 1.9: Lack of career counselling/guidance Sub-Theme 1.10: Background of learners Sub-Theme 1.11: Pedagogical Technology

Discussions

Sub-Theme 1.1: Teacher training institutions and the quality of produced teachers

The HoD from school 1 lamented that: “*Poorly trained or half-baked teachers led to poor performance.*” Teacher 1 from school 3 added that “*the lack of creativity in teachers, amongst which is the inability to create reading corners, brought about poor performance*”. The HoD from school 1 further said that: “*Low-quality teachers were characterised by absenteeism, inability to complete the syllabus, and laziness*”.

In the context of tuition, quality is the extent of excellence in learning and teaching that is acceptable (Marouli, 2021). There are three recognised universities in Namibia, namely the University of Namibia (UNAM), the Namibia University of Science and Technology (NUST), and the International University of Management (IUM). They all supposedly offer diplomas, bachelors, masters, and doctor of philosophy in pedagogical programmes tailored to produce teachers, many of which are already teaching in various secondary schools. The term pedagogy refers to the art of teaching (Burkhanovich, 2020).

While UNAM and IUM produce elementary, intermediate, and secondary-level educators, NUST specialises mostly in science subjects. However, a School Board Chairperson from school 1 stated that: “*My child and many others do not have much notes or summary in*

their exercise books; what do they do every day when they come to school? I think our teachers are not prepared to teach our children”. A School Board Chairperson from school 2 added that: “*During our parent meeting, I asked a question about why certain teachers are found in the staffroom every time I come to school. That is a sign of laziness, but they need to know that they are here to teach our children, and I told the school principal about it*”. A School Board Chairperson from school 3 related that: “*Something is wrong with teachers. Example: How can learners fail a particular subject each year without improvement for many years? Something must be done*”.

Junias et al. (2022) agree with the participants that the quality of teachers produced by these institutions is doubtful and may not be as creative in the classroom. Ankonga (2018) suggests that learner teachers should be strengthened, which according to Burkhanovich (2020) should be achieved by assisting them to master required subject matter, pedagogical skills of their specialisation, and attitudes befitting teachers and moulding them into competent teachers to facilitate quality teaching. Teacher 1 from school 1 adds that: “*Learners are affected by simplified teacher training done online, which produces poor-quality teachers*”.

Therefore, Ilonga et al. (2020) concur with the participants that although online learning, provides access to tertiary education,

poor internet reception and other challenges affect learners' rates of success, thereby compromising the quality of teachers produced. Consequently, destitute or poverty-stricken and helpless learner teachers quit their training, but they end up being appointed as unqualified teachers, while those who manage to finish enter the teaching profession as poor-quality teachers. However, the Inspector of Education asserted that: "*Opportunities to tertiary education are a constitutional right, and each one should be accorded the opportunity to access the services through any possible means, although there are shortcomings involved*". The researcher is of the view that these factors influence the performance of NSSCO English second language learners' academic performance.

Sub-Theme 1.2: English across the curriculum

Teacher 1 from school 1 lamented that: "*NSSCO English second language learners were affected by the failure or inability of teachers to implement English across the curriculum*". Literature explains that English across the curriculum is a method of stressing language skills, including grammar, by all teachers in their various subjects, to enhance the English fluency of the NSSCO English second language learners (Mpofu, 2024). The Inspector of Education commented that: "*The head of department as a specialist should always, if possible, strive to have an advanced understanding of each subject, group of subjects, or phase over which they preside, such as finding out what English across the curriculum is to be able to assist the teachers accordingly to enhance not only the NSSCO English second language academic performance but, that of other subjects, grades, and phases as well*". Participant 1 from school 1 added that: "*Failure to implement English across the curriculum, it gives birth to the NSSCO learners' inability to read with understanding*".

This is why Junias et al. (2022) equally doubt the quality of teachers produced by the universities, confirming the participants' observation that universities produce poor-quality teachers due to poor facilities and modes of pedagogy facilitation that placing learner teachers in compromising situations. As a result, teachers lack expertise to teach English across the curriculum to maximise learners' exposure to English and enhance their proficiency (Mncube et al., 2021). In agreement

with the forgoing observation, the focus group discussions with learners from School 1 shared that: "*Difficult terminologies make reading and comprehension difficult. Some teachers pronounce words differently, which causes a communication barrier. All these make our chances to pass English difficult*".

English across the Curriculum (EAC) is a collective teaching strategy that requires English teachers and those of other subjects to emphasise language skills during lessons so that learners can practice them (Mpofu, 2024). Mpofu (2024) posits that English across the curriculum has been a source of complaints among content teachers as they did not receive its pedagogy during training. This is contrary to the expected skills in the 21st century. The term 21st century skills denotes a composite of advanced problem-solving skills developed through collaboration, technology, and critical thinking to mould the future generation (Bhude, 2021). Thus, the observation by teacher 1 from school 3 was correct when she said that the lack of creativity in teachers, such as setting up reading corners, et cetera, was one of the deficiencies that affected the effective implementation of the NSSC English second language curriculum. Due to lack of reading opportunities, the focus group discussions with learners from School 3 confirmed that: "*Understanding instructions in tests or examinations is a big problem, and we are forced to opt for skimming and scanning, which result in rushing through the materials, which is not enough, and we fail*".

