CHALLENGES IN USING SPOKEN ENGLISH BY GRADE SIX LEARNERS AT A SCHOOL IN ONANKALI CIRCUIT IN NAMIBIA

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ABSTRACT: *Research investigating the challenges in teaching and learning using spoken English in schools has shown that many challenges do exist in using spoken English around the world. Although learners are being taught all the English skills usage, it still seems to be a big problem mastering the skill of speaking in schools, specifically the grade six learners at the case school. In the context of Namibia, English is used as a medium of instruction in schools only from grade 4. The major research questions raised in this article were as follows: What are the challenges that learners encounter in using spoken English in the selected school? What measures should be put in place to solve the above challenges? Qualitative research method was used in this study. Data was collected through interviews of four teachers and 12 learners. Teachers and learners gave different perceptions about the usage of spoken English and its challenges. These challenges included shyness, poor vocabulary that causes poor expression ability, the learning environment and lack of confidence. Suggested interventions included parental involvement, the introduction of spelling bee program at the school, more support should be given to teachers as well as strengthening the policy of speaking English all the times at the school.*

KEYWORDS: Onankali Circuit, Challenges, Suggested Interventions, Spelling Bee Program

INTRODUCTION

Background

English is one of the most spoken languages in the World today (Wilson, 2016). According to World Travel Media - WTM (2016), although English is the approved language for Namibia, it is the first language of only few people. According to the Ministry of Basic Education, Sports and Culture - MBESC (2003), the whole main idea of the language policy for Namibian schools is to make sure that every child is taught in English with adequate skills in English before they complete their seven-year primary school cycle. This will make them proceed with a language of wider communication to higher institutions. In order for learners to become good communicators, they need to be able to listen, speak, read and write, but being able to speak fluently can provide them with a lot of different benefits and one of them is to be well oriented in the skill of speaking (Gerald, 2013). It is clear that the grade six learners at the selected school in Onankali Circuit are experiencing difficulties when using spoken English. The aim of the study is to explore the challenges in using spoken English by grade six learners at a selected school in Onankali Circuit.

Problem statement

The Ministry of Education (2016), states in the syllabus that the main idea of offering English as a second language is to promote the communicative skills of learners which is vital for meaningful interaction in a society full of different cultures and languages. In spite of that, the

majority of learners in grade six at a selected school are not competent in English, especially in speaking. It is of great concern that the grade six learners at the selected school in Onankali circuit have problems speaking good Standard English. Although learners are taught speaking skills in English, the fact still remains that learners in grade six at the selected school tend to display poor speaking skills. This leads to poor performance either in class speaking activities or English examinations which also leads to learners failing or poorly performing in various subjects. Learners tend to pass the English Language subject averagely and proceed to the next grade. This might become an ongoing process where learners pass without good marks in their speaking skills. It could be that learners were too ignorant of the language or perhaps that there were more other factors contributing to learner's poor speaking skills. The fact is that the speaking skills of grade six leaners at the selected school need improvement. It is this notion that drove and gave purpose to this study and therefore there was a need to conduct and explore the challenges in using spoken English by grade six learners in the English language.

Research questions

This article was guided by the following research questions:

1. What are the challenges that grade 6 learners encounter in using spoken English in the selected school?

2. What interventions should be put in place to solve the above challenges?

Significance of the study

Unindustrialized countries should put in mind the role of spoken English in enlightening its universal profile and importance. Because by doing this, learners will be capable of listening critically and be able to express themselves more clearly and effectively which leads them to be successful in schools and the society (Abdalla, 2015).

We believe that this article will be of great help to identify speaking difficulties and their solution at the selected school. The article will be of great advantage to the teachers and learners, educationalists, as well as English language specialists in Onankali circuit. Other stakeholders in the country will also understand how learners can improve their spoken English skills. The study will also help English language teachers to improve on teaching English language speaking skills.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Challenges in using spoken English

Inhibition

Tuan and Mai (2015) observed that the first problem in speaking English as a foreign language to be inhibition. They stressed that unlike reading, writing or listening activities, in order to speak, one has to be exposed to varieties of listeners, and one should have a reason to speak. Shyness causes learners to be afraid of saying anything in an unfamiliar language in the classroom; they are nervous of making mistakes or are simply just shy of the attraction of their speech. They added saying that students are full of fear or disapproval of what they might say

by their peers or of being embarrassed wherever they go because of something they might have said in the classroom (Tuan & Mai, 2015).

