

## Exploring the determinants of substandard academic performance in English as a second language among Grade 11 students in the Oshakati educational circuit, Oshana region, Namibia

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### Abstract

*This study utilized a qualitative methodology and a case study design to investigate the factors contributing to poor performance in English as a Second Language (ESL) among Grade 11 learners in the Oshakati circuit, Oshana region of Namibia. Data were collected through interviews with sixteen participants, including teachers, school principals, Heads of Departments (HODs), learners, and Board members. The study aimed at identifying school environmental factors and home environmental factors that contributed to poor performance in ESL, and to provide recommendations for improving performance in ESL. The findings of the study, derived from thematic analysis, revealed several key themes and sub-themes. Theme 1 identified home environmental factors that affected learners' performance in ESL in the Oshakati circuit. Sub-themes included lack of parental support, parents' education level, marital statuses of parents, home language of the learner, and gender roles. Theme 2 identified school environmental factors affecting learners' performance in ESL, encompassing the following sub-themes: learner attitudes, medium of instruction, school location, peer pressure, lack of resources, and the need to strengthen market information systems. Theme 3 identified strategies to mitigate poor performance in ESL in the Oshakati circuit, including sub-themes such as enhancing language instruction, code switching, parental involvement, individualized support, collaboration and support, and professional development for teachers. These findings provided valuable insights into the factors influencing poor performance in ESL among Grade 11 learners in the Oshakati circuit. The study highlighted the importance of addressing both home and school environmental factors to improve learners' performance in ESL. The study recommends that educational authorities enhance resources such as language labs and libraries, invest in teacher training for effective ESL instruction, and strengthen parental involvement through workshops to support students at home. Additionally, it suggests adapting the ESL curriculum to be culturally relevant and aligned with students' experiences while fostering positive student attitudes through initiatives like language clubs and competitions to boost engagement and enthusiasm for learning English.*

**Keywords:** *poor performance, ESL, policymakers, parents, practical implications, targeted interventions*

### Introduction and background

The global significance of the English language within the educational system cannot be overstated (Bryk et al., 2010), given its role as the primary medium of instruction across a wide range of school subjects. Nevertheless, the performance of students in English in typical schools often falls short of expectations. This research sought to delve into the underlying determinants contributing to the underperformance of Grade 11 learners in English as a second language in the Oshakati circuit, Oshana region of Namibia. Various scholars have explored the determinants contributing to lacklustre performance in the English subject. One key

factor highlighted is teacher qualifications. Teachers who lack adequate qualifications tend to exert a negative influence on the teaching and learning process, hindering students' progress. Even highly qualified teachers may become less effective when working under unfavourable conditions, leading to reduced dedication and productivity (Burmester, 2005).

Research conducted in California, USA, emphasizes the role of effective instructional supervision in enhancing the quality of teaching and learning (Cohen et al., 2011). Additionally, findings from studies conducted in Kashmir, India, bring to light a significant issue: a scarcity of textbooks in many

secondary schools, forcing multiple students to share a single textbook (Cavanagh & Huston, 2008). The challenge is even more pronounced in newly established public and private schools, where shortages in textbooks, reference materials, and supplementary resources persist. Furthermore, deficiencies in facilities such as laboratories and libraries have been reported in several educational institutions (Coben et al., 2011).

In the context of Ghana, research reveals that students in private schools tend to perform better compared to their counterparts in public schools (Franscisca, 2012). This difference is attributed to the enhanced supervision and efficiency found in private schools. A glaring shortage of teachers within schools can have detrimental effects on endeavours to improve educational outcomes (Fadel & Khaled, 2013). Immediate and decisive actions are imperative to address the critical shortage of teachers and enhance the overall quality of education. Since

Namibia's independence in 1990, English has become the primary medium of instruction, replacing Afrikaans in most Namibian schools. Currently, English is integrated into the curriculum from Upper Primary to Senior Secondary School, spanning Grades 4 to 12 (Creswell, 2014).

Despite the perceived advantages of teaching and learning English as a second language, students' performance in this subject in Namibia, especially within the Oshakati circuit, Oshana region, remains below anticipated standards (Çapa-Aydın & Köksal, 2018). Oshakati circuit schools have grappled with consistently poor results in English as a subject since the introduction of the new curriculum in 2020. Despite concerted efforts by education stakeholders at both regional and national levels to address this issue, the performance continues to be unsatisfactory, as evident in the examination results for the years 2020, 2021, and 2022 (see Table 1).

