

# The Effect of Mother Tongue on Grade 4 Learners when Learning English as a Second Language: Case Study of Kavango East Region in Namibia

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**Abstract:** The study examined the effects of mother tongue on the academic achievement of Namibia's senior primary school learners in grade 4 studying English as a Second language who also speak Rukwangali, Rumanyo and Thimbukushu. Language is a significant phenomenon without which it is impossible to successfully educate learners in a classroom. The study focuses on Namibian learner's English Second language learning. English was adopted in Namibia as an official language in 1990, since then, English has been the country's recognised official language. In Namibia's primary and secondary schools, English is a required subject as well as a medium of instruction from senior primary to higher institutions of learning. The usage of English in learners' interactions in the classroom today is not enforced with much effort. Mother tongues (Rukwangali, Rumanyo and Thimbukushu) may have an impact on how well learners learn English. From several schools in Namibia's Kavango east region, three groups of 60 senior primary learners with three different mother tongues: Rukwangali, Rumanyo and Thimbukushu were randomly chosen. The null hypothesis is maintained by CHI-SQUARE ANALYSIS. The analysis demonstrates that no mother tongue has a distinctive impact on the process of learning English.

**Keywords:** Mother Tongue, Grade 4, English Second Language, Namibia, Kavango East Region

## I. INTRODUCTION

Learners who are admitted in Namibian schools especially in the Kavango East region of Namibia in junior and senior primary basic education mostly come from homes where the language of communication is either Rukwangali, Rumanyo and Thimbukushu. Moreover, all state schools in Namibia instruct in the medium of mother tongue in the junior primary phase except for a few classrooms in the junior primary phase of which the medium of instruction is English. Therefore, such learners are faced with numerous challenges to distinguish between their mother tongues and the medium of instruction. As a result, learners tend to perform poorly. MBESC (2003) articulates that the grade 4 classroom in Namibia is a transitional grade where learners transit from the medium of mother tongue to the medium of English and mother tongue as a subject (Kirchner & Mostert, 2017). This change is a ticking concern amongst the teachers and learners. Teachers have to ensure that learners comprehend the content being taught in English and learners have to ensure that they develop the skills of English as a Second language. Whether or not mother tongue

influence has any effect on English second language learning to learners in grade 4 is what this paper unraveled.

A plethora of literature (Yadav, 2014; Eltom, 2017; Adeleye and Ogunremi, 2017; Sibanda, 2017; Alimi, et al., 2020; Beisenbayeva, 2020; Haufiku, Mashebe & Abah, 2022)) documents literature on the influence of Mother Tongue on the acquisition of English as a second language, but there seems to be a dearth of literature in the context of Kavango West and East regions of Namibia. This paper premised to fill the gap that exists in literature. Mother tongue remains a controversial topic in linguistics and many defines the term differently. To Yadav (2014) the phrase "mother tongue" refers to the idea that a mother develops a child's language skills, making the mother's language the child's main source of language instruction. If the spouses are from the same tribe, this was or is very plausible. The mother tongue, native language, or first language is what a person learned from birth or within a critical period where the capacity to learn a language is biologically linked to age. As a result, it serves as the foundation for social identity and the primary means of instruction in schools and in society. Whereas Adeleye and Ogunremi (2017) define mother tongue to be a language grasped consciously or unconsciously when a person speaks their native tongue. It is the most powerful catalyst for a people's culture and an essential cultural legacy that underpins all relationships between people.

### 1.1. Research Objective

The primary goal of the study was to determine whether the mother tongue of the participants (Rukwangali, Rumanyo, and Thimbukushu) had any influence on their ability to learn English in grade 4 classes in Namibia. By discovering this relationship, we may make predictions and recommendations on how to acquire and learn a second language.

### 1.2. Statement of the Problem

The mother tongue has an effect on grade 4 learners learning English as a Second language.

### 1.3. Research Questions

- 1.3.1. Is there a connection between the learning of English as a Second Language in grade 4 and the mother tongues (Rukwangali, Rumanyo, and

Thimbukushu)?

- 1.3.2. Does the mother tongues' grammar, accent, and intonation affect the grade 4 learners' acquisition of English as a Second Language in any way?