Supposedly, the teacher's ability to be creative provokes the learners' imagination to be innovative to find answers to problems they are immersed in (Cremin et al., 2018). It is therefore reasonable to assume that learners have poor receptive and productive language skills. Ankonga (2018), as quoted by Junias et al. (2022), is of the view that this signals the need for professional development programmes as an antidote.

Sub-Theme 1.3: Professional development programs

The HoD at school 1 regretted that: "*There is a serious lack of mentorship for NSSCO English second language teachers, which further influences poor performance*". In support of the other participant, Teacher 1 from school 1 noted that: "*The lack of career guidance for NSSCO English second language teachers brings about poor performance*". The researcher inferred that, terms such as mentorship and career

guidance hint at a professional development program. A professional development (PD) programme is a needs-tailored programme aimed at sustaining and supplementing pre-service knowledge to enhance the quality of pedagogy due to modifications occurring in the education system (Taylor, 2019; Fatih, 2020). Professional development programmes are usually run by and at schools, universities, teacher resource centres, workshops, conferences, seminars, short courses, e-learning, handouts, and so on as part of the performance management system (Taylor, 2019). It could be perceived that professional development programmes are reactions and strategies to curb unwelcome poor performance in schools. Junias et al. (2022) clarify that it is a form of mentorship, which according to Ankonga (2018) is to improve performance.

The Inspector of Education indicated that: *“The regional directorate has been affected by staff attrition in that many senior education officers transferred to other regions due to personal reasons, one of which is professional growth, such as promotions; hence, organising and facilitating professional development programs has been on hold until such a time when the posts are filled and resources are available. Meanwhile, the school management, particularly the subject specialists—the heads of departments and the subject teachers—should save the situation with their expertise”*.

The HoD from school 2 supported the preceding respondents, as they both deeply regret the lack of continuous professional development programmes. Junias et al. (2022), state that revival and continuous professional development programs help in keeping teachers in shape and the functions of schools on course.

Sub-Theme 1.4: Education policy/Language policy

Teacher 1 from school 1 stated that: *“Learners are affected by the policy that provides for their transfer from one grade to another. By transferring learners, the ministry or government renders itself protective of learners, and such policies bring about poor performance when such learners have not mastered the expected competencies”*. The HoD from school 1 lamented that: *“The teacher-learner ratio and the transfer of teachers lead to poor performance, particularly in the case of the NSSCO English second language”*.

Although these observations might be genuine, the researcher asserts that the policies

that facilitate education are protected and safeguarded by the Constitution of the Republic of Namibia (Stiftung, 2021). Chapter 3 of the Constitution of the Republic of Namibia, in particular, establishes fundamental human rights and freedoms (Stiftung, 2021). Article 20 of the Constitution of the Republic of Namibia grants all persons the right to education, while Article 21 grants fundamental freedom, among others liberty to thoughts, association, freedom to mobility, and execution of any profession (Stiftung, 2021). Therefore, the factors narrated by participants, such as overcrowded classrooms are due to policies that seem tailored to protecting the rights of learners, such as Article 20 of the Constitution of the Republic of Namibia, the transfer of learners and teachers from one school to another within the same town or region or to another region, and the issue of teacher-learner ratio, may be brought about and exacerbated by protective government policies pertaining to education, although some of them, such as death, are natural phenomena.

Worth noting is the fact that, although Namibia is a multilingual country (Norro, 2021), English is the medium of instruction (MOI) from grade 4 through senior secondary grades and universities (Vatilifa et al., 2022). The Inspector of Education explained that: *“The current language policies remain as they are until further notice as they are the consequence of consultation with stakeholders who considered it necessary to have English as the medium of instructions from Grade 4 to 12”*. Norro (2021) reveals, however, that Namibia’s current language policy implements a subtractive, early-exit transitional model because learners cease using their mother tongue as a medium of instruction in grade 3. Consequently, mastery of basic literacy and numeracy skills is interrupted, learners are deprived of effective learning due to insufficient mastery of their mother tongue, and most teaching in English as the medium of instruction becomes teacher-centred, which promotes rote learning. This suggests that learning a foreign language is not effective.

Norro (2021) explains that while it takes a minimum of two years to gain basic interpersonal communication skills (BICS), it will take a learner more than six years to begin to master cognitive academic language proficiency. This means that learners are misguided and therefore struggle to use language skills, which results in a high failure rate. Therefore, reviving the proposal by

Professor David Namwandi, one of the former ministers of education, made in 2014 to lengthen the first language medium of instruction from pre-primary to grade 5 is appropriate. The foregoing will allow learners time to gain competencies in their mother tongue to lay the basis for the easy acquisition of a second language (Tollefson & Tsui, 2018, as cited by Norro, 2021).

Sub-Theme 1.5: Teacher learner ratio: Overcrowded classes/classrooms

The HoD at school 1 indicated that: *“The schools’ teacher-learner ratio used to be 1:30”*. In agreement with the participant, the national notional teacher-learner ratio for senior secondary schools is 1:30 per class (Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture, 2021; Shikalepo, 2020). The HoD observed further that: *“The situation of teacher-learner ratios is currently out of hand and a huge problem at their school”*. She added that: *“At this moment, the school is accommodating between 40 and 50 learners per class”*. The School Principal of school 2 mentioned that: *“The current teacher-learner ratio in my school is unmanageable”*. He went on to say that: *“Almost every class at my school has 40 or more learners”*.