**Table 1: Cambridge Assessment International Education (CAIE) results performance in Oshakati circuit, Oshana region of Namibia for three-year 2020 -2022 (Grade 11- results)**

Symbol (s)	2020	2021	2022
A –C	11%	8%	3%
D - E	21%	11%	7 %
F - G	40%	33%	28%
U	28%	52%	64%
<b>Promoted to AS (Grade 12)</b>	<b>11%</b>	<b>8%</b>	<b>3%</b>

Table 1 provides a clear illustration of the declining Grade 11 results over the past three years following the introduction of the new curriculum in Namibia's current education system. In 2020, only 11% of learners achieved grades A to C. This percentage dropped to 8% in 2021, and further plummeted to a mere 3% in 2022, out of the 12500 learners who sat for the examination. These were the students eligible to advance to Grade 12 for the Advanced Subsidiary Course. The data in Table 1 unequivocally indicates a substantial increase in learner failure with unfavourable grades in 2022 compared to 2020, thus reflecting a significant decline in English subject performance over the past three years since the introduction of the new curriculum in 2020.

Learner performance in national examinations has consistently remained poor (Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture, 2022). The failure rates in English as a subject for the years 2020, 2021, and 2022 (under the new curriculum - Namibia Senior Secondary

Certificate (NSSC) results) were 29.03% respectively. According to the 2022 Department of National Examinations and Assessment (DNEA) report on Grade 11 Examination results, 98.5% of the candidates took the English examination in 2021, and out of this number, 77.5% or 7,806 candidates, representing 33%, obtained grades below the required level. Conversely, 11,902 candidates, or 52%, achieved U grade at grade 12 level. Consequently, the Ministry of Education, Arts, and Culture recommended a deeper investigation into the determinants contributing to the poor performance in English as a second language among Grade 11 learners in national examinations. The report emphasized the high failure rate observed in English (82.66%) and first languages (13.21%), prompting the need to scrutinize the reasons behind this situation (Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture, 2022).

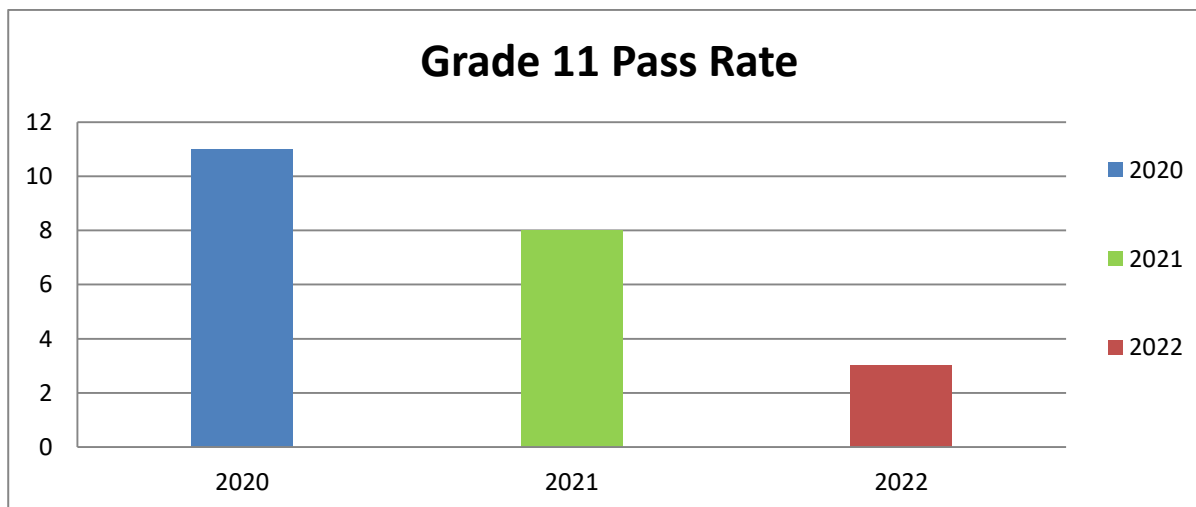
From this evidence and scenario, it becomes evident that English had a significantly higher failure rate compared to

first languages as revealed by the NSSC results for 2022 (Haimbodi, 2019). The elevated failure rate in English as a school subject underscores the poor performance of learners in schools throughout Namibia, particularly within the Oshakati circuit in the Oshana region. Given this context, the researchers decided to explore the determinants contributing to the subpar performance of Grade 11 learners in English as a second language within the Oshakati circuit, Oshana region of Namibia. The Oshakati circuit encompasses nine several schools where English is taught as a second language, and despite the language's significance, a substantial number of learners appear to face challenges in mastering the English language skills. This persisting issue has raised concerns among educators, policymakers, and parents, necessitating an in-depth investigation into the

determinants that underlie the poor performance.

### Statement of the problem

The problem understudy was to investigate the determinants contributing to the poor performance in English as a second language among Grade 11 learners in Oshakati circuit, Oshana region of Namibia. After the release of Grade 11 National Examination results in January 2022, the researchers observed that there was a decline in the performance of Grade 11 learners in English as a second language in Oshakati circuit, Oshana region of Namibia from 2020 to 2022. This therefore prompted the researchers to carry out the study. Figure 1 shows the decline of learners' performance in English as a second language (ESL) in Oshakati circuit, Oshana region of Namibia since the introduction of the new curriculum in 2020 – 2022.