Most of the times, learners' minds are blank and that one would hear learners grumbling about not thinking of anything to say, this is because they have no reason or purpose to express themselves beyond their classrooms (Tuan & Mai, 2015). Rivers (1968) and Tuan and Mai (2015) also believe that learners might have nothing or that they have less to express, maybe because the topic chosen by the teacher that day is not interesting to them and there might be little they know about that topic. Baker and Westrup (2003), and Tuan and Mai (2015), agree that many students find it hard to answer when the teacher asks them to say something in a language which is not their mother tongue as they might have few ideas on what to say, which terminology to use or how to use the language rules appropriately.

Bowen (2005) and Abdalla (2015) are also in agreement that nature also causes learners to be shy because they are very quiet by birth. In this case, students lack the confidence and tend to be shy because most of them find it very difficult to speak in English in front of their friends and teacher because they are afraid of being a laughing stock to their peers.

Low/uneven participation

Tuan and Mai (2015) have also identified another challenge of speaking English as low or uneven participation. When a group is large, only one student or participant can talk at a time in order to be heard and in large groups this means that each student will have only very little time to talk. This means that some learners will dominate others (Tuan & Mai, 2015).

Mother tongue

Mother tongue use is also a challenge in using spoken English, according to Tuan and Mai (2003). According to them, when a lot of learners are from the same background or when most of them share the same mother tongue, they tend to use it because it is easier for them as it looks natural to use and understand. Harmer (1991) and Tuan and Mai (2015) have suggested reasons why students use mother-tongue in class. Firstly, they explained that when students are asked to discuss a particular topic which they know nothing about, they will use their own language or first say it in their own language if they want to participate. Harmer (1991) added that the use of mother-tongue comes naturally, hence an easy language to use. Finally, if teachers commonly use the students' mother tongue, then students will feel free using it. Therefore, most of the students are not trained to use the target language in the learning process and using spoken English becomes a challenge (Tuan & Mai, 2015).

Teaching materials

A study by Abdalla (2015) revealed that another challenge in using spoken English by learners is inappropriate teaching materials. In the study, most of the teachers stated that the teaching and learning materials which are used for listening and speaking skills at schools and some private educational organizations are also one of the basic problems of teaching and learning spoken English. They stated that the text books which are used in schools are not doing teaching and learning any justice since they do not support both listening and speaking.

Lack of motivation

Lack of motivation is another challenge of spoken English faced by learners. Abdalla (2015) has explained that most learners are unwilling to speak English in the classroom simply because they lack the motivation from their teachers concerning the communication in English which they need in order to learn. This is the background of the situation, he says. In line with Babu (2010), Siegel (2004) believes that motivation is given more by the teachers teaching performance therefore it is important for them to motivate their learners toward learning and speaking English.

Anxiety

Another challenge faced by learners in using spoken English is anxiety, as noted by Abdalla (2015). They defined anxiety as "A feeling of tension, apprehension and nervousness associated with the process of learning a foreign language" (p.9). Anxiety as a speaking English challenge is supported by Paakki (2013), when he proposed that "anxiety is the reason for students' negative emotional reaction to language learning" (p.13). He maintains that it is anxiety which affects learning a language and that it is reasonable because anxiety has been pointed out to delay many types of learning. Abdalla (2015) said that in order to decrease this feeling of anxiety, educators need to make sure that each student's strengths and weaknesses are given enough attention so that they can build a learning technique which accommodates all the students in the classroom.

Environment

Kabir (2014) has explained that students are also to be blamed because they do not put enough effort to speaking in English in their classrooms. As a result, they lack the confidence to speak in English, which makes students stressed and worried, which decreases their efficiency of English. They also added that when a student speaks in a class full of people, other kids make fun and laugh at him/her and this does not encourage the speaking of English.

Kabir (2014) adds that students in Hong Kong hardly get the chance to practice spoken English outside the school environment, be it at home or elsewhere. In addition, students experience a lot of loss of words and phrases when it comes to speaking and as a result, they cannot express what they wanted to mean exactly. This is because they lack the necessary vocabulary, meaning that vocabulary is a challenge which is keeping students from accurately developing their speaking skills.