According to the school principal, the situation poses a big challenge when it comes to the equitable distribution of teaching and learning resources, for which principals blamed for poor performance. According to the National Institute for Educational Development (2016) as cited by Haufiku (2022) and Shikalepo (2020), a classroom at senior secondary school is considered overcrowded when the total number of learners in a class is beyond 30 per teacher in Namibia, which concurs with the observation of the participants. The HoD from school 1 suggested that: *“Appointments of teachers should rather be based on the needs of the learners to relieve them from a large, exploitative, and unacceptable teacher-learner ratio because the implementation of the curriculum is made difficult”*.

Overcrowded classes, or overcrowding in classes, on the other hand, is placing more learners than are required in one class and classroom (Haufiku, 2022). A focus group discussion with learners from school 1 mentioned that: *“Our English class has 50 learners, and sharing learning materials disrupts most of our learning time, which is already creating a problem for preparing for examination”*. Focus group discussion with

learners from school 2 indicated that: *“We are between 60 and 65 in our English class, and chaos is always dominating our lesson as the teacher struggles to keep order in the class. Although a few learners are able, may be, to study on their own, many learners need help, and we will not be ready to sit for our examination and get good marks to qualify for admission to universities of our choice”*. A focus group discussion with learners from school 3 added that: *“We are really too many in the class even though we are not able to give the exact number. Chairs, textbooks, and other resources become difficult to share, and the space in the class is hardly available for the teacher to move around. The situation is very bad, and it will cause us to fail our examination”*. Mankgele (2023) explains that teacher-learner ratio or class size denotes the sum total of learners in a class or the sum of learners entrusted to a teacher or learners per teacher per subject (Sartorius von Bach et al., 2022). A School Board Chairperson from school 1 said that: *“The issue of having many learners in one class is very difficult to solve, and sometimes I feel guilty to talk about the high failure rate to the teachers because certain things, like lack of classes, are not their responsibility. The government needs to build more schools to solve the problem”*.

Literature indicates that overcrowding is brought about by enrolling more learners than are required per class (Haufiku, 2022), due to a lack of infrastructure and primary facilities in various parts of the country. A School Board Chairperson from school 2 narrated that: *“Overcrowded classes are common at our school and I believe that it is one of the big problems that caused poor performance among our children. I once mentioned in our parent meeting that if additional schools are not build, we should expect the high failure rate to get worse”*.

The situation could also be caused by merging classes due to a lack of teachers (Shavuka, 2020; Botes et al., 2020), or as a result of teachers transferring to other schools in the same town, region, or other towns and regions, including other ministries (Shavuka, 2020). It is also worsened by a lack of pedagogic materials, mostly brought about by the economic downturn that the state is facing (Shikalepo, 2020). The HoD at school 1 indicated that: *“The poor performance is also influenced by the transfer of teachers to other schools”*.

This means that the issue of

overcrowding in classrooms reported by participants could be further blamed on the attrition rate of teachers. The attrition rate may be perceived as the percentage of teachers whose service was terminated due to retirement, resignation, ill health, or death (Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture, 2021). Due to a lengthy recruitment procedure for replacements, classes are left without teachers and may be merged to make up for the lack of teachers, resulting in overcrowding of classes. Literature adds that the issue is further brought up by a lack of facilities and infrastructure (Tanga et al., 2019). Although the government has done a plausible job of building classrooms to cater for each catchment area since independence, as dictated by the demographic distribution, many schools were initiated and established by the concerned communities. In most cases, available local resources such as sticks, mud, poles, zinc sheets, etc. were used. To cope with the lack of classrooms, a large number of schools used traditional and hired structures, as well as outdoor areas, to offer classes. The scarcity of classrooms and basic services such as water, sanitation facilities, electricity, telephones, and internet connectivity (Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture, 2021) also creates room for overcrowding in classrooms as schools try to cope with a large number of learners.

The Inspector of Education assuredly highlighted that: *“The regional directorate is faced with the scarcity of resources from which it hopes to recover, but we are busy negotiating with the little we have to manage the situation in order to continue providing accessible, quality, and inclusive education and possibly to ensure that the NSSCO learners achieve better grades in the English second language to access admission into universities”*. The HoD from school 1 noted that: *“Managing an overcrowded class is a continuous struggle, which is one of the major factors causing poor performance at NSSCO in English second language, because teachers get no chance to help slow learners at all”*. Teacher 1 from school 1 added that: *“Overcrowded classes is a big problem at our school, particularly now that there is a shortage of resources such as furniture, facilities, et cetera”*.

According to her, overcrowded classes make classroom management difficult, and once that gets out of hand, one can expect nothing but a high failure rate, especially in English as a second language. An overcrowded class is not manageable and discouraging;

learner-centred teaching is made impossible; and resources are overstretched, which disrupts effective teaching and learning (Haufiku, 2022; Botes et al., 2020). The situation results in low morale among teaching staff, poor performance among teachers, and ultimately poor academic performance by learners, particularly in the second language of the NSSCO final examination. By extension, the issue of automatic progression from grade 10 to 11 contributes to overcrowded classrooms as learners who were supposed to repeat grade 10 are effortlessly moved to grade 11 whether they failed or passed (Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture, 2018; Iimene, 2018). Other consequences associated with overcrowded classes are poor individual attention to learners, encouraging dodging of lessons amongst the learners, dropouts, and absenteeism (Haufiku, 2022). The participants, such as the HoD from school one and teacher 1 from school 1, lamented that the foregoing paints a picture of protective government policies that fuel the phenomenon of overcrowded classrooms in Namibia, which contributes to poor performance.