**Figure 1: The results of grade11 learners for the past three years in Oshakati circuit (Oshakati circuit examination reports, 2020-2022)**

Figure 1 indicates clearly that there was a decline in learners' performance as far as English as a second language is concerned among Grade 11 learners in Oshakati circuit, Oshana region of Namibia. Since 2020 when the first examination of the new curriculum (Namibia Senior Secondary Certificate - NSSC) was administered to Grade 11 learners in Namibia's educational system only 35% of learners have obtained better symbols, a drop of 10% in 2021 was revealed and a huge decline of 15% in 2022 was obtained in English as a second language among Grade 11 learners in Oshakati circuit, Oshana region of Namibia. The poor performance in English as a second language among Grade 11 learners in

the Oshakati circuit has become crucial to understand the determinants contributing to this issue to address the root causes and improve the overall language proficiency of the learners. This study aimed to investigate the specific determinants that hinder Grade 11 learners' performance in English as a second language within the Oshakati circuit.

### Theoretical framework and literature review

#### Theoretical framework

The sociocultural theory, developed by Vygotsky, is well-suited to address the research questions in this study, which centred on the factors contributing to poor performance

in English as a Second Language (ESL) among Grade 11 learners in the Oshakati circuit, Oshana region of Namibia (1978). This theory underscores the significance of social and cultural factors in the learning and developmental process (Vygotsky, 1978). To examine the factors behind poor ESL performance, the sociocultural theory offers a framework to explore both the school and home environments of learners. It views learning as a social activity taking place within a cultural context, emphasizing the role of social interactions, cultural norms, and environmental factors in language development (Vygotsky, 1978). By applying this lens, one can discern whether these factors facilitated or hindered language learning and performance.

In line with the environment factors, the sociocultural theory provided a basis to understand the impact of cultural and social practices within the learners' homes. It allowed for an exploration of factors like parental attitudes, language use at home, exposure to English language outside of school, and socioeconomic conditions on language proficiency (Rogoff, 1990). By considering the sociocultural context of the learners' homes, insights could be gained into how these factors contributed to poor ESL performance. Furthermore, the sociocultural theory guided the formulation of recommendations to enhance ESL performance. It underscored the significance of social interaction, scaffolding, and collaborative learning in language development (Vygotsky, 1978). ESL performance, the sociocultural theory offers valuable insights. It emphasizes scaffolding and the zone of proximal development (ZPD) as key in facilitating learning (Vygotsky, 1978).

### ***Determinants of poor performance in English as a second language***

#### ***Limited exposure to English***

Learners who have limited exposure to English outside the classroom may struggle with language acquisition. Lack of opportunities to practice and interact in English can impede their language development. Limited exposure to English is a significant factor that can contribute to poor performance in ESL among learners. Research studies have highlighted the importance of exposure to a language for effective language acquisition (Krashen, 1981; Lightbown & Spada, 2013). When learners have limited opportunities to practice and

interact in English outside the classroom, their language development may be hindered.

#### ***Inadequate language proficiency***

Learners who have lower levels of proficiency in their first language may face challenges in acquiring English as a second language. Weak foundational language skills can hinder their ability to comprehend and express themselves effectively in English. Inadequate language proficiency is a significant factor that can contribute to poor performance in ESL among learners. Research has consistently shown the importance of strong foundational language skills in the first language for successful second language acquisition (Cummins, 2008; García & Kleifgen, 2010). Learners who have lower levels of proficiency in their first language may face challenges in acquiring English as a second language.

#### ***Insufficient instructional support***

Inadequate instructional support, such as limited resources, outdated materials, and ineffective teaching methods, can hinder language learning. Inadequate focus on language skills development and insufficient language input can contribute to poor performance. Insufficient instructional support is a notable factor that can contribute to poor performance in ESL among learners. Research has emphasized the importance of effective instructional practices and resources in promoting language learning and development (Ellis, 2003; Wong-Fillmore, 2000). When learners lack adequate instructional support, they may face challenges in acquiring and mastering English language skills. Insufficient resources, outdated materials, and ineffective teaching methods can hinder learners' progress in ESL (Ellis, 2003). Without appropriate instructional support, learners may struggle to develop their listening, speaking, reading, and writing abilities in English.

#### ***Low teacher competency***

Teachers who lack training or expertise in teaching English as a second language may struggle to provide effective instruction. Limited understanding of language acquisition theories, pedagogical approaches, and insufficient professional development can impact learners' language development. Low teacher competency is a significant factor that can contribute to poor performance in ESL among learners. Research has emphasized the critical role of teachers in language instruction

and their impact on learners' language development (Larsen-Freeman, 2018; Shulman, 1986).

