

**The Transition from Mother Tongue to English as a Medium of Instructions
in Namibian Primary Schools**



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**Professional and Resource Development
Research Sub-Division**

April 2023



National Institute for Educational Development



REPUBLIC OF NAMIBIA
Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture

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Acronyms

HoDs

Heads of Departments

MoI

Medium of Instruction

NIED

National Institute for Educational Development

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1. Introduction and background

According to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UN General Assembly, 1948), the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (Organization of African Unity, 1990), the Namibia Basic Education Act 16 of 2001 (Ministry of Basic Education, Sport and Culture, 2001), and the Namibian Constitution Article 20 (The Constitution of the Republic of Namibia, 2018), everyone has the right to education. Chavez (2016) argues that the right to education is wide-ranging, but the descriptions of what and how inclusive quality education should be effectively provided seems to be impractical. However, it is worth noting that basic education should promote a “functional literacy and language development to help the learners to communicate effectively in speech and writing in English and in another language of Namibia” (Ministry of Education and Culture, 1992, p. 1). For the learners to be proficient in speaking and writing in English and in their mother tongue, the Ministry of Education and Culture felt that it was necessary to formulate a new language policy for schools. According to the Ministry of Basic Education, Sport and Culture (2003, p. 2), “Namibia perceived the need to have a new language policy for schools in order to promote mother tongue use, alongside English, in schools and colleges of education”. A document called *The Language Policy for Schools: 1992-1996 and Beyond* was formulated shortly after independence in 1990 and it was implemented afterwards.

In April 2000, the conference on Language and Development in Southern Africa was held in Okahandja and one of the outcomes of this conference was to review the language policy. Hence, the new policy document, titled *Language Policy for Schools in Namibia: Discussion Document* was revised. The revised language policy states that learners in Grades 1–3 must be taught either through the mother tongue or a predominant local language. Whereas, English become a compulsory subject starting in Grade 1 and considered as the medium of instruction (MoI) from Grade 4 and onward. And in case, where parents/guardians or the school want to use English as the medium of instruction in Grades 1–3, permission must be obtained from the Minister of Education with well-grounded, convincing motivation (Ministry of Basic Education, Sport and Culture, 2003). Many studies have been conducted and articles were written on the language policy in Namibia (Chavez, 2016; Brock-Utne & Holmarsdottir, 2019; Ninkova, 2022; Norro, 2021; Norro, 2022; Shilongo, 2007). Some of these studies found that the prevalence of English

in the present language education policy caused some challenges such as negative societal attitudes toward African languages, inadequate teacher training, and the influence of international organisations. Therefore, these challenges have made it difficult for the language policy to positively serve the Namibian Child towards the provision of inclusive quality education.

In spite of the above-mentioned challenges, the language policy document that is currently used in Namibian schools is for 2003. And due to several transformations within the Namibian education system in terms of curriculum revision for the past few years. The NIED research subdivision, therefore found it necessary to conduct a study to understand the experiences, perceptions and practices of the school management and teachers on the transition from mother tongue to English as a medium of instruction in Namibian primary schools.

2. Main research objectives

- To gauge whether participants were aware of the language policy for schools in Namibia and if they have access to the document.
- To assess the participants' experiences in the transition of Grade 4 learners to English as a medium of instruction.
- To find out the key factors that influence the transition from mother tongue education to English as a medium of instruction during the teaching and learning process.
- To investigate the challenges that hinder the teaching and learning process when the medium of instruction is not a mother tongue.

3. Research methodology

3.1 Research design

This study used a mixed method design that combines both qualitative and quantitative approaches. In this case, questionnaires and semi-structured interviews were used to collect data.

3.2 Population and sampling

The population of this study consists of 14 regions with schools that have Grade 4. The study targeted school managers and Grade 4 teachers only. The sample comprised of seven regions (Erongo, Kavango East, Khomas, Omaheke, Omusati, Oshana and //Kharas), 35 schools (five schools per region) with 247 participants (42 school managers and 205 Grade 4 teachers). At each school, the school managers were interviewed separately from the teachers due to the nature of their job descriptions and also to allow teachers to express themselves freely.