Teaching and learning methods

According to Kabir (2014), teaching and learning methods are some of the problems faced by learners when it comes to speaking English. He found that a lot of teachers lack the knowledge of teaching and that they do not know or they do not adapt varieties of styles of teaching the language. This is also supported by Abdalla (2015), by revealing that the concept of teaching English that teachers possess is the one of teaching grammar, reading and writing only. They add that students are not taught how to use the oral skills, but taught the knowledge of the language instead.

Theoretical framework

The study adopted the Socio-cultural learning theory by Lev Semyonovich Vygotsky. According to Vygotsky (1978), and Wilson and Peterson (2006), learning is basically a social phenomenon that takes place around ourselves and our communities, and in which classroom environment is included. This belief has the impression that knowing something and getting to know how to do something has to do with the way we interact with one another plus the context in which we live as well as the activities we are involved in. Wilson and Peterson (2006) are of the view that children are able to learn even more when they interact with society and their culture.

According to Scott (2016), sociocultural learning theory is based upon the idea that the surrounding of learners plays an important role in their learning development. The socio-cultural learning theory is of the view that the degree of relevance of tools and symbols within a certain culture can be directly associated to a language. Scott (2016) added on saying that language can be learned through different types of social events, different situations and processes, and these all lead an individual to learning a language. Socio-cultural learning theory relies upon the idea that learners should first participate in a social environment and next learn about how to voice their thoughts aloud and lastly, the "inner speech" in which a learner keeps his/her idea within his/her mind which takes control of how we behave and think (Scott, 2016).

The socio-cultural learning theory also takes into account how social situations and peers at school affect learners' ability of gaining information. As such, the authors are of the view that the social and cultural environment, the communities and the interactions of people which learners are exposed to, has an influence on the way they speak English and that it should be changed for learners to become competent English speakers (Scott, 2016). In order to apply this theory, teachers should become aware of how learners may directly impact one another, as well as how cultural norms can influence a learner's learning behavior. Learners should then be exposed to the English language in schools at large as well as in classrooms. They should be encouraged to speak English, so that other learners who are not eager to speak the language can be motivated by their peers. An English policy, for example, can be established at schools and in classes where teachers and learners are only allowed to interact in English at all times except when it's time for the mother tongue lessons.

RESEARCH METHODS

Research design

In this study, the qualitative research method was used. Qualitative researchers aim to gather an in-depth understanding of human behaviors and the reasons that lead to such behaviors, giving the researcher an in-depth understanding of the study. The method has provided the researchers with a productive, rich detailed picture on why learners are not speaking English of their level, what their feelings are on speaking English and solutions to such problems.

Population, Sample and sampling procedures

The targeted population for the study included schools, grade 6 learners and their subject teachers in Onankali Circuit. The sample was one school, 12 grade 6 learners and 5 subject teachers. The researchers used purposive sampling in order to select the participants who are

believed to possess the needed knowledge. According to Kobus (2007), purposive sampling simply means that participants are selected because of some defining characteristics that make them the holders of the data needed for the study. Twelve learners (six best and six poor performers) from all classes in grade 6, as well as five subject teachers who are responsible for teaching grade 6 at the selected school in Onankali Circuit were involved in the study. The local language teacher was not included.

Research instruments

The researchers collected data using interviews. Kobus (2007) defines an interview as a conversation between two or more people in which the interviewer asks the participants questions to collect data and to learn about their ideas, beliefs, views, opinions and behaviors in the topic in question. Interviews helped the researcher to pursue in-depth information around the topic as well as to obtain rich descriptive data on the views and opinions of how learners view spoken English.

Data collection

The researchers collected data using individual face to face and focus group interviews with the subject teachers and 12 learners from the two grade 6 classes at the selected school in Onankali Circuit. The researcher used a cellphone to record the interviews and store the data on a disk and three places on a personal computer.

Data analysis

Firstly, the researchers transcribed the interviews, and then read the data in order to become familiar with the information and make meaning out of it. The researchers then classified the data into two main categories: for teachers and for learners to narrow it down into smaller groups. Thereafter the data examined in depth. This helped in categorizing the data to identify themes. The identified themes were then segmented with regard to the research questions. Lastly the data were interpreted to give meaning to the findings.

RESULTS/ FINDINGS

Introduction

This section presents the results, analysis and their interpretation in accordance with the research questions. This study was based on a selected primary school with challenges in using spoken English by the grade 6 learners. The information from the interviews is combined to give meaning.