#### *Cultural and socioeconomic factors*

Socioeconomic factors, such as poverty, limited access to educational resources, and low parental education levels, can influence learners' language acquisition and performance. Cultural factors, including different language backgrounds and varying cultural norms, may also affect learners' language development and classroom participation. Cultural and socioeconomic factors are influential factors that can contribute to poor performance in ESL among learners. Research has shown that learners' cultural backgrounds and socioeconomic status can impact their language acquisition and overall language performance (Cummins, 2000; Ogbu, 1999).

#### *Lack of motivation and engagement*

Learners who lack motivation or interest in learning English may exhibit poor performance. Factors such as disengagement from the subject, lack of relevance to their personal lives, or negative attitudes toward English can impede progress. Lack of motivation and engagement is a significant factor that can contribute to poor performance in ESL among learners. Research has consistently highlighted the importance of motivation in language learning and its impact on learners' language proficiency and achievement (Dörnyei, 2001; Ushioda, 2009).

#### *Testing and assessment bias*

Testing and assessment practices that do not align with learners' language proficiency levels or cultural backgrounds can lead to inaccurate assessments of their language skills. This can contribute to a perception of poor performance. Testing and assessment bias is a significant factor that can contribute to poor performance in ESL among learners. Research has highlighted the importance of fair and unbiased assessments in accurately measuring learners' language proficiency and determining their performance (Alderson, 2000; Shohamy, 2001).

#### *Limited support from home*

Insufficient support and reinforcement of English language skills at home can impact learners' progress. Lack of parental involvement, limited exposure to English in

the home environment, and different language priorities within the family can all influence learners' language development. Limited support from home is a significant factor that can contribute to poor performance in ESL among learners. Research has highlighted the importance of a supportive home environment in promoting language learning and development (Genesee, 2008; González, 2015).

#### *Language anxiety and self-confidence*

Learners who experience high levels of language anxiety or lack self-confidence may struggle with English language learning. Fear of making mistakes, low self-esteem, or negative classroom experiences can hinder their progress and contribute to poor performance. Language anxiety and self-confidence are significant factors that can contribute to poor performance in ESL among learners. Research has emphasized the impact of learners' affective states on language learning and their overall language performance (Horwitz et al., 1986; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994). Language anxiety refers to the feelings of unease, fear, or apprehension that learners may experience when using the target language. High levels of language anxiety can hinder learners' ability to effectively communicate and engage in language learning activities (Horwitz et al., 1986). Learners may experience difficulties in speaking, participating in class discussions, or taking risks in using English.

#### **Methodology**

This study employed a case study design to investigate the factors influencing ESL performance among Grade 11 learners in the Oshakati circuit, Oshana region of Namibia. The case study design allows for a contextual understanding of the social, cultural, and educational elements that impact language learning within this specific context (Yin, 2018). Data collection methods encompass a range of approaches, including interviews, observations, and document analysis. These methods enable the collection of diverse data, encompassing learners' experiences, perspectives, behaviours, and contextual factors influencing ESL performance. This holistic approach ensures a thorough exploration of the subject matter (Yin, 2018).

The sampling technique employed was purposive sampling, drawing a sample of 16 participants from a population that included

Grade 11 learners, principals, heads of department, parents, school board members, and English teachers in all then population had 15900 participants. In-depth face-to-face interviews serve as the primary data collection method. These interviews are conducted with various participants, including learners, parents, and school board members. Open-ended questions are utilized to elicit detailed and rich information from the respondents. Direct interaction through interviews facilitates nuanced insights into the factors contributing to poor ESL performance (Kothari, 2004).

Data analysis techniques were qualitative and interpretive in nature. The analysis involved examining the meaningful and

symbolic content of qualitative data and identifying relationships between emerging patterns and themes. The analysis aimed to explore similarities and differences and connect findings to the study's conceptual framework and model. Content analysis was applied to data collected from interviews, observations, document reviews, and questionnaires. Data was coded and analysed with respect to a priori themes and codes from the literature (Kothari, 2004).

### Findings

The identified themes and their respective sub-themes from the research findings are given in Table 2.

**Table 2: Themes and sub-themes identified from the research findings**

<b>Theme 1:</b> Home environmental factors that affect learners' performances in English Second Language (ESL) in Oshakati circuit	<b>Sub-theme 1.1:</b> Lack of parental support
	<b>Sub-theme 1.2:</b> Education levels of the parents
	<b>Sub-theme 1.3:</b> Marital statuses of parents
	<b>Sub-theme 1.4:</b> Home language of the learner
	<b>Sub-theme 1.5:</b> Gender roles
<b>Theme 2:</b> School environment factors that affect learners' performances in English Second Language (ESL) in Oshakati circuit	<b>Sub-theme 2.1:</b> Learner attitudes
	<b>Sub-theme 2.2:</b> Medium of instruction
	<b>Sub-theme 2.3:</b> School location
	<b>Sub-theme 2.4:</b> Peer pressure
	<b>Sub-theme 2.5:</b> Lack of resources
	<b>Sub-theme 2.6:</b> Strengthening market information systems