Shavuka (2020) warns that such factors cause low teacher morale, which compels teachers to transfer to other schools. As a result, the teachers left behind become few, a situation that forces schools to merge classes to bring about control while making it hard for teachers to handle the large population of learners, which leads to overcrowded classrooms. The Teacher from school 1 expressed that: *“Overcrowded classes, amidst a lack of furniture, is the big problem that leads to poor performance”*. Therefore, literature indicates that the situation of overcrowding could be manageable if the provision and quality of facilities were improved so that each learner could have the necessary resources to reduce stress on learners, teachers, and facilities (Haufiku, 2022).

Additionally, each learner should be encouraged, assisted, and expected to satisfy the basic competencies of grade 10 to qualify for promotion to grade 11 (Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture, 2018). On top of that, enhanced facilities, both in quality and quantity, might help mitigate the overcrowding in classrooms (Stiftung, 2018; Iimene, 2018). Among others, improved salaries, incentives, and the school climate and culture would ultimately improve the morale of the teachers and curb transfer to other schools (Shavuka, 2020).

Sub-Theme 1.6: Transfer and attrition rate of teachers

The attrition rate in the teaching profession is the number of teachers who end their teaching career due to unavoidable occurrences such as retirement, resignation, ill health, and death (Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture, 2021). On the other hand, the transfer rate could be defined as the number of teachers who taught at another school in the previous year (Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture, 2021). The School Principal from school 3 related that: *“I lost two teachers to transfer and three to retirement, and getting new appointees takes time”*. He further added that: *“The skills and dedication of the new teachers might be a large gap below those of the retired teachers, which affects the performance of learners in English as a second language at NSSCO”*. A School Board Chairperson from school 3 added that: *“Even when the post is advertised upon the departure of the transferring teacher, it takes too long for the post to be filled, and this is how our children fail because they stay without teachers for a long time”*.

The study deduces that the transfer of teachers to other schools was one of the factors that affected the academic performance of learners in the NSSCO English second language examinations. The HoD from school 1 also revealed that: *“The current NSSCO English teacher is to be transferred to Rundu. This means that one has to combine the classes left behind as the timetable cannot allow dealing with each class separately. Learners change teachers in the middle of the year, and it affects their performance. I am sure that if we manage to get a teacher, it will be an underqualified relief teacher, which will make the situation worse. Teachers should remain with the learners for the entire year and transfer only at the beginning of the following year to allow for the completion of the scheme of work”*. Shavuka (2020) confirms the observation of the participant by noting that the transfer of teachers is prevalent and the Oshana region lost at least 250 teachers in 2015, either to other regions or professions, as a result of low morale among teachers.

Although focus group discussions with learners from school 2 and school 3 lost teachers to transfer in other subjects, focus group from school 1 said: *“We were informed that our English teacher is transferring to Rundu, and we did not do much to be ready to sit for our examination. We are really going to fail, because so far we do not know when we are*

getting a new teacher”. The transfer of teachers from one school to another is also observed in America (Moris, 2019; Shavuka, 2020). Unhealthy school climate and school culture, strict school leadership, bad behaviour of learners, curriculum change, poor wages, a lack of incentives, and a lack of motivation are also among the factors causing low teacher morale (Shavuka, 2020). A School Board Chairperson from school 1 said that: *“The transferring of teachers to other schools is killing the future of our children’s careers. I want to know whether all schools allow their teachers transferred at the rate as our school does, because we lose good teachers in exchange for the careers of our children”*. In addition to the transfer of teachers to other schools, poor performance and a negative staff would ultimately influence the performance of learners negatively (Shavuka, 2020). Therefore, implementing teacher motivation programmes, awarding performing teachers, and involving teachers in decision-making and/or policy formulation to give them a sense of ownership would raise the morale of the teachers, which would result in good academic performance (Shavuka, 2020).

The Inspector of Education indicated that: *“The directorate is cognisant of the effect motivation has on teachers, hence has been hosting regional awards each year to appreciate not only the teachers that performed well but also their schools in general. Hopefully, this exercise will sustain the zeal of teachers to be determined to achieve good performances in their subject specialisation and to also encourage others to apply themselves to come on board as well as keep quality teachers in the region to enhance the performance of the region to compete with other regions nationwide.”* With the exception of retirements of staff members and resignations, ill health and death are unforeseeable factors that result in the leaving of schools and learners without teachers. This means that certain subjects are left untaught, including English as a second language, for a considerable period of time, resulting in poor performance during the NSSCO final examination.

As a strategy, the transfer of teachers has now been subjected to strict procedures (Ministry of Education, 2006). They ought to write a letter to request a transfer or send a completed application for employment to the directorate or region where the desired advertised post exists and wait for approval from the director of education (Ministry of Education, 2006). However, Mwelwa (2019)

argues that the issue of transfer exists in Zambia too and comes in many forms, such as a change in management style and relocating extramural activities to teachers from year to year. He says such practices ought to be followed up with professional development programmes to prevent the negative effect of teacher transfers (Mwelwa, 2019).