Sample description

Table 1. Teacher's participants in the interviews

Teacher participant	Years of teaching at the selected school	Gender	Subject taught
Teacher A	17 years	Male	Natural science
Teacher B	14 years	Male	English
Teacher C	16 years	Male	Mathematics
Teacher D	3 years	Female	Elementary agriculture & social studies

Table 2. Learner's participants in the interviews

Learners participation	Gender	No of years at the selected school	Favorite subject	Academic performance
Learner 1	Female	5 years	English	Good
Learner 2	Female	6 years	Mathematics	Good
Learner 3	Female	5 years	Mathematics	Poor
Learner 4	Female	7 years	Social studies	Good
Learner 5	Male	6 years	English	Poor
Learner 6	Male	2 years	Mathematics	Poor
Learner 7	Female	6 years	English	Good
Learner 8	Female	7 years	English	Good
Learner 9	Female	6 years	English	Poor
Learner 10	Male	7 years	English	Poor
Learner 11	Male	2 years	English	Good
Learner 12	Male	1 year	Oshindonga	Poor

Teachers' learners' perception on the challenges in spoken English by grade 6 learners

Shyness

Shyness seems to be a common repeated challenge of spoken English in all teachers and learner's participants. According to the respondents, teacher A had this to say:

> *Some of the learners are very shy when speaking, when you mention them to say something, they have to first look at their peers but you can see that they know the answer, If I ask them in their mother tongue, they might explain it very well (Teacher A).*

The participants revealed that most of the learner's face speaking challenges such as shyness as learners laugh at each other's mistakes. Another response from an interview with teacher B revealed that *"learners are shy and that they are afraid to be laughed at by their classmates"*. This is supported by learner 1, who has been at the school for 5 years and who likes to speak

in English in order to improve her vocabulary when she said that she experienced some speaking difficulties by saying this: "if I say something wrong, people laugh at me and as a result, I am shy and keep quiet because I am scared to be laughed at if I say something wrong". In agreement with the challenge is learner 5 who had this to say "When I speak aloud, learners laugh at me and I feel bad and that leads me not to say anything in class". Learner 6 also supported shyness as a speaking challenge by saying that if he says something wrong, people laugh at him and that sometimes he would want to say something but he doesn't know how to say it in English.

Also in support of shyness as a learners' speaking challenge is Teacher C who had this to say "a learner may know what to say but might not know how to express themselves as a result of being shy". Learner 3 said, "Sometimes I'm shy to say the answer and sometimes I know the answer but I don't want to speak loud".

Lack of self-expression caused by lack of vocabulary

Teacher A says that difficulties in speaking English are always there. He continued saying that learners mostly lack the confidence to express themselves in English and they also encounter difficulties in building sentences, because mentioning something long is hard for them when they are asked a question to describe or to explain. Teacher B added that learners lack the vocabulary to construct grammatically correct sentences as they are influenced by their mother tongue. Learners try to direct translate from their mother tongue to English in the way they feel the sentence should be and this brings confusion to the teacher in understanding what they want to say. Learner 2 was in agreement with Teacher B when she said that sometimes she doesn't know how to explain the answer in English. "Sometimes I know the answer but only in my mother tongue, and it's hard to say it in English" (L2).

Not knowing what to say

An interview with Learner 4 revealed that when she mentions an incorrect answer in class, her peers laugh at her and when a teacher asks a question, she might know the answer but only know how to explain it in Oshiwambo and not English. Learner 7 said that English is a difficult language, that's why she likes to speak it so that she will know how to speak it well and answer people who can't speak Oshiwambo. She says that she doesn't know some words and this makes her not to speak because she doesn't know how to say them.

Not knowing what to say seemed to be a common speaking challenge among learners as Learner 8 said in the interview that, although she likes speaking in English in order to one day speak it with others, it is still a challenge when she has to stand up in class and doesn't know the answer, as a result, she keeps quiet because other learners curiously look at her.

Learner 9 added that she also speaks English at home but it is embarrassing in class when she says something wrong, and other learners laugh at her. "Sometimes I don't understand when being taught by the teacher and sometimes I don't know what the question means because it is in English and sometimes I don't know what to answer" (Learner 10). Learner 11 has been at the selected school for 2 years and had this to say; "In class, you can make a mistake or spell a word incorrectly and the learners end up laughing at you". Learner 12 says his favorite subject is Oshindonga because it is taught in his mother tongue and he understands it better.

