

## Student teachers' perceptions of teaching listening and responding during COVID-19: A case of Junior Primary Oshindonga and Oshikwanyama languages at a selected campus of the University of Namibia

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### Abstract

*Teaching strategies for listening and responding skills online can be difficult for teachers, student teachers, and learners, as each is expected to contribute in a practical and relevant way. The purpose of this study was to explore Junior Primary (JP) student teachers' perceptions of teaching listening and responding through online or blended mode during COVID-19 pandemic. This was a qualitative case study which utilized the focus group interview and document analysis (students' assignments). The data were gathered from the Bachelor of Education (Honours) second, third and fourth year Junior Primary student teachers at one of the University of Namibia campuses. The results revealed that teaching online was doable but there were several challenges which needed attention such as teachers', learners' and parents' ICT skills, availability of internet infrastructures, access to compatible gadgets, insufficient funds to data loading, unmanageable number of learners per teacher (teacher-learner ratio) and many more. In addition, some participants were pleased with the teaching and learning activities during COVID-19 lockdown, such as the videos, audios, and others that might be used repeatedly depending on the needs of the learners. The study recommended that computer literacy subject should be made mandatory in schools from Junior Primary phase to Secondary phase. In order to promote the integration of technology into teaching and learning, the Ministry of Education should make sure that all institutions of higher education and the teachers in the system receive training on how to use different technological tools to teach listening and responding.*

**Keywords:** listening, responding, audio-visual, students' perceptions, online teaching, junior primary, COVID-19

### Introduction

Listening and responding are fundamental skills that include the ability to understand accurately and respond effectively to both spoken and unspoken thoughts, feelings, and concerns of others in everyday circumstances. Specifically, listening is a process that includes listening to language sounds and visual aspects, identifying, interpreting, valuing, and reacting to meaning content (Surayatika, 2017). Before COVID-19, teaching listening and responding skills happened face to face. However, with the emerging COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns, teaching and learning shifted to online mode. Teaching strategies for listening skills via online requires modern approaches, whereby teachers must think and select appropriate listening materials and activities to meet learners' needs and conditions (Nurkhamidah, 2021). In fact, listening and responding in Oshindonga and Oshikwanyama as first languages in some schools in Namibia was not exceptional to online learning mode. In real life, everyone is either an eye-watcher or a mouth-watcher when talking to people. However, this was not

possible during COVID-19 lockdown.

In higher education, online learning is not a new model of teaching and learning unlike in some schools in Namibia, however; young learners are considered as digital natives who live and coexist with technology, they are required to master digital competence (Puluhulawa et al., 2021). Thus, our teachers and all education stakeholders should keep on exposing and advancing their ICT skills through refreshing in-service trainings and workshops in order not to delay the 21<sup>st</sup> century and other generations to the desired and demanding skills. Oshindonga and Oshikwanyama first language syllabus outlined the essential components that need to be considered when teaching the first language: listening and responding, speaking, and communicating, reading, and viewing, writing, language structure, grammar and language usage (Ministry of Education, 2014). Oshindonga and Oshikwanyama are some of the Namibian languages of instruction at Junior Primary schools. Therefore, student teachers majoring in Oshindonga and Oshikwanyama in