Sub-Theme 1.7: Teacher motivation

Teacher 1 from school 3 mentioned that: *“Teachers are not motivated due to misbehaviour of learners and a lack of teaching and learning materials, to mention but a few”*. Focus group discussion with learners from school 1 indicated that: *“Some schoolmates make noise during lessons and do not carry out the teachers’ instructions, such as participate in group work, which takes up our learning time”*. The focus group discussion with learners from school 2 added that: *“At our school we have learners who fight with teachers, and the teachers are scared to come to classes to teach us”*. The focus group discussion with learners from school 3 revealed further that: *“Some learners do not have manners as they disrespect the teachers by talking to them like they would talk to a peer and threaten to beat them up in the location after school”*.

Supplementing the participant’s view, literature elaborates that unhealthy school climate and school culture, strict school leadership, bad behaviour of learners, curriculum change, poor wages, and a lack of incentives are also among the factors causing a lack of motivation and low teacher morale (Shavuka, 2020). The Inspector of Education explained that: *“Schools have structures such as the management, which consists of the school principal, the head of departments, teachers, administrative officers, cleaners and learners and then you get the school board, which is there to govern and help develop the school. As far as the motivation of teachers is concerned, although creating a conducive environment is imperative, each one should primarily be motivated to execute their job description to achieve the bigger picture, which is the provision of accessible, quality, and inclusive education to the learners”*.

On the contrary, Shavuka (2020) stresses that a happy or motivated teacher is productive compared to an unhappy and demotivated teacher. Just as teachers in Turkey do not experience professional satisfaction (Fatih, 2020), many teachers in Namibia are demotivated because of low salaries,

unconducive schools, poor supervision, and a lack of job satisfaction, which could be improved by assisting teachers to have a sense of achievement, giving them responsibilities, and receiving recognition (Shavuka, 2020). A School Board Chairperson from school 1 said that: *“Our school is one of the most underperforming schools in our region, and I know it will be difficult to get a regional award. However, I have never seen one of them awarded at school level during the prize giving ceremony of the learners because there are some teachers doing a good job and they feel demoralised if not recognised”*. Other factors resulting in the demotivation of teachers are a lack of infrastructure and facilities, which make teaching and learning difficult. Literature suggests that, among other things, improved wages, incentives, and an improved working environment will improve the morale of the teachers and discourage them from transferring to other schools (Shavuka, 2020).

Sub-Theme 1.8 Teachers’ unions

The Principal from school 2 observed that: *“Amidst poor performance in English as a second language in NSSCO, teachers cannot be held accountable due to a protective union”*. For instance, she explained that: *“Teachers do not work eight hours any longer but limit themselves to five hours, which is from 07:00 AM. to 13:00 PM”*. She added that: *“Teachers threatened to report school principals to trade unions such as the Namibia National Teachers’ Union (NANTU)”*.

The employer, which is the Ministry of Education whose expectations they implement, would not protect them against the union once they had been reported. Therefore, she perceived that the union is also a contributing factor standing in their way, making it very difficult for the school management to ensure accountability from the teachers as far as the current failure rate is concerned. A trade union is a formally established and recognised group to whom the employees affiliate, which maintains the relationship between their members and their employers or the representatives of their employers (Libebe & Warikandwa, 2022).

In Namibia, there are many trade unions, namely the Namibia National Teachers’ Union (NANTU), the National Union of Namibian Workers (NUNW), the Trade Union Congress of Namibia (TUCNA), the Namibia National Labour Organisation (NANLO), etc. (Libebe & Warikandwa, 2022). The focus of this study is

on the Namibia National Teachers' Union (NANTU), to which the majority of teachers belong as compared to that of NUNW, TUCNA and NANLO (Libebe & Warikandwa, 2022). The establishment of teachers' unions emerged in the 1900s (Bhude, 2021). While the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) gives a right to form a trade union (Libebe & Warikandwa, 2022), Article 21(1)(e) of the Namibian Constitution (Stiftung, 2021) and the International Labour Organisation (ILO) (Libebe et al., 2022) safeguard the citizens' freedom of association and protection of their rights to organise conventions (Stiftung, 2021; Libebe & Warikandwa, 2022). Just like in African countries such as Namibia and South Africa, countries of other continents, such as Africa, Australia, Asia, and the USA, also have their own trade unions (Bhude, 2021). Although there are somewhat dissatisfactions of services to their members (Libebe & Warikandwa, 2022), trade unions act as agencies to bargain for better pay and improve the working conditions of their members as a form of addressing inequality in society (Compton & Weiner, 2008). They also represent their resistance to change by challenging the employer's laws, policies, and regulations used in schools, thereby weakening the employer in the process (Bascia & Osmond, 2012).

Bhude (2021) argues that teachers' unions are hypocritical because, while they appear to work in partnership with the employer (Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture) at one point, particularly when acting in the interest of their members, they oppose when their interests are threatened. Sadly, the school Principal of school 2 observed that: *"The learners' academic performance worsens each year due to the influence of the NANTU union that protect teachers"*. Conversely, the Inspector of Education stated that: *"Realising our core duties as teachers, which are to facilitate quality learning and adhering to the code of conduct, will help schools excel their performance, not only in the NSSCO English second language, which we so much yearn to achieve, but also in others, including non-promotional subjects. Our stakeholders, such as NANTU and others, should rather support and make things easier for the education industry in order for us to enhance not only the academic performances but also the society in general"*.