Learners' environment

Teacher B says that learners are more exposed to English only when they're at school but English is scarce at home, and they're discouraged when they try to speak English elsewhere other than school and this is causing learners to have problems in speaking. In support of this is Teacher D who is of the view that because English is not spoken in the environment, this causes learners to find it very difficult to express themselves in English with confidence that's why sometimes when they stand up to express themselves, they experience grammatical errors, and their sentences are not well structured.

Lack of confidence

Teacher C said that learners are not confident enough to stand in class and give an answer because they're afraid of being laughed at by their peers. Some of them are slow learners and mastering the competencies of their grade level is quite hard. He gave an example of a learner who might be in grade 6 but his/her level of understanding might be that of a grade 4 learner. Teacher D said that she encounters a lot of speaking problems in class brought by learners, lack of confidence and low self-esteem among learners, she said that learners find it very difficult to stand up and say an answer and they do not trust themselves if what they're saying is correct.

Teachers and learners' perceptions on the interventions of the speaking challenges faced by learners

School English policy

According to the interviews, the school has adopted an English policy whereby all learners must adhere to speaking in English all the time while at school and elsewhere. Teacher C said that "there is an English policy at school whereby all learners are encouraged and expected to speak English in and out of the classroom". Teacher D, also said that "the school has an English policy in place, which was introduced so that learners must speak English in the environment, like in the class, outside the class and wherever they are playing". Teacher D added that learners are not really aware of the policy, that's why they find it difficult to express themselves and are not confident and end up speaking the vernacular language in and outside the class.

Teacher A who has been a grade six teacher for 11 years says that difficulties in speaking English are always there. He says that the school has adopted an English Language policy whereby the learners are expected to speak English all the time and encouraged to speak it at home. Although there is this English policy at school, only some learners adhere to it because their background does not allow them to speak it at home and their parents will be against it as a result of not understanding.

The learners who took part in the interview said that there is an English policy introduced at the school. Learner 1 said that "if a person likes to speak English, then she/he will improve and learn how to speak it better and we are also told to speak English at all times expect during Oshindonga periods". In support of the English policy as an intervention to curb the challenges of speaking English, Learner 2 had this to say: "Our school's principal tells us to speak English every time". "The principal always tells us at the morning devotion that we should speak English" (Learner 7).

Class teaching by different teachers of different grades

Teacher A is of the view that learners should be taught by different teachers of different grades after school so that learners are able to speak proper English.

> *When I go to the class, I teach in English, I explain in English, and I ask learners to answer me in English and I usually encourage them to build sentences rather than mentioning only one word in order for them to have more access to English (Teacher A).*

In favour of this approach, Teacher C added that "extra lessons are needed to be given to learners in order for them to express themselves better in front of other learners".

Monitoring of learners by teachers

Teacher B also supports the policy at the school which encourages learners to speak in English every time, and he believe they are trying. He believes that if teachers can monitor learners every time while at school, be it in classrooms or on the school ground, then it will encourage and make learners not to switch to their mother tongue. He is of the view that teachers need to motivate learners to keep speaking English.

> *I always communicate with them in English, either in or out of class. Encourage learners not to be afraid of making mistakes as we all learn from our mistakes. I also ask them to always carry their dictionaries so that they can increase their vocabulary (Teacher B).*

Devotion conduction

Teacher C said that "Each grade at the school is given a day whereby they are required to conduct the morning devotion in front of the whole school in order to build their confidence". This might help them to have confidence enough to speak English in class, be it giving an answer or presenting a speech in front of other peers.

Promoting learner centered approach

When the researchers asked Teacher C what measures should be introduced in order to address the learners speaking challenges, he had this to say: "Learners should be given more chances to speak or say something in class during lesson presentation and be motivated by their teachers to practice speaking English in order for them to become better English speakers".

Spelling bees

On the intervention measures to the challenges of spoken English, Teacher D had this to say: "Spelling bees should be introduced whereby there is a competition or tournament once a week, where learners compete in order to gain confidence of speaking in public". She added that debating should also be in place as well as the library to be equipped with necessary materials to help them.

Motivation by teachers

The grade 6 elementary agriculture and social studies teacher is of the view that teachers should be caring enough for their learners by motivating them to speak more English inside and outside

the classroom. Teacher D stated that teachers should also introduce more speaking activities rather than more writing activities and inform learners more on the importance of speaking English. Learner 7 had this to say: "Teachers should always use English when they teach us or at times when they're not in class so that we learners can learn from their examples".