3.3 Data analysis

The quantitative data were analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). The qualitative data were transcribed verbatim. The transcribed data together with the field notes were coded and categorised into patterns for reporting.

4. Findings

The findings are presented under the four main sub-sections. These sub-sections are awareness and access, experiences in the transition of English as a MoI, factors influencing the transition of MoI, and challenges faced by teachers when teaching in English.

4.1 Awareness and access

This section aims to gauge whether participants were aware of the language policy for schools in Namibia and also if they had access to the document.

4.1.1 Awareness of and access to the language policy for schools in Namibia

When someone has access to the document, it means that he/she is in possession of it or is able to obtain the document in a short period of time. Therefore, this section seeks to find out whether

participants were aware of the language policy for schools in Namibia; whether as individuals they had copies of the policy and whether the school had a copy.

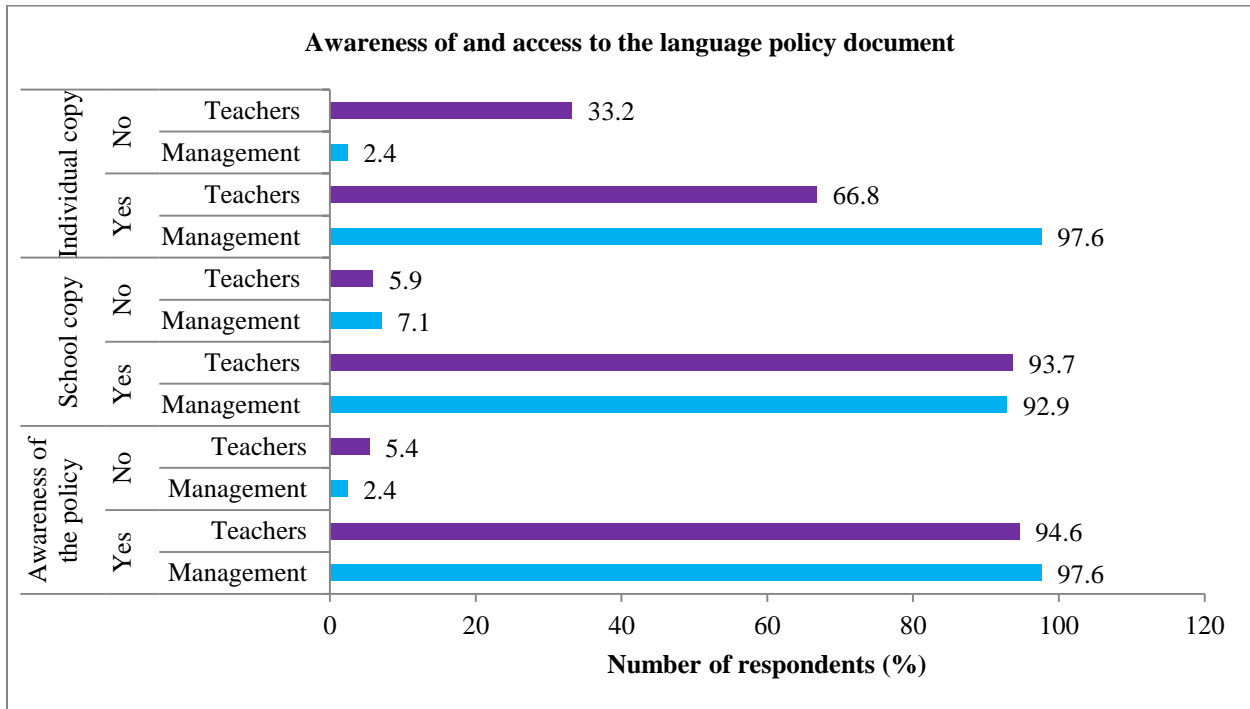


Figure 1: Awareness of and access to the language policy for schools in Namibia

The results in Figure 1 show that the majority of the school managers (97.6%) and teachers (94.6%) were aware of the language policy document. The researcher also wanted to find out if participants were in possession of the document. To which 97.6% (management) and 66.8% (teachers) replied yes, while 2.4% and 33.2% of the management and teachers who said no. In addition, 92.9% of the management and 93.7% of the teachers stated that there is a copy of the policy in the school. This concludes that the majority of the participants were aware of the language policy for schools in Namibia; they had access to the document either as individual copy or a copy at the school.