### *Theme 1: Home environmental factors that affect learners' performances in English second language (ESL) in the Oshakati circuit*

#### *Sub-theme 1.1: Lack of parental support*

One significant sub-theme that affected learners' performance in English as a Second Language (ESL) within the home environment in the Oshakati circuit was the lack of parental support. Parental support plays a crucial role in students' academic success, including their language learning and proficiency development. This sub-theme explores the impact of inadequate parental involvement and support on learners' performance in ESL. Learner participant 16 had this to say, "my parents don't really care about my English grades. They never ask about my progress or help me with my homework." These sentiments were supported by learner participant 1 who also said that "I wish my parents could help me practice English at home. It's challenging to improve my language skills without their support."

The participants expressed a lack of parental interest and involvement in their

English language learning. This lack of support from parents might lead to a decreased motivation and sense of accountability, which could negatively impact their performance in ESL. The participants highlighted the desire for parental involvement in practicing English at home. This indicates the recognition of the importance of parental support in language development and suggested that the lack of such support might hinder their progress in ESL. Research studies have emphasized the significant role of parental support in students' language learning and academic achievement (Fan & Chen, 2001; Jeynes, 2005). Parental involvement, including monitoring homework, providing encouragement, and engaging in language-related activities at home, had been found to positively influence students' language proficiency and overall academic performance (Deslandes & Bertrand, 2005; Sui-Chu & Willms, 1996).

*Sub-theme 1.2: Education levels of the parents*

Another significant sub-theme that influenced learners' performances in ESL within the home environment in the Oshakati circuit was the education levels of the parents. The educational background of parents can impact their ability to support their children's language learning and proficiency development. This sub-theme explores the relationship between parents' education levels and learners' performance in ESL. On this issue learner participant 9 had this to say *"my parents didn't complete their education, so they struggle to help me with my English homework. Sometimes, they can't even understand the questions."* This was supported by learner participant 2 who said that *"my parents are highly educated, and they always provide guidance and resources to improve my English skills. They understand the importance of education and support me in every way they can."*

The participant's statement highlighted the challenge faced by learners when their parents had lower levels of education. The inability of parents to provide adequate assistance due to their own limited education could hinder the learners' progress in ESL. The participant 2 and 9 statements reflected the positive influence of having parents with higher levels of education. Their understanding of the value of education and their ability to provide guidance and resources contributed to the learners' motivation and progress in ESL.

Numerous studies have established a positive association between parents' education levels and their children's academic outcomes (Hoff, 2003; Sirin, 2005). Parents with higher levels of education often possess better language proficiency themselves, which enables them to provide effective language support to their children (Deslandes & Bertrand, 2005; Sui-Chu & Willms, 1996).

*Sub-theme 1.3: Marital statuses of parents*

The marital statuses of parents played a significant role in shaping the home environment and subsequently influencing learners' performance in ESL in the Oshakati circuit. This sub-theme explored how the marital statuses of parents could impact learners' language learning experiences and outcomes. In line with this subtheme, learner participant 14 had this to say, *"my parents are divorced, and it's challenging for me to focus on my English studies. The constant changes and conflicts at home make it difficult to create*

*a conducive learning environment."* This was supported by participant 3 who also said that *"both of my parents are happily married, and they provide a supportive and nurturing environment for my language learning. They encourage me to practice English and create a routine that helps me stay focused."*

The participant 1, 3 and 14 statements highlighted the potential disruption caused by divorce or separation on the home environment. The instability and emotional stress associated with such situations can affect learners' ability to concentrate on their ESL studies, potentially leading to poor performance. The harmonious home environment, characterized by effective communication and encouragement, fostered a conducive space for learners to excel in their ESL studies. Research indicates that the marital statuses of parents can significantly impact children's educational outcomes (Amato, 2001; McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994).

*Sub-theme 1.4: Home language of the learner*

The home language of the learner is a crucial aspect of the home environment that can significantly influence learners' performances in ESL in the Oshakati circuit. This sub-theme explored how the home language spoken and used within the family context could impact learners' proficiency and fluency in ESL. On this sub-theme, participant 13 had this to say, *"at home, we primarily speak the indigenous language. English is only spoken when necessary, but it's not used as extensively. This limited exposure to English affects my confidence and ability to express myself effectively in the language."* This was supported by participant 11 who said that *"English is the primary language spoken at home. My parents are fluent English speakers, and we often engage in conversations, watch movies, and read books in English. This consistent exposure has greatly helped me in developing my English skills."*

When the home language differed from English and was predominantly spoken, learners might have fewer opportunities to practice and engage with the target language, resulting in limited proficiency and confidence in ESL. The participant 11 and 13 above statements demonstrated the positive impact of a home environment where English was the dominant language. Regular exposure to English through conversations, media, and literature provided learners with ample opportunities to enhance their language



proficiency and fluency. Numerous studies emphasize the influence of the home language on second language acquisition (Cummins, 2000; Genesee, 2008).