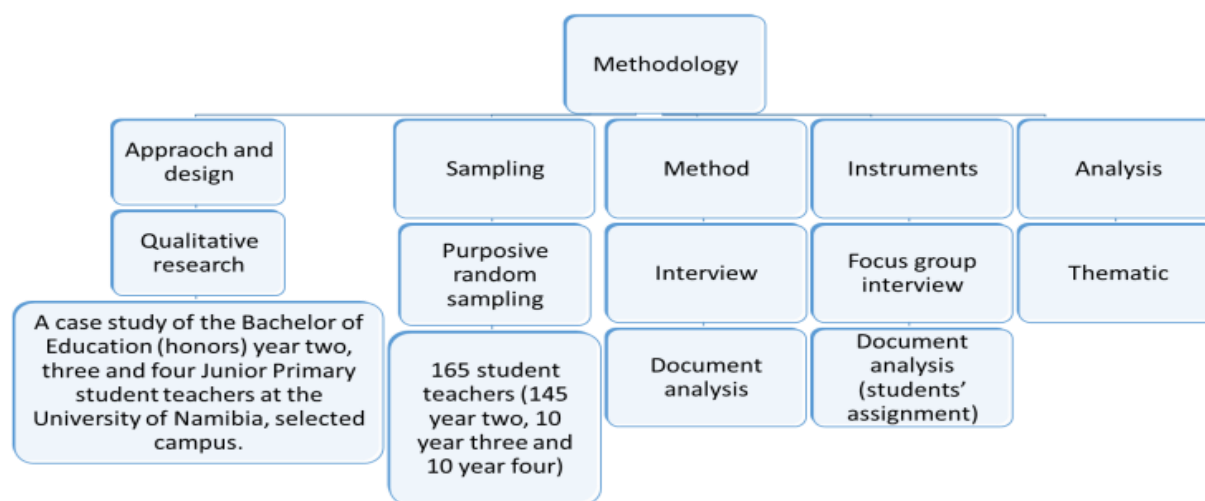
Junior Primary at the University of Namibia are expected to master the mentioned essential components upon completion of their studies for effective teaching and learning of the two languages. Surayatika (2017) emphasized that listening is a fundamental skill under receptive skills that plays a vital role in speaking. Also, listening is essential for language learning because it offers the auditory information necessary for the development of new vocabulary and allows pupils to engage in spoken interaction (Sharma, 2011). According to Kholida (2016) authentic audio and audio-visual learning materials that can be applied in listening classes include TV news, radio, YouTube, Facebook, WhatsApp, and video. Since this shift to online teaching and learning is new to both teachers and learners at Junior Primary school level, and all phases in some schools and higher education institutions in Namibia and elsewhere in the world, this is what made the authors interested in conducting

research about the student teachers' perceptions on teaching strategies of listening and responding through online mode, during the COVID-19 pandemic. The authors sought to explore the Junior Primary (JP) student teachers' perceptions on teaching listening and responding through online or blended mode during the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Research questions**

This study aimed at answering the following research questions:

1. What are the student teachers' perceptions on teaching listening and responding skills online in Junior Primary phase during COVID-19?
2. What strategies can be used in Junior Primary grades when teaching listening and responding skills through distance mode during COVID-19?



**Figure 1: The research methods and design**

**Approach and design**

This was a qualitative case study, which was conducted through a focus group interview and document analysis (students' written assignments). Participants in this study were the Bachelor of Education (Honours) second, third and fourth year Junior Primary student teachers at a selected campus of the University of Namibia. The study's total participants were 165 student teachers (145 second year, 10 third year and 10 fourth year). The group of 20 student teachers who took part in the focus group interview, each comprising 10 participants were from third and fourth year respectively. About 145 student teachers took part in completing the written assignment

(document analysis) in groups of 4 members each.

**Sampling and sampling procedure**

The participants were selected using purposive random sampling method. The sampling of participants for the written assignment included all 145- second year Bachelor of Education (Honours) Junior Primary student teachers doing the following modules: LOP3600 Oshindonga Language Education and LWP3600 Oshikwanyama Language Education, offered in Oshindonga and Oshikwanyama at Junior Primary school level. The second-year students were purposively

sampled because the modules LOP3600/LWP3600 covered the listening and responding content. The student teachers were divided into groups of 4 which gave the total of about 36 groups. Focus group interview participants were sampled randomly from all the third- and fourth-year student teachers who had been away for School Based Studies (SBS) during COVID-19 lockdown and they had done the listening and responding module when they were in their second year.

### ***Research methods and instruments***

The data were obtained by using interviews (focus group) and document analysis (student teachers' written assignment) as the research methods of data collection. The interview guide was used to collect data from the third- and fourth-year student teachers focusing on their perceptions and strategies used when presenting listening and responding skills through online mode during COVID-19. However, the second-year student teachers' written assignment task was used as document to inform the investigation on strategies that might be used when teaching listening and responding skills at Junior Primary school phase through online mode during COVID-19 lockdown.

### ***Data collection procedure***

The process of data collection took place during the second semester at the selected campus of the University of Namibia. The focus group interviews lasted about 1 hour and 30 minutes, while the assignment was completed over two weeks. Focus group interviews were used to gather data from ten third-year and ten fourth-year student teachers in two sessions. The document analysis was done through the group work written assignment which covered the listening and speaking module content and aligned to the pandemic situation of COVID-19.