4.1.2 Knowledge about the aim of the language policy at Junior Primary phase

According to the revised language policy, learners in Grades 1–3 must be taught either through the mother tongue or a predominant local language; whereas, English become a compulsory

subject starting in Grade 1. Therefore, this section provides the responses on whether participants had knowledge of what the language policy aims to promote at the Junior Primary phase.

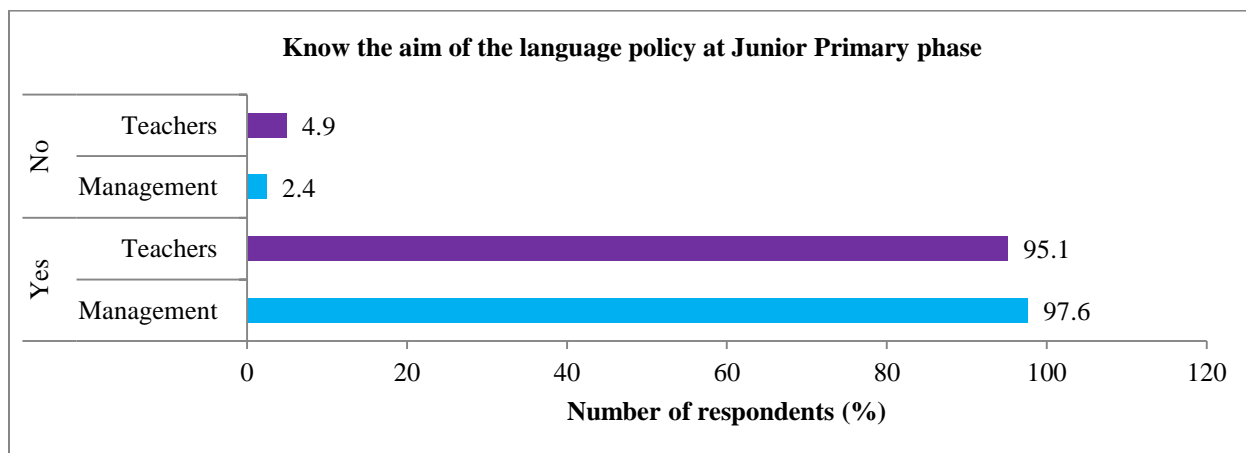


Figure 2: Knowledge about the aim of the language policy at Junior Primary phase

According to the responses presented in Figure 2, the management (97.6%) and teachers (95.1%) indicated that they had the knowledge about the aim of the language policy at the Junior Primary phase. Whereas, only few (2.4%) of the management and teachers (4.9%) stated that they had no knowledge of what the language policy's aim is.

4.1.3 Awareness of English usage as a MoI and mother tongue a subject from Grade 4

This section provides answers to whether participants were aware that English is only used as a medium of instruction and assessment throughout the education system in public schools from Grade 4 onwards. And that the mother tongue / predominant local language is only offered as a subject.