According to Ithindi et al. (2020), absenteeism increases among teachers, and they deliberately choose not to complete the syllabus

because the managers' hands are tied up. Participants indicated that NANTU breeds unprofessionalism among its members, which leads to the mistreatment of the client, the learners, and the ministry as the employer, which perpetuates a high academic failure rate, particularly in the NSSCO English second language.

Sub-Theme 1.9 Lack of career counselling/guidance

The principal from school 1 suggested that the teachers should motivate the learners, and universities should be invited by recommendation from the regional office to come to school and give motivational speeches to motivate the learners. Such programmes would provide career guidance, motivate the learners, and help them understand the purpose of education. Additionally, Teacher 1 from school 3 realised that: *"Learners lacked career guidance, which causes a serious lack of drive or motivation as they do not know what they want to become, which could be a motivating factor"*. She advised that: *"University officials and students of various faculties should be organised to visit secondary schools to give some career guidance and motivation to the learners, more especially the NSSCO learners"*.

Furthermore, the Principal of school 1 noted that: *"Secondary schools are not equipped to offer career guidance to learners and thus need the assistance of universities"*. As a result, learners do not realise the purpose of schooling and consequently find the transition from school to university and employment a challenge (Kettel et al., 2020). Focus group discussion with learners from school 1 asserted that: *"We only had a lesson about career guidance once in Grade 10, but not much to know what it is really all about"*. The focus group discussion with learners from school 2 added that: *"We have not had any lesson regarding careers and do not know the different careers that are out there"*.

However, the focus group discussion with learners from school 3 stated that: *"We had a lesson on career in trimester one, but not really enough for one to know all that is needed for each career. Once we leave school, it will be hard for us to know where to go, and this is very scary"*. As opposed to the preceding counterpart who did not receive career guidance, those who receive career guidance and counselling are able to achieve stable careers because they reduce their career choices (Otwine et al., 2022). The Inspector of

Education explained that: *“Counselling and career guidance is the custodian of the life skills teachers and they should live up to their responsibility to ensure that learners are guided to know the range of careers are there for them to make informed choices in preparation for life after school, such as seeking admission into tertiary institutions”*. Literature reveal that career counselling is a pedagogical plan whose activities encompass exposure to knowledge and skills to raise awareness with the purpose of helping learners choose the right careers (Dodd et al., 2022). For secondary schools, it would consist of occupational awareness, career discovery, and a career execution plan (Hai et al., 2022). However, such activities cannot materialise without facilities, expertise, and social relations (Otwine et al., 2022), which the ministry faces now (Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture, 2021).

It is therefore advisable that teachers be capacitated to facilitate career guidance and counselling (Kettel et al., 2020) through internal programmes such as special career days and class careers to improve performance (Otwine et al., 2022). However, these activities cannot succeed if parents are not sensitised about them to be involved and assist the schools in controlling learners’ negative attitudes and poor cooperation (Otwine et al., 2022).

Sub-Theme 1.10 Background of learners

The HoD from school 2 explained that: *“A lack of financial support is another big problem”*. According to her, *“Many learners do not have necessities such as pens to write with as a consequence of their background, and the school has to improvise for them at all times, which affects their academic performance in the NSSCO English second language”*. The school Principal from school 3 added that: *“The majority of our parents and guardians didn’t have good educational backgrounds, so they find it difficult to help their children with academic work”*. She added that: *“When they have parent meetings, the parents who mostly don’t attend meetings are those of the struggling learners”*. Furthermore, Teacher 3 from school 2 mentioned that: *“Lack of parental involvement is another problem, as there is no encouragement from them at all”*. On top of that, she said that: *“Their meeting attendance is always very poor”*.

The researcher is compelled to deduce that those were signs of a poor educational background in the family. The researcher deduced further that participants’ comments

alluded to the background of learners, such as their socioeconomic situation, mother tongue influence, lack of role model, misconceptions about English, and lack of motivation, as well as environmental influence. The school principal of school 3, the HoD from school 2, and teacher 3 from school 3 indicated that while many parents hardly afford to buy learning materials for their children, the mother tongue influence makes it hard for learners to master English as they speak quite a bit of their home language. They added that the majority of them did not have parents with a good amount of education as models to look up to, resulting in a lack of motivation. On top of that, the participants explained that the environment where the learners residing and where the schools are located had also factors perpetuating poor performance in the second language.

A School Board Chairperson from school 1 added that; *“Many of our parents have no jobs to support even themselves, and this makes it more difficult to think about our children who need help with school-related needs. It is a very bad situation, but we pray that each one of us tries to do even little things like buy a pencil, which will make a difference in learners’ performance”*. A School Board Chairperson from school 2 explained that: *“I know some of the parents receive social grants from the Ministry of Gender, Equality and Social Welfare, but I have also seen that some situations are so difficult to deal with that the parents chose to buy only food for the children to at least have something to eat when they are back from school. Although the majority fail their examinations”*. A School Board Chairperson from school 3 added that: *“Some parents who receive the social grants from the Ministry of Gender, Equality and Social Welfare on behalf of the children at our school do not live with the children while the learners have school needs such as lunch boxes when they come to school or tax money for daily travel to and from school, and the situation is much more difficult to deal with than we think, and it results in learners failing their examinations”*.