### ***Data analysis***

Data collected in this study were analysed qualitatively using thematic analysis.

### ***Ethical considerations***

The University of Namibia's ethical committee gave approval to carry out the study. Participants were fully informed of the exact purposes and procedures of the research. The researchers obtained the voluntarily informed consent of every prospective participant. Participants were informed that they were free

to withdraw from the study at any time without any negative consequences. Participants were guaranteed that their identity would not be reflected in any report, anonymity and confidentiality would be observed, by using pseudonyms. The participants' permission was obtained to audio record the group interview and it was not denied. The data were securely stored in the password protected computer folder. The recordings would be destroyed after about 5 years.

### ***Results and discussions***

This section contained the analysis of the data collected from the focus group interview and the document analysis. The findings from the two instruments provided information for the four themes formulated from the study's main research questions. The four themes were: Student teachers' perceptions of teaching listening and responding skills online, Strategies used when teaching listening and responding skills online, Effectiveness of the strategies used and Challenges encountered when teaching listening and responding skills online.

#### ***Student teachers' perceptions of teaching listening and responding skills online***

The participants' responses from the interview showed that schools were not supposed to close at all, due to the nature of listening and responding skills that required face to face interactions in everyday lessons but to enforce and monitor preventative measures to curb the spread of COVID-19. *"Mmh, I believe it was challenging to teach listening and responding online. Face-to-face interactions between the teacher and learners were necessary. Because there is no live interaction during COVID-19, some learners may become distracted. One could argue that perhaps schools were not supposed to close"* (fourth year participant). The participants agreed with Susilowati (2020) who stated that listening is considered as one of the difficult skills in any language and it is not easy to make such kind of online learning for listening class with insufficient preparation.

In addition, some participants viewed that some learners would find it difficult to learn better and meaningfully on shifting modes of teaching and learning from face to face to online, as their concentration would be affected by family members' interactions or any distractions from the environment. *"You know, formal and structured learning could not be possible in the children's home*

environment. A variety of distractions, such as family members giving children different home tasks and other environmental distractions, might make it difficult for certain children to focus” (third year participant). A study by Robingatin et al. (2021) emphasized that language skills in youngsters can be enhanced through online learning activities. In this study, some of the student teachers felt that online teaching was beneficial as the lessons could be saved and be used afterwards by the learners at any appropriate time. “For listening and responding activities, I personally think that recording audio or video was beneficial because children could play the content repeatedly” (fourth year participant). Kholida (2016) concurred with the findings as expressed that the use of the videos when teaching listening skills were helpful for learning English, and that video resources improved their listening comprehension skills more than modified or non-authentic materials.

#### **Strategies used when teaching listening and responding skills online**

Based on the results from the written assignment, the participants revealed that several strategies were used to teach listening and responding through online such as WhatsApp group, educational programs on radio/TV, audio recorder, YouTube, Zoom and hard copy materials. The study found that the teachers sent audio/videos to parents’ phones whereby parents recorded the learners’ responses and sent back to the teacher, responses revealed the use of video call to ensure face to face interaction and effective learning. The third-year participant expressed that “WhatsApp has been used by teachers to record voice or video and distribute it to parents. Parents help children watch or listen, and then they answer by sending the teacher a recording of an audio or video on WhatsApp. Sometimes teachers require learners to interact through video call”. The participants concurred with Robingatin et al. (2021) who indicated that language skills in youngsters can be enhanced through online learning activities such as the videos produced, in which children feel compelled to speak.

Many of the tools mentioned in this study’s findings such as Zoom Cloud Meeting and WhatsApp were similar to some of the primary learning tools in the study of Robingatin others (Robingatin et al., 2021). The findings revealed that parents played a significant role in collecting listening materials

for example, written story texts to read to the learners and returned the learners’ worksheets. As narrated that “parents come to the school to pick up their children’s work, such as story written texts. After helping learners complete their work at home by reading the story aloud to them while they listen and respond to the questions from the story, then parents return completed work to school” (third year participant). It is worth stating that radio programs having specific time slots for a specific subject were part of assisting learners while on lockdown, however the radio programs were general not for a specific grade.