After school lessons

In our interviews with the learners, Learner 3 stated that in order for the problem at hand to be removed, learners who are struggling with speaking in English need to remain after school so that they can be taught by their teachers in order to improve speaking in English. "We should always try to speak in English whenever we can, as this can also help us improve" she said.

Punishment for learners who laugh at other's mistakes

On the interventions to curb speaking difficulties Learner 5 said that people should stop laughing at each other's mistakes, because everyone comes to school to learn. Learner 5 stated that those people who laugh at each other should be punished by their teachers so that they can stop making fun of each other.

Punishment for learners who do not want to speak English

On the interventions on the challenges of spoken English, Learner 1 is of this view: "The teachers should punish the learners who speak Oshindonga by cutting grass and I will tell people to speak English every time expect during Oshindonga period". Learner 5 is a male who said that for them to become better English speakers learners must start speaking in English every time and if they do not comply, they should be punished. He said that, before help comes from elsewhere, it's them who should start helping themselves, and they can only do this if they start speaking in English on their own and not always waiting to be told by a teacher to speak in English.

In support of this approach is Learner 8 who said, "There should be strict monitoring of those learners who do not want to speak English and they should be punished upon their identification". Adding on the punishment strategy as an intervention measure to the above problem, Learner 9 said that there should be punishment for those who do not adhere to the English policy, for example, by cutting grass.

Parental involvement

Learner 8 is a top performer at the school whose favorite subject is English. She is of the view that there should be a meeting conducted at school, so that the parents can be told about the problem of speaking English among their learners and so that they can be encouraged to speak in English with their children back at home so that learners can be speaking in English at school as well as at home with parents who are able to speak in English.

Using materials at school

Learners should make use of the available materials at school, for example, dictionaries in order to familiarize themselves with a lot of English words as this will help them know the meanings of a lot of words meaning. Learner 11 also suggested that learners should be free to ask for help when they need it, either from their peers or the teacher. Learner 11 had this to say: "I just

want to tell the other learners that speaking in English is not a crime, so they should not be afraid of speaking English as it is a good way to learn and know it better".

DISCUSSIONS

The results of this research suggest that teachers and learners are aware of the speaking difficulties that learners go through every day. They also viewed the challenges of speaking in English as a hindering factor in the education of the learners.

Discussion of findings on the challenges in spoken English by the grade 6 learners based on teachers and learners' responses

By involving teachers and learners in this study, the researchers discovered some challenges of spoken English by the grade six learners at the selected school in Onankali Circuit. Upon going through the data, the main challenges were identified as follows:

Shyness

Most of the participants indicated shyness to be the biggest challenge that hinders learners from speaking English. The findings pointed out that most learners are shy of appearing before others in class which means that if learners are afraid of being laughed at, they can have no courage to speak openly in front of their peers as well as the teacher. This finding is in agreement with that of Tuan and Mai (2015). According to them, shyness causes learners to be afraid of saying anything in a foreign language in the classroom; they are nervous of making mistakes or simply just shy of the attraction of their speech.

Lack of self-expression caused by lack of vocabulary

Another challenge according to the teacher's interviews is the lack of self- expression among learners which is a result of lack of vocabulary among learners. It was pointed out that learners find it hard to express themselves exactly what they mean in class, so it is hard to construct sentences as their vocabulary is not up to standard. Kabir (2014) supports these findings when he said that students have a major problem with the insufficient vocabulary. He said that when it comes to speaking, students' minds seem not to get some of the words and phrases they need in order to speak and as a result, they fail to express what they intend to mean exactly.

Learners' environment

Learner's environment is a challenge when it comes to speaking English. Since their school is located in a village, this means that most of their parents are not really educated to speak English with them. The participants revealed that most learners are only exposed to English when they are at school. Their parents are not orientated on the importance of being able to speak English. These findings are in line with Kabir (2014), who said that students hardly get the chance to practice spoken English outside the school environment, be it at home or elsewhere.

Lack of confidence

Lack of confidence was also one of the challenges mentioned by the teacher participants. The findings revealed that learners lack the confidence to stand in class as they doubt their answers.

It was found that some learners are slow when it comes to learning so it is very hard for them to master the expected competencies. Apart from that, learners are in doubt whether what they are saying is correct and as a result, they do not stand to give answers as they are also scared of being laughed at by their peers. Kabir (2014), agreed with these findings in his study when he said that lack of confidence is one of the challenges that students face when it comes to speaking English.