According to Hai et al. (2022), the background of the learners is rooted in the cultural traditions of the community and their perceptions thereof. They explain that a hard-working community with a keen interest in education supports schools in various ways, including involving themselves in the education of their children, and ultimately produces hardworking learners who pass academically

well, graduate from universities and secure jobs as productive citizens and human capital to enhance the country. Focus group discussion with learners from school 1 related that: *“All of us live in the informal settlement with no electricity, which makes studying after school, especially in the evening after resting, very difficult. Although some of our parents understand, many will not have means to support our efforts, and this situation leads us to fail our exams”*. Confirming the participants’ view, literature adds that, like in Uganda, a country in east-central Africa, many children in Namibia come from financially challenged families, and thus their involvement in the education of their children is minimal in many aspects (Otwine et al., 2022). Focus group discussion with learners from school 3 explained that: *“With the exception of one of us, the rest of us walk in rain, winter, heat, windy and dusty weather with our books in plastic backs. The situation is very difficult to relate to at the moment, but we hope for the best”*.

Otwine et al. (2022) add that hardship situation places learners in a position where they lack a career model from home and the surrounding environment, resulting in demotivation. Focus group discussion with learners from school 2 described their situation as: *“Our parents cannot speak English, although they want us to achieve the best, but they cannot help us with school work, especially with English at home; there is no phone or airtime to call the teacher for explanations, and most of the time we are hungry and have no energy to study”*. Mncube et al. (2021) elaborate that for these children, mastering English is an ongoing challenge as the involvement of their parents and/or guardians is compromised by low literacy or low educational backgrounds. They add that for such learners, learning English in class alone is not sufficient contact to speed up the learning and acquisition of English as a second language and do well in final examinations (Mncube et al., 2021).

The report by Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture (2021) indicates a serious lack of physical facilities, also indicates that some children walk long distances to and from school, which implicates the environment or catchment area as one of the factors influencing learners’ performance. This denotes that tiredness and discouragement, harsh weather conditions during rainy seasons, and winter are inevitable, leading to absenteeism and dropping out, which consequently influence their performance in English as a second language in NSSCO. The

Inspector of Education acknowledged the challenges faced by learners but added that: *“The Regional Directorates have implemented school feeding programs in schools to ensure daily food security for those learners that emerge from insecure households to keep learners in schools for tuition purposes to enhance their performances”*. Alhamad (2018) indicates that the situation of the background of learners is equally discouraging to teachers, resulting in compromised quality education, more especially in NSSCO English as a second language.

Sub-Theme 1.11 Pedagogical Technology

Teacher 1 from school 1 asserts that: *“Dysfunctional computer laboratories and, generally, a lack of technology in the school contribute to poor learner performance in English as a second language as online teaching materials for NSSCO cannot be accessed”*. She added that: *“The situation is quite demotivating for teachers”*. In support of the remark of the foregoing participant, the HoD from school 1 said that: *“Our school has only one laptop, which is used mostly by the school management”*. She added that: *“This lack of technological equipment makes teaching difficult in this era, especially in the NSSCO English second language”*.

On top of that, the Teacher from school 3 explained that: *“Lack of teaching materials, even the means to access those that were readily available on the internet in general, influenced the performance of learners in English as a second language”*. She related that: *“The Ministry did not supply the schools with the teaching aids suggested in the syllabus, and English teachers found it difficult to access them to prepare and deliver quality lessons to the learners”*. As a result, learners were not well prepared for NSSCO examinations, and they failed. The Principal for school 3 added that: *“My school has only one laptop”*. As a result of that, *“It gets difficult to control the usage of cell phones by teachers during lessons, which leads to lack of teaching by some teachers as they get distracted by social media”*. The Principal for school 3 further said that: *“Understandably, teachers sometimes are forced to use their cell phones to show videos to try to bring technology into their teaching, but even that, those teachers use their own data to access teaching materials because internet connection is limited to the administration block, even if the laptops were available”*. He concluded that: *“One is really constrained in terms of English curriculum*

implementation”.

Participants expressed regrets for the unavailability of pedagogical technology to enhance English 2nd language teaching and learning and improve learners’ performance in NSSCO. They pointed out that schools had no computers, internet connections, overhead projectors, etc. They argued that traditional teaching in the 21st century requires the integration of suitable technological tools to supplement it and ensure that learners are exposed to and motivated to learn.

Focus group discussion with learners from school 1 explained that: *“Although our English teacher has created a WhatsApp group to share the materials and assignments, none of us here with us have a cell phone to access them”*. The focus group discussion with learners from school 2 added that: *“One of us has a cell phone, but she only uses it during certain periods and most of the time the internet is off, which makes it more demotivating”*. The focus group discussion with learners from school 3 unpacked that: *“The Grade 11 learners of last year used the computer library, which has computers, and the internet was fine, but the computers are being used for computer classes only due to poor internet accessibility. This situation is really difficult, especially in English, where we need a lot of materials to read to prepare for the examination, and it is a challenge to pass”*.

Confirming their opinions, Altun and Khurshid (2021) add that curriculum developers should integrate technology into curriculum for teachers to be prepared to integrate Information and Communication Technology into teaching and learning because it has become part of our lives. Teaching with technology pertains to the usage of media tools such as machines, the internet, software, etc. that are compatible with the teaching and learning objectives of a curriculum (Prayudi et al., 2021; Al-Sharqi & Abbasi, 2020). Among others, pedagogical technology includes such information technology as television, computers, sound systems, etc. It also includes applications (technological applications that could be downloaded by the user) such as Quipper School, Academic Group, e-book, Google Classroom, YouTube, Twitter, podcasting, Skype, etc. that could be used for teaching and learning (Prayudi et al., 2021). For example, having access to YouTube means teachers and learners could use computers, laptops, and mobile phones to teach and learn components of English to advance accents, language skills,

vocabulary, and pronunciations using downloaded videos (Prayudi et al., 2021; Al-Sharqi & Abbasi, 2020).