#### *Null Hypothesis*

Mother tongue has no effect on acquiring English as a second language.

#### *1.4. Significance of the Study*

The beneficiaries of this study are the teachers and learners at various schools. The study may bring into view strategies that may guide the teachers to help improve the learners' ability to express themselves in English second language.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### *Mother tongue's impact on English language instruction and learning*

To connect and communicate effectively, one must comprehend and learn any language. A person can only communicate if given the opportunity to do so. In this world, communication is both necessary and in high demand. Although the mother tongue is important for the development of ideas, global communication calls for the use of an international language. English is therefore widely used and a global language. English is the most widely used and crucial tool for international communication (Daniel & Arulappan, 2020).

It has long been suggested that the mother tongue interferes with the teaching and learning of the English language. There is a common belief that the mother tongue affects how English is spoken. The key competencies needed for teaching English language include writing, speaking, reading, and listening. The teachers must invest more time to teaching English, as well as more time overall. The capacity of teachers to teach English is influenced by a variety of elements, including pronunciation, mother tongue, the quantity of exposure to English, a person's phonetic aptitude, personality, and motivation (Daniel & Arulappan, 2020).

Alqahtani (2015) expounds that the use of the learner's mother tongue during English language instruction has an impact on how quickly they pick up the language. One uses sound from their native tongue when learning to speak English. Pronunciation is not given enough weight in most English language instruction. Pronunciation is a crucial component of a learner's communicative ability, which aids in the development of high language proficiency.

The English language instructor serves as the class's major source of English language and is in charge of enforcing the usage of good English language. This is important in the learning process of the language. The English language instructor demonstrates word pronunciation in English during everyday conversation. Through ongoing communication with their English language instructors, the students develop proper

pronunciation. The students won't be able to pick up the proper pronunciation if the teacher speaks incorrectly. As a result, the students develop improper pronunciation techniques. (Gutiérrez & Francisco, 2018).

Daniel and Arulappan (2020) allude that in many societies, the English language is highly regarded. English language instruction receives more attention and resources. Despite this, kids' speech and writing abilities are not given sufficient emphasis. Over time, the pupils form incorrect assumptions about the routine activities and directives in the classroom, and they lack confidence while speaking English. When teaching this language, English language instructors focus the articulation of individual sounds. Mispronunciation is brought on by the enormous number of dialects that exist and cannot be taught in a school.

Underachievement is a widespread issue in many regions of the world's educational systems. Poor performance across a wide range of academic areas is caused by the English language's weak foundation. Thus, a lack of proficiency in a language is blamed for poor academic performance. To improve the students' language proficiency, English language instructors should get closer to the pupils. When students make mistakes or struggle with learning the English language, teachers can correct them or offer assistance. These techniques will assist the teachers in identifying the students' problems and improve the students' comprehension of the English language. The best way to teach English to students would be determined by the English teachers' understanding of the learners' mother tongues. For the sake of the students, the teacher should provide expectations and guidelines. The kids will benefit from this as they learn and use the language effectively. By using a specific English accent, the teacher can establish standards (Daniel & Arulappan, 2020).

Despite the fact that students are more exposed to and learn in their mother tongue, English language teachers should ensure that their students have a sufficient understanding of and exposure to the language from an early age. According to several studies, secondary schools should offer more years of English language instruction. When teaching English, English teachers should make an effort to bring realism into the classroom. As a result, the students will be able to do well academically and have a solid foundation in the English language.

### *Language barrier issues for non-English speakers*

Students who do not speak English may find it challenging to learn using the English language as a medium of education. Numerous research looked into the actual issues that pupils have when utilising the English language in various contexts. The research made an effort to identify and address the causes of the students' challenges.

Despite coming from various backgrounds, English language learners struggle to learn it as a second language. It has been discovered that employing English articles might be

challenging for natural English speakers. The other non-native English speakers, on the other hand, struggle with interference from their mother tongues. Here, learning a second or foreign language is influenced by the mother tongue. Every person needs to learn English because it is one of the most important languages in the world and is used by people in the arts, sciences, politics, economy, and other fields worldwide (Abid, 2016).