Discussion of findings on the intervention measures in spoken English by the grade 6 learners based on teachers' and learner's responses

According to the responses, the school has implemented an English policy. The participants stressed that the school has to make sure that all learners adhere to the English policy program by making sure that each and every learner speaks in English at all times except in the Oshindonga lessons. Teachers should also speak in English with their learners and also promote a learner-centered approach where learners will speak more than the teacher as well as do more speaking activities in class. This will provide learners with the necessary vocabulary. This is supported by Kaliris (2013), when he said that the more you speak as a teacher in the foreign language the more the students get familiarized with this new language.

According to the study, another measure to curb the situation at hand is parental involvement. The classrooms are not enough for learners to learn to speak English, says Kabir (2014), and thus a friendly environment can assure the learning outcome of teaching and speaking English. Parents should speak in English with their children to expose them to more English. Learners can also do something on their own by making use of the materials at school such as dictionaries to make themselves more familiar with different English words.

Participants suggested that struggling learners can remain at school to be taught by different teachers who usually do not teach them. Another measure can be by teachers whereby they have to encourage and monitor learners' progress so that learners take it as a goal they need to accomplish. Kabir (2014) supported this when he said that students become inspired to speak in English as they become less anxious with the support of their peers and teachers. In order to build learners' speaking confidence, learners should also be taught to stand in front of big crowds, such as conducting morning devotions at school to gain confidence.

The participants revealed that the school should also introduce a program of 'spelling bee' so that learners are confident enough to stand in public and by doing this; they become familiar to a lot of new words that can build their vocabulary. Debating can also be put in place for learners to get used to speaking in English.

Implications to research and practice

The school environment has a major role to play on improving learners spoken English. An environment that allows learners to use their local language in daily conversations will influence learners not to communicate in English fluently. This explains why learners in rural areas and those in cities in Namibia have different challenges. Also, our teachers should be trained or more emphases should be on English grammar teaching and learning. A learner is able to speak good English only when his/her English grammar has been mastered. Learners should be motivated to overcome this challenge because they need English a national language in Namibia.

CONCLUSION

Conclusion

The researchers came to the conclusion that learners' challenges in speaking English are serious problems that hinder their ability to communicate efficiently with the world and threaten the effectiveness of teaching and learning. Shyness, lack of self-expression due to lack of vocabulary, learners' environment, lack of confidence and not knowing what to say, are identified as the most common challenges which the grade six learners at a selected school in Onankali circuit when it comes to speaking English. It is therefore important for the government, the entire shareholders of the school, and mostly learners to be involved, and to identify and intervene to eliminate or curb these challenges. Parents should see to it that learners' spoken English is made better by speaking to them more in English whenever possible as well as explain to them the importance of knowing how to speak in English appropriately. Teachers should also do more regular speaking activities in classrooms and by this their confidence is built and challenges curbed, making learners more at ease to speak in English.

Recommendations

In order for learners to become competent English speakers, there has to be a foundation of speaking in English before school years. Parents who are able should speak English with their children when they are still young. Television can also help in homes for those who can afford them, so children can watch just enough but not too much of TV. This will help them grow up listening to more English and understand meanings of words. All Classrooms at the school can be made more learner friendly in a way that it becomes an appropriate atmosphere for learners to learn how to speak English better.

All teachers should be well trained and supplied with enough appropriate materials in classrooms. Speaking games such as role plays and drama can be assigned to learners to do in class in order to enhance their oral skills. Speaking activities can be added to their examination assessments so that they would not proceed to the next grades without properly speaking in English.

It will be of great importance for learners to be clear that English is not only a subject to memorize but a language to learn. More research should be done on this topic in order to grasp ways on how to help learners overcome the challenges they face when dealing with spoken English, especially the shyness of learners as this seems to be the most common challenge which learners face.

Future Research

We would like to suggest that future research should be conducted in the following areas

- Challenges in using spoken English by grade 4 to 7 learners in Onankali Circuit. This will give the Department of Education an overview of these challenges in the whole circuit.

- More research could be conducted on the feasibilities of using English as a medium of instruction beginning from Grade one. If this is possible, we hope that by grade six or seven, learners will be able to express themselves in English.

- Research should also be done on how motivation and an improved school environment can improve learners' spoken English

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