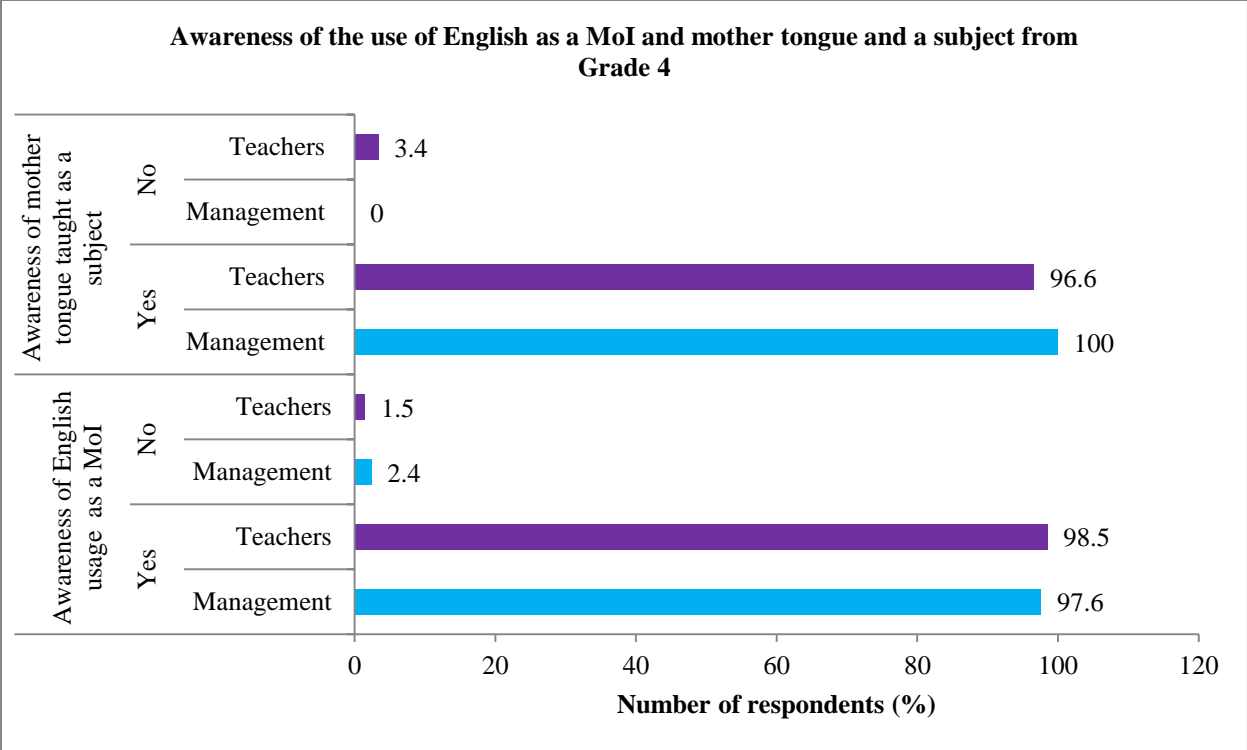


Figure 3: Awareness of the use of English as a MoI and mother tongue as a subject from Grade 4

Figure 3 portrays that more than 96% of both school management and teachers were aware that English should be used as a medium of instruction; whereas, mother tongue or the predominant local language only offered as a subject from Grade 4.

4.2 Experiences in the transition of English as a MoI

This study assessed the participants’ experiences in the transition of Grade 4 learners to English as medium of instruction.

4.2.1 The coping of the majority of Grade 4 learners during the teaching and learning process

Participants were asked to indicate (to what extent) whether majority of the Grade 4 learners were coping well with the transition to English during the teaching and learning process.