The core fundamental skills of hearing, reading, writing, and speaking must be taught to students, according to (Daniel & Arulappan, 2020). The majority of pupils struggle with writing. Writing is a crucial skill where pupils create phrases that are connected. However, the pupils frequently believe that writing is a challenging and exhausting endeavour.

According to Daniel and Arulappan, (2020), students make mistakes when writing. He stresses the value of writing because it helps pupils remember the vocabulary, idioms, and grammatical structures they have learned. Additionally, writing gives kids more opportunities to become fluent in the language. Students engage with the new language while they are writing. When the hand and the brain work together to write, the learning is reinforced by the brain. Error analysis is a crucial tactic that both teachers and students must use. It details the mistakes that were made. With the aid of this technique, educators can enhance their instruction, identify areas that need reinforcement, and amend their mistakes.

Abisamra (2003) looked at ten essays that students in the ninth grade had produced. It was found that there were 120 substance errors, 29 grammatical errors, 35 syntactic faults, 26 lexical errors, and three semantic flaws. According to the author, intralingual interference was a contributing factor to these errors in addition to negative L1 transfer. In 42 writings, Mahmoud (2005) found 420 mistakes. He determined that both interlingual and intralingual issues are the source of the inaccuracies. He advised that crucial plans for overcoming these mistakes be made.

According to Brown (1994), many mistakes are made at the beginning stages of language learning because of negative transfer. Another conclusion is that intralingual errors prevail over interlingual errors when language learners master English. Kim (1987), who conducted an error analysis of compositions written by Korean students of English in the 12th grade, reported similar results. He noted that intralingual mistakes happen more frequently than interlingual mistakes. A total of 2445 mistakes were found, with auxiliary errors being the most common type. This was the cause of 419 mistakes.

*Methods to lessen the impact of mother tongue on the teaching and learning of the English language*

The issue can be resolved by integrating spoken English abilities into the fundamentals of education and by introducing the English language. It is possible to identify and drill the sound patterns that are most likely to be misunderstood and confused with the mother tongue. Using a native speaker's

model voice, the students should constantly practise these sound patterns. When, when, and how the mother tongue is utilised should all be actively under the teacher's control and influence. The teacher should provide a strong model of utterance because it is crucial to the learner's linguistic development. The instructor should push the students to use English as much as they can.

English language learning can be accelerated and the mother tongue's influence on instruction removed with the help of digital language labs. The students should listen to the term being spoken correctly and then assess their own understanding. In their regular interactions, teachers should start teaching students how to pronounce things in English

(Gazzalie & Jahane, 2019) The learners should make the most of their English language abilities. They should pay attention to the grammar and vocabulary and avoid poor pronunciation. The cultural and social norms that apply to the communication scenario should be followed by the learners. The instructors should employ activities that blend language input, organised output, and communicative output in a balanced manner.

Language input includes teacher discussion, listening exercises, language read and heard outside of class, and reading passages. This encourages learners to start developing dialect on their own. The language input could be either form- or content-oriented. The input that is content-oriented is information-focused. The description of learning strategies is also included. The ways in which language is used, the direction and advice provided by teachers, or the acquisition of pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar are all examples of form-oriented input. The students need to work on their discourse competency, taking turns during conversations, rate of speech, length of pauses, and other language use skills.

When a brief explanation of grammar is needed for learners at a lower level, English should be used rather than the learners' native tongue. Structured output refers to the proper delivery method. In this method, the pupils have choices for their responses. The pupils employ a particular framework that the teacher established and instructed during this procedure. The learners are at ease creating recently introduced specific language elements in structured output. The previously studied material can occasionally be mixed. Exercises from textbooks make for a useful structured output practise activity.

### III. METHODS

*Population:* All grade 4 students in public schools who speak Rukwangali, Rumanyo, or Thimbukushu as their mother tongue were included in the study's population.