The results show that some schools with sufficient facilities used Zoom or Google classrooms to teach listening and responding skills live. “Google classroom was used by certain schools to incorporate reality into their online teaching. Learners could ask a teacher questions, talk to their peers, and participate just as they did in real-life interactions” (third year participant). However, a certain study conducted in China revealed that there were three main factors contributing to the parents’ reluctance to support children’s online learning such as the limitations of online learning skills, the lack of self-control in young children, and their parents’ insufficient time and lack of expertise in the teaching profession (Dong, Cao, & Li, 2020).

#### **Effectiveness of the strategies used**

The effectiveness on the strategies used on teaching through recorded lessons was viewed with different experiences, especially on the negative side as the participants said that sending audios or written materials over to children were not effective as the parents seemed to complete the work by themselves on behalf of their children. One of the third-year student teachers narrated that “children are given home chores and may not have enough time to accomplish their school activities, which may lead to some parents doing activities on behalf of their children”. In addition, the results showed that learning was ineffective, as when the learners needed help, some parents could not assist their children as some were illiterate, or do not understand how to give relevant guidance. “Not all parents are able to help their children with schoolwork; for instance, if a parent is illiterate or lacking knowledge, it could result in poor guidance for the children” (fourth year participant). In addition, some parents could be well educated, but lacked specific knowledge in teaching and

learning at Junior Primary phase. Another participant from the third-year focus group interview stated that *“when narrating a story, one can tell the difference between a teacher and a parent. Parents will not do it the same way as teachers do with their learners. The children may not respond well because they feel that this is a parent, but not a teacher”*.

The results are in line with the study conducted in China by Dong et al. (2020) where the parents shared similar challenges. The findings revealed the possibilities of sidelining some learners who did not have phones, thus, those learners would miss the lessons. A participant from fourth year said *“another issue could be that teachers were unsure whether the lesson aims was reached, or how many learners answered or listened to the audio”*. It was indicated that to assist listeners create a meaningful interpretation of what they heard, listening comprehension involved the employment of a variety of listening strategies that freely interacted with one another.

A balance between top-down and bottom-up approaches was required when teaching listeners how to apply these strategies in efficient and successful ways (Kholida, 2016). Based on the remarks about parents doing exercises on behalf of their children, learners not getting the support while learning and many more challenges mentioned earlier, one of the fourth-year focus group participants revealed that *“learners got promoted to the next grade even if they did not acquire the necessary competencies of that grade”*.

### ***Challenges encountered when teaching listening and responding skills online***

This study gathered information about the challenges that hindered effective and smooth utilization of online teaching and learning at the Junior Primary phase. From document analysis all participants indicated that some teachers and parents had smartphones, but they lacked Information Communication Technology (ICT) usage skills. *“Some parents and learners lack the skills and expertise necessary to operate smartphone or other gadgets, particularly those attending schools in remote areas. This indicates that they are not proficient in Information Communication Technology”* (document analysis). The lament about lack of ICT usage skills was similar to that of the parents in China as indicated by Dong et al. (2020) who stated that the Chinese parents were unprepared for online schooling

and lacked the necessary training. The study revealed three main factors that contributed to the parents' reluctance to support children's online learning activities such as: The limitations of online learning knowledge, the lack of self-control in young children, and insufficient time and lack of expertise in ICT skills. Apart from the ICT skills related challenges, the results revealed that there was poor network, limited distribution of electricity in rural areas, no smartphones, inadequate funds to buy data, and limited knowledge to use the smartphone applications.

One of the fourth-year participants stated that *“some learners reside in places with weak or no network coverage, making it difficult for them to access online teaching and learning activities”*. The finding on poor or no network concurred with the document analysis findings which stated that *“some rural areas lack electricity, learners travel long distances in search of locations where they can charge their phones so they may use them for online learning”* (document analysis). It was also pointed out in the document analysis that some families could not afford to buy a smartphone. *“We discovered that not all parents had the funds to purchase smartphones so they could use WhatsApp. This could be one of the difficulties that teachers, learners, and parents face when utilising technology. Another issue is that parents might not have the funds to purchase airtime, which would allow teaching and learning to occur through online platforms like WhatsApp”* (document analysis). The findings revealed that parents did not have enough time to help their children with their schoolwork. Due to the parents' busy schedules, some parents found it difficult to spend time guiding their children.