#### *Sub-theme 1.5: Gender roles*

Gender roles within the home environment can play a significant role in shaping learners' performances in ESL in the Oshakati circuit. This sub-theme explored how societal expectations and division of household responsibilities based on gender could impact learners' language learning experiences and outcomes. On this sub-theme participant 5 had this to say, *"in our household, it is believed that girls should focus more on domestic chores and taking care of the family. As a result, I have limited time and support for my English language studies, which affects my overall performance in ESL."* This was supported by participant 10 who said that *"both boys and girls in our family are encouraged to pursue their academic goals,*

*including English language learning. Our parents emphasize equality and provide us with equal support and resources to enhance our language skills."*

The participant's statement highlighted the impact of traditional gender roles on educational opportunities and language learning. When girls are assigned, more responsibilities related to household chores and caregiving, they might have less time and resources to dedicate to their language learning, hindering their progress in ESL. The participant's statement reflected a more gender-inclusive approach within the home environment. When boys and girls were provided with equal opportunities and support for their language learning, they were more likely to thrive in ESL and achieve better performances. Research indicates that gender roles and expectations can influence educational opportunities and outcomes (UNESCO, 2018).

### **Theme 2: School environment factors that affect learners' performances in English second language (ESL) in Oshakati circuit**

#### *Sub-theme 2.1: Learner attitudes*

Learner attitudes play a crucial role in influencing performances in ESL within the school environment. This sub-theme explored how learners' attitudes towards English language learning could impact their motivation, engagement, and overall language proficiency. On this sub-theme participant 7 had this to say, *"I find English lessons boring, and I don't see the relevance of learning a second language. It affects my motivation to study and perform well in ESL."* This was supported by participant 10 who said that *"I enjoy learning English because I see it as an opportunity to expand my horizons and communicate with people from different cultures. I actively participate in class discussions and seek additional resources to improve my language skills."*

The participant 10 and 7 statements above highlighted the influence of negative attitudes towards English language learning on learners' motivation and performance. When learners perceive the subject as uninteresting or irrelevant, they may lack the enthusiasm and drive to actively engage in language learning, leading to poor performance in ESL. The participant 7 and 10 statements reflect positive attitudes toward English language learning. When learners perceive the subject as valuable

and meaningful, they demonstrate higher levels of motivation, engagement, and a proactive approach to enhancing their language proficiency, resulting in better performance in ESL. Research suggests that learner attitudes significantly impact language learning outcomes (Dörnyei, 2005; Gardner, 1985).

#### *Sub-theme 2.2: Medium of instruction*

The choice of the medium of instruction plays a significant role in shaping learners' performance in ESL within the school environment. This sub-theme explored how the language used for instruction could affect learners' language acquisition, comprehension, and overall performance in ESL. In line with this sub-theme, participant 9 had this to say, *"when teachers use the local language to explain concepts in English class, it becomes easier for us to understand. It helps us grasp the content better and improves our performance in ESL"*. The same sub-theme was also supported by participant 16 when she said that *"English lessons are challenging for me because the teacher only speaks English during the class. I struggle to understand the instructions and explanations, which affects my performance in ESL."*

When learners could rely on familiar language to facilitate their understanding of



new concepts, it enhances their comprehension, reduces language barriers, and contributes to better performance in ESL. When learners experience challenges in understanding instructions and explanations due to limited language proficiency, it could hinder their language development and negatively impact their performance in ESL.

Research indicates that the choice of medium of instruction significantly influences language learning outcomes (Cummins, 2000; Enever & Lundberg, 2018). A balanced approach that incorporates the use of learners' first language (L1) alongside English instruction has been found to enhance comprehension, language acquisition, and overall academic performance (Cummins, 2000; Enever & Lundberg, 2018).

#### *Sub-theme 2.3: School location*

The location of a school can have a significant impact on learners' performance in ESL. This sub-theme explored how the geographical context and environment of a school could influence learners' language development, exposure to English, and overall performance in ESL within the Oshakati circuit. Supporting this sub-theme, participant 4 had this to say, *'In our rural school, there are limited resources and opportunities for English language practice. We don't have access to language labs or libraries with English books. It affects our exposure and hampers our performances in ESL.'* Participant 11 added by saying that *"in urban schools, there are more English-speaking environments and cultural diversity. It creates a positive learning atmosphere and improves our performances in ESL. We have more opportunities to interact with English speakers and practice the language."*

The participant 4 and 11 statements above highlighted the challenges faced by learners in rural schools regarding limited resources and opportunities for English language practice. The lack of access to language labs, English books, and other supportive materials diminished learners' exposure to the language and could hinder their language development and performance in ESL. The exposure to a variety of English speakers and the opportunities for interaction contributed to a positive learning atmosphere, enhancing learners' language skills and performance in ESL. Studies indicate that school location can impact learners' performance in ESL due to differences in resources, opportunities for

language practice, and exposure to English (Bailey, 2012; Ndongeni & Makalela, 2018).