*Sample:* Of the total 60 learners in grade 4 classes, 20 were from Rumanyo, 20 were from Rukwangali, and 20 were from Thimbukushu. In this study, a quantitative paradigm was used. This paradigm is used to increase the data analysis's validity, dependability, and procedural bias control. Data is gathered from the grades of three groups of ten grade 4 learners, each of which comprises three scores. Three separate mother tongues

are used by learners (Rukwangali, Rumanyo and Thimbukushu). The learners received specialised coaching for one week in one lesson. They received equal treatment without any form of prejudice. After a week, they were tested with a 50-point exam that included various grammar, comprehension, and oral presentation skills.

*Analysis of Data:* Following a thorough review of the participants, the findings were put through a CHI-SQUARE analysis using SPSS software to determine whether or not the learner's mother tongue had an effect on the acquisition of English as a Second language in grade 4. Data from each group was analysed. For better representation and additional analytical decision-making, outcomes, and recommendations, the acquired results were incorporated into tables.

IV. RESULTS

Mother tongue	Marks of English														Total
	30	33	34	35	36	38	39	40	41	42	43	44	48		
Rukwangali	0	1	0	1	4	2	2	3	3	2	0	1	1	20	
Rumanyo	1	0	1	2	2	4	2	1	3	0	2	1	1	20	
Thimbukushu	1	1	0	1	4	2	3	3	3	1	1	0	0	20	
<b>Total</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>60</b>	

Case Processing Summary

	Cases					
	Valid		Missing		Total	
	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent
Mother tongue * English marks	60	100.0%	0	0.0%	60	100.0%

Mother tongue \* English marks Cross tabulation

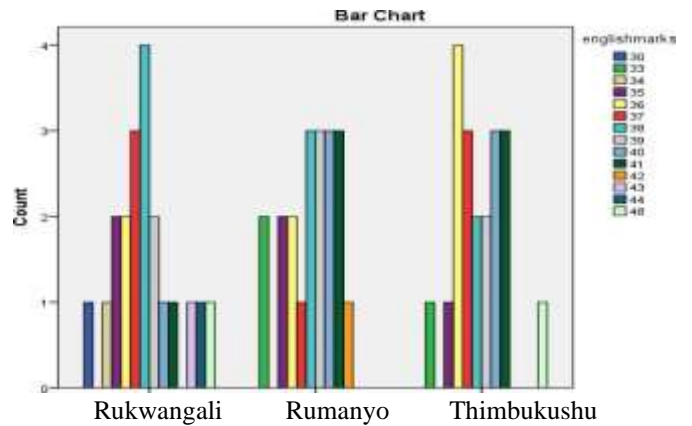
Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	18.781 <sup>a</sup>	26	.846
Likelihood Ratio	21.678	26	.706
Linear-by-Linear Association	.060	1	.806
N of Valid Cases	60		

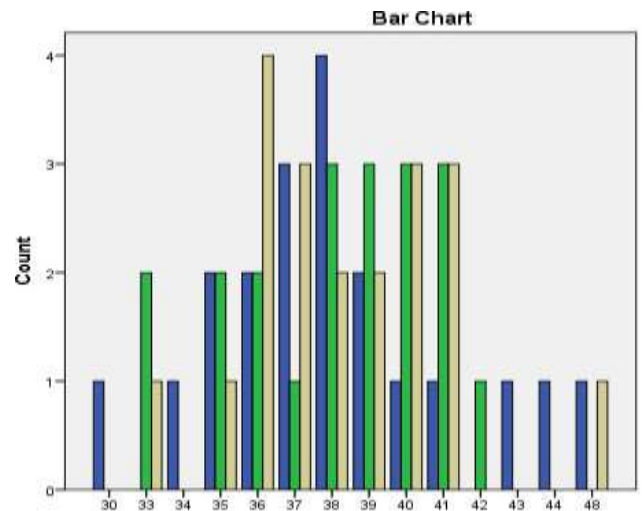
a. 42 cells (100.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .33.

The result of Chi-Square

As the calculated value of  $P > .05$  so the null hypothesis is maintained.



English marks



Key:

- Rukwangali
- Rumanyo
- Thimbukushu

V. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

According to the findings, the alternative hypothesis is rejected and our null hypothesis is supported. It may be concluded that mother tongues are not useful while studying English as a second language.

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