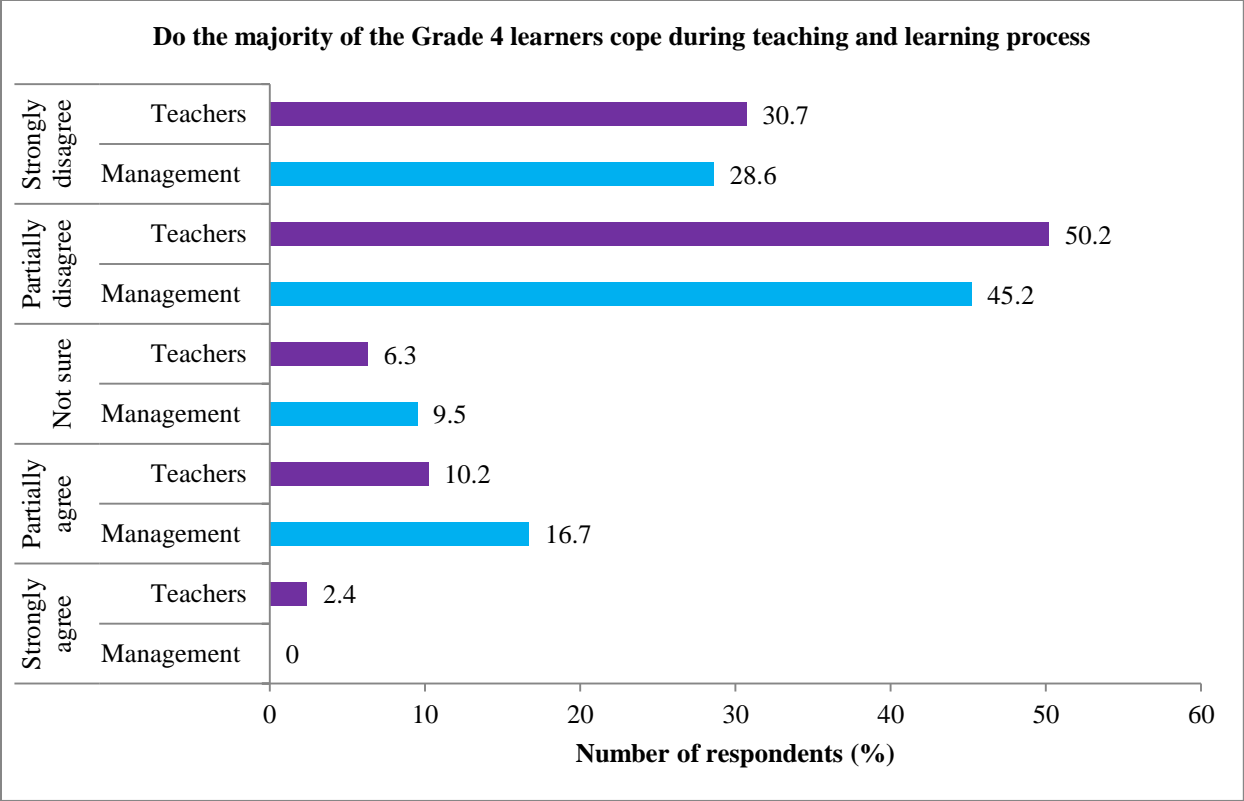


Figure 4: The coping ability of the majority of the Grade 4 learners during lesson presentations

Based on the results shown in Figure 4, the management (73.8%) and teachers (80.9%) indicated that majority of the Grade 4 learners were not coping well with the transition to English during the teaching and learning process. The difficulty of learners not coping well was articulated by some participants during the interviews that:

“Learners are hardly coping because it’s their first time to be taught in English. They don’t understand English, so you have to read, explain and translate in their mother tongue for them to understand.” Teacher

“Learners find it difficult to cope with English throughout their daily learning. Even if teachers are trying their best to teach in English, sometimes teachers are forced by the situation to code-switch for the learners to catch up because it won’t make sense for a teacher to present the

whole lesson in English because learners were not used to an entire day of learning in English in the previous grade.” Principal

“...Grade 4 learners really struggle to cope with English and as a teacher you are forced to translate every sentence you are saying in the vernacular otherwise learners would not understand any single word. So, both teachers and learners are really suffering. The 40 minute period is not enough because you are just there explaining, translating and repeating for the learners to understand.” Principal

“Learners are not coping at all and sometimes they don’t understand what you are saying. They don't even know how to read, speak and write some English words. It’s very hard for them.”
Teacher

Learners’ difficulties with reading, writing and speaking English words seemed to be the contributing factors to why the majority of Grade 4 learners hardly cope during the teaching and learning process. This has forced the Grade 4 teachers to translate in learners’ mother tongue or code-switch during lesson presentation to enable learners comprehend the subject content knowledge being taught.

4.2.2 Majority of the Grade 4 learners’ reading and writing in English

The language policy emphasises the need for learners to be proficient enough in English, the official language, at the end of the seven-year primary school cycle in order to gain access to further education as well as to a language of wider communication. Thus, participants were asked whether many of the Grade 4 learners could read and write English fluently.