A School Board Chairperson from school 1 replied that: *“I agree that the world is changing and everybody, including some young children from rich families, has cell phones, but the majority of our children from our school are coming from poor backgrounds to afford the technology items”*. A School Board Chairperson from school 2 added that: *“Although the idea is good and it is true we need to keep up with time, the majority of the children who perform academically poor are those with cell phones or have access to the internet, which means that the bad parts of using technology items are also many and make me fear”*. A School Board Chairperson from school 3 said that: *“Children know how to use technology such as YouTube, WhatsApp, and most of teenage pregnancy nowadays is happening because they are reachable by their boyfriends in our own houses and still lead to poor performance”*.

The School Board Members from schools 1, 2, and 3 are against the possession of cell phones by the children owing to the fact that while they could use them for academic purposes, they misuse them in manners that could cease their school career, such as getting friends, which may be a distraction, and even involving themselves in relationships with boyfriends that could lead to teenage pregnancy. However, literature emphasises that using technologies to implement the curriculum fits well with learner-centred teaching methodology, is fun and motivating, and creates a context for improved knowledge retention (Prayudi et al., 2021; Al-Sharqi & Abbasi, 2020; Altun & Khurshid, 2021; Altun & Khurshid, 2021). The Inspector of Education stated that: *“Schools are encouraged to prioritise, purchase technology items yearly, and introduce pedagogical technology to supplement the teaching media they have and their teaching methodologies to enhance academic performances”*.

Considering the fact that each learner is unique, using ICT to teach English as a second language at NSSCO makes it easier for the teachers to plan accordingly to meet the needs of each of them (Altun & Khurshid, 2021). It is worth adding that ICT gives learners autonomy and improves interactions between them and their teachers, creating a context of maximum exposure to English as a second language (Altun & Khurshid, 2021). However, while

teaching and learning technology encourages creativity and autonomy among learners, internet users are bound to experience attention deficiency and addiction as distractions (Al-Sharqi & Abbasi, 2020). However, a good number of schools in Namibia do not have facilities and basic services, i.e., electricity, telephones, and access to internet connectivity (Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture, 2021).

Conclusion

This study investigated the factors influencing learners' performance in English second language of the NSSCO in Namibia, through the lens of Larsen-Freeman's complex dynamic systems theory. The study found that the context is dynamic due to the complexity and diversity of factors. Literature revealed that poorly established physical facilities and infrastructure, as well as a lack of quality human resources, create an unfavorable environment that breeds poor performance at NSSCO in English 2nd language final examinations.

Additionally, the study brought to light that some factors are inherent to the education system, such as failure to provide curricular materials, automatic promotion of failures, and policies that permit unqualified heads of departments to take charge of the language department. Furthermore, some factors are inevitable, such as the background of learners whose vernacular dominates English as a second language. Participants explained that, amongst others, the disconcerting phenomenon of underperformance among learners is also attributed to the incompetent teachers produced by the local universities. They related that such teachers fail to facilitate English across the curriculum and require regular professional development. It was added that the current language policy, which requires pre-mature migration from the mother tongue, creates grounds for underperformance among learners in the English 2nd language at NSSCO. They further indicated that overcrowded classes, sudden transfers and attrition of teachers, and poor working conditions that create poor morale among teachers worsen the phenomenon.

On top of that, they explained that protective teachers' unions, a lack of career counselling and guidance for learners, the compromised background of learners, and a lack of technology for the English classes are among the chief factors influencing poor performance in the English 2nd language at NSSCO in the final examination in Namibia.

Recommendations

The study recommends as follows, based on the empirical discoveries made through literature and explanations from the participants:

- By virtue of Article 20 paragraph (2) of the Namibian constitution, the ministry should live up to its expectations to provide for the physical facilities and infrastructure as well as basic services across the country in line with the educational needs of the 21st century. This will create a conducive learning environment and attract quality, qualified teachers to enhance the performance of learners in English as a second language in the NSSCO final examination.
- Local universities should improve their service delivery modes to ensure learners' needs are satisfied to produce quality, qualified teachers for the provision of quality education upon completion.
- Learners should undergo a comprehensive induction programme at the onset so as to be oriented to the various aspects of their course to prepare for their academic journey and should be given age-appropriate career guidance and counselling.
- Parents should be sensitised through meetings about their responsibilities to enhance their involvement in the education of their children.

Area of further research

This study zoomed into the factors influencing the performance of learners in English as a second language in the NSSCO final examination. It is recommended that:

- A similar study should be carried out at NSSAS and lower levels to find out the state of learners' performance in English as a second language to create a holistic picture at senior grades.
- Research should be conducted on the creation of course materials for career guidance and counselling in English across the curriculum and their integration into teacher training programs. These will not only capacitate teachers but also enhance the performance of the learners in English as a second language at NSSCO and ensure an easy transition from school to universities and job markets.
- An investigation should be done on the ideal English 2nd language of the 21st century and

age-appropriate pedagogical technology to improve learner-centred education to facilitate efficient and effective English 2nd language learning and acquisition for learners of all backgrounds.

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