#### *Sub-theme 2.4: Peer pressure*

Peer pressure within the school environment can significantly influence learners' performances in ESL. This sub-theme explored the impact of peer interactions, social dynamics, and the influence of classmates on learners' language learning experiences and performance in the Oshakati circuit.

Participant 1 had this to say, *"some students make fun of those who struggle with English. It creates a negative atmosphere in the classroom, and it affects our confidence to speak and participate in English activities. It hampers our performances in ESL."* This was supported by participant 12 when he said that *"I have a study group with classmates who are motivated and supportive. We practice English together, help each other, and it boosts our confidence. Being surrounded by peers who encourage and motivate us improves our performances in ESL."* Ridicule and teasing from classmates who excelled in English could create an environment where learners felt embarrassed or hesitant to engage in English activities, leading to a decline in their language performance.

Research studies have highlighted the role of peer pressure and social dynamics in influencing learners' performance in ESL (Çapa-Aydın & Köksal, 2018; Mavengere, 2019). Negative peer pressure, such as ridicule or teasing, could lead to a decrease in learners' motivation, self-esteem, and willingness to participate in English activities, resulting in poor language performance (Çapa-Aydın & Köksal, 2018).

#### *Sub-theme 2.5: Lack of resources*

The availability and adequacy of resources within the school environment can significantly impact learners' performance in ESL. This sub-theme explored how the lack of resources, such as textbooks, teaching materials, technology, and infrastructure, could affect learners' language learning experiences and performances in the Oshakati circuit. The sentiments from participant 2 supported this claim when he said that *"we don't have enough textbooks in our school, so we have limited access to reading materials. It makes it difficult to practice reading comprehension and expand our vocabulary. This lack of resources affects our language performance in ESL."* Participant 11 supported this view by

saying that “our school lacks proper technology and audio-visual resources. It limits our exposure to authentic English language use and interactive learning experiences. Without these resources, it's challenging to develop listening and speaking skills, which affects our performances in ESL.”

Insufficient access to authentic English language materials and interactive learning experiences restricted learners' opportunities to practice listening and speaking skills, leading to a decline in their performance in ESL. Numerous studies have highlighted the detrimental effects of a lack of resources on learners' language performance in ESL (Mehrotra & Sahni, 2018; Mokhtar & Halim, 2021). Insufficient access to textbooks, teaching materials, technology, and infrastructure could impede learners' language learning progress and hinder their overall performance in ESL (Mehrotra & Sahni, 2018; Mokhtar & Halim, 2021).

Research suggests that the availability of adequate resources, such as textbooks, supplementary materials, audio-visual aids, and technology, positively correlates with learners' language achievements and performance in ESL (Mehrotra & Sahni, 2018; Mokhtar & Halim, 2021). Access to a variety of resources facilitates active engagement, enhances language practice, and supports learners' language development in ESL (Mehrotra & Sahni, 2018; Mokhtar & Halim, 2021).

### **Discussions**

This study, anchored in the sociocultural theory, has illuminated the multifaceted interplay of school and home factors on Grade 11 learners' ESL performance within the Oshakati circuit, in Namibia. These findings resonate with the theory's core principles, emphasizing the profound impact of these factors on language development and ESL success. First and foremost, learners' attitudes toward English language learning emerged as a pivotal determinant of ESL performance. Positive attitudes fuelled motivation and proficiency, while negative attitudes acted as barriers. This underscored the critical role played by cultivating a supportive and positive school environment that nurtured learners' enthusiasm for English language learning. Peer pressure was revealed as another influential factor, as social interactions and group dynamics significantly impacted language development. Negative peer pressure stifled

motivation and participation, emphasizing the need for schools to create supportive peer environments that uplift learners' confidence and ESL performance. Resource scarcity in schools was identified as a formidable challenge, impeding ESL learning. Inadequate access to materials and technology hindered learners' progress, underlining the urgency of prioritizing resources to provide an enriching ESL learning environment. Transitioning to home factors, the language spoken in learners' homes held substantial influence. A strong foundation in the home language facilitated second language acquisition, while limited exposure to English at home posed challenges. This highlighted the need to respect and nurture learners' home languages as a valuable resource for English language development. Parental involvement in learners' education emerged as a significant factor, positively impacting academic achievement and language development. Schools must foster partnerships with parents, involve them in language-related activities, and provide resources for their active engagement in their children's English language learning.

Socio-economic background was shown to significantly affect language development, with socio-economic disparities impacting ESL performance. Addressing these disparities and ensuring equal access to resources and support is crucial in levelling the playing field for ESL learners. Cultural beliefs and practices within the home environment played a substantial role in learners' ESL performance. Cultural norms and gender stereotypes influenced learners' opportunities, expectations, and motivation in language learning. Fostering gender equality and recognizing diverse cultural backgrounds are crucial for providing equal opportunities and support in language learning.