Despite the findings on parents' insufficient time to assist their children with their schoolwork, among the other challenges that were discovered included some parents completing their children's schoolwork. Children who were assigned household chores lacked time for their school activities. Based on the document analysis, participants mentioned that *“some learners might not have enough time to finish their schoolwork on time since their parents have given them different home tasks to do”*. Consequently, the interview data showed that *“some parents complete their children's work”*. There was a distinction between a parent telling a story at home and a teacher telling a story at school; the former was not the same as the latter. Practically the parent

might not handle the story telling as the teacher at school. *“The way parents and learners deliver stories differs, and this affects how well learners learn. Parents’ experiences differ from teachers’ experiences”* (fourth year participant). Besides the above-mentioned difficulties, the results showed that many schools had more learners per teacher. The teacher-learner ratio was too high for a teacher to listen to all 40 or 50 audios to determine whether the learners had met the lesson objectives or not.

In addition, it was revealed that teachers were not able to determine the number of learners who had listened to the audios and answered the questions. The fourth year student narrated this *“Mmhh, the teacher - learner ratio in many schools is high. There might be 40–50 learners in a classroom. It is challenging to oversee and assist learners with that quantity, particularly during COVID-19. Teachers were therefore uncertain about whether the lesson’s objective had been achieved and how many learners had responded or listened to the audio”*.

### **Implications**

This study might be used to inform the Oshindonga and Oshikwanyama Junior Primary school teachers in the field and student teachers at tertiary institutions on strategies to be used when teaching listening and responding through online mode. According to this study, instruction on how to utilise various gadgets, including tablets, laptops, and smartphones, during remote instruction should be a part of teacher preparation programs and professional development.

### **Conclusion**

This study sought to understand how Junior Primary student teachers felt about teaching listening and responding lessons in an online and blended environment during the COVID-19 epidemic. Based on the students’ teachers’ perceptions, recorded online videos and audios was advantageous since learners could save the lessons and use them whenever it was convenient for them. Teaching and learning were conducted using a variety of devices, including laptops, tablets, and smartphones. But smartphones were largely used, with teachers recording audio or video and sending it to parents via WhatsApp. The parents then help learners complete their work, record the learner's responses, and provide the teacher

with the recorded feedback. Some well-equipped schools taught listening and response skills using Zoom or Google Classrooms. On the contrary, the study discovered that giving written or audio materials to children did not help since the parents appeared to do the work on behalf of their children. Additionally, some parents were illiterate or lacked teaching experience, so not all learners received sufficient guidance. As a result, some learners may draw comparisons between their parents and more experienced teachers.

The findings showed that schools were unprepared for online teaching, and that some parents, teachers, and learners lacked the ICT skills necessary to conduct effective online teaching and learning. Aside from being unprepared, it is discovered that inadequate network coverage, a lack of electricity in some rural areas, a lack of funds for purchasing smartphones, and data loading credits may have all played a role in the online teaching failure. Overall, the study's findings showed that it was unclear whether or not all of learners had listened to or replied to the audios, which made it unclear if the objective of the lesson had been achieved. Considering all of the challenges mentioned above, the results of the study raised concerns that some learners would advance to the following grade before mastering the required skills in their current grade.

### **Recommendations**

When teaching listening and responding, it is important to address the human resources inabilities and provisions of infrastructures and offer relevant online support systems. The student teachers, lecturers and teachers should aim to explore further various appropriate listening and responding teaching techniques to meet the demand of the advanced technologies. As per the study’s results, some teachers and learners were computer illiterate. It was recommended that computer literacy skills training needed to be implemented in schools including the Junior Primary phase. Computer literacy skills should be a compulsory subject even for the young ones. They should be taught the basics of technology usage.

To advance the technology integration into teaching, the authors encourage the Ministry of Education to ensure that all teacher training institutions and the teachers in the system are trained on how to incorporate various technological devices into teaching and

learning. The study covered aspects of low speed of country electrification, internet, and network infrastructures; it is advisable to improve the mentioned low speed.

It is also recommended that the families which are unable to afford purchasing gadgets should be helped by non-governmental and business entities to buy smartphones or tablets to enable all Namibian children to access and enhance education. To minimize unnecessary use of the gadgets, some applications which are not in support of learning should be removed or limited. Families should be coached on various uses of technological devices to enhance teaching and learning activities.

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