### **Conclusion and recommendations**

In conclusion, this study, conducted within the framework of the sociocultural theory, offered valuable insights into the complex interplay of school environmental and home factors affecting Grade 11 learners' performances in ESL within the Oshakati circuit, Oshana region of Namibia. The findings illuminated the multifaceted nature of language acquisition and development, underscoring the critical role played by both educational institutions and home environments. One of the central findings of this study related to the profound influence of learners' attitudes on their ESL performance. Positive attitudes fostered

motivation, engagement, and language proficiency, while negative attitudes hindered progress. Therefore, the creation of a nurturing and positive school environment that encourages learners' favourable attitudes towards English language learning is of paramount importance.

Peer pressure emerged as another pivotal factor impacting ESL performance, with negative social interactions hindering motivation and participation. Thus, the establishment of supportive peer environments within schools is essential to bolster learners' confidence and boost their ESL performance. The shortage of resources within schools posed a significant barrier to ESL learning, highlighting the pressing need for prioritizing resource allocation to create an enriching and conducive learning environment. The study also delved into home factors, with the language spoken in learners' homes found to be a key determinant. A strong foundation in the home language facilitated second language acquisition, while limited exposure to English at home posed challenges. It is vital to recognize and value learners' home languages as valuable resources for English language development. Parental involvement emerged as a positive influence, promoting academic achievement and language development. Schools must actively engage with parents, encouraging their participation in language-related activities and providing the necessary resources to support their children's English language learning.

Socio-economic background was identified as a significant factor, with socio-economic disparities impacting ESL performance. Tackling these disparities and ensuring equitable access to resources and support is crucial to promote equal opportunities for ESL learners. Cultural beliefs and practices within the home environment played a substantial role in ESL performance, with cultural norms and gender stereotypes affecting learners' language development. Overcoming these stereotypes and fostering cultural inclusivity are vital for providing equal opportunities and support for all learners in language learning.

In light of these findings, it is evident that a holistic approach is required to support ESL learners. Schools must work diligently to foster positive attitudes, create supportive peer environments, and ensure sufficient resources. Simultaneously, recognizing and respecting learners' home languages, involving parents,

addressing socio-economic disparities, and promoting cultural inclusivity are essential steps in providing a nurturing and inclusive environment for English language development. This study has shed light on the importance of collaboration between schools, families, and communities to create a comprehensive and supportive context for ESL learners. By addressing these school and home factors, educational institutions and stakeholders could collectively work towards enhancing the ESL performance of Grade 11 learners in the Oshakati circuit, Oshana region of Namibia. This research served as a foundation for further initiatives aimed at improving language education and ensuring equitable opportunities for all learners.

### ***Recommendations***

The following recommendations are provided to the Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture in order to improve ESL education in Namibia.

- Collaborate with education experts and stakeholders to review the ESL curriculum. Ensure it aligns with international standards and best practices.
- Adapt the curriculum to be more inclusive of diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds to cater to the needs of all learners.
- Invest in comprehensive training programs for ESL teachers to equip them with the necessary skills to address the diverse needs of learners.
- Provide ongoing professional development opportunities for teachers to stay updated with the latest teaching methods and strategies.
- Allocate sufficient resources to schools to ensure ESL learners have access to quality textbooks, teaching materials, technology, and well-equipped classrooms.
- Establish a transparent resource allocation system that ensures equitable distribution across all schools.
- Promote active parental and community involvement in supporting ESL learners. Organize outreach programs, workshops, and parent-teacher associations to foster collaboration.
- Encourage parents and communities to create a supportive home environment for ESL learners by valuing their home languages and participating in language-related activities.

- Develop policies and programs to address socio-economic disparities that hinder ESL learners' performance. This may include scholarships, subsidies, and support for learners from disadvantaged backgrounds.
- Collaborate with social welfare agencies to identify and support learners in need.
- Consider the implementation of multilingual education programs to bridge the gap between home languages and English proficiency.
- Encourage the use of home languages alongside English to ensure learners maintain strong linguistic foundations.
- Promote cultural inclusivity in ESL education by incorporating diverse cultural perspectives into language instruction.
- Create a curriculum that fosters gender equality and challenges stereotypes within the classroom.
- Encourage and fund research initiatives to further explore ESL education within Namibia and assess the impact of policy changes.
- Establish a monitoring and evaluation system to track ESL learner performance and the effectiveness of policy implementations.

#### Areas for further study

The following recommendations for further study are suggested to conduct a longitudinal study to examine the long-term effects of the implemented strategies on learners' language proficiency and academic achievement. This would provide a deeper understanding of the sustained impact of the strategies and their effectiveness over time.

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