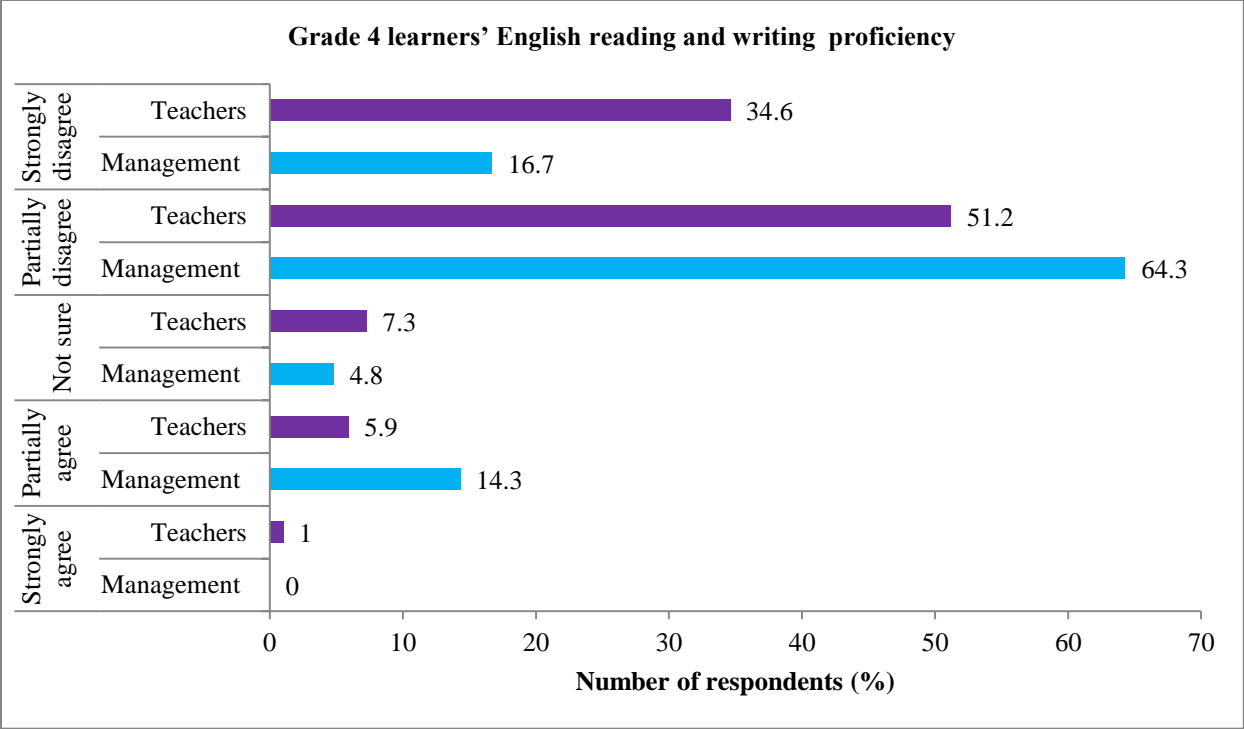


Figure 5: Grade 4 learners' English reading and writing in proficiency

The responses from the management (81.0%) and teachers (85.8%) attest that many of the Grade 4 learners are not fluent in reading and writing English, while only 14.3% of the management and teachers (6.9%) who agreed to the statement. A total of 4.8% and 7.3% of the management and teachers respectively were not sure whether many of the Grade 4 learners could read and write English fluently. The struggle of the Grade 4 learners with reading and writing in English was described by some participants as real. They revealed that:

“It’s a real struggle and this is caused by the lack of a proper foundation, which was not laid at the Junior Primary Phase. So, learners struggle with reading and writing. In addition, learners’ handwriting is bad maybe because handwriting was taken out.” Principal

“In terms of reading, Grade 4 learners are a problem because they can’t read in English. Now in terms of questions you have to read for them, but where would they get the answers if they cannot understand again?” Teacher

“As an English teacher, I mean, let’s not even talk about reading because they cannot read. It’s not that they do not want to, but because it’s the first time that they expected to read to

understand English. During the exams, I have to read for them the question paper like three times and still there will be that one learner who says, sir, read for me number 4. Now it becomes a problem, because I have to go back to the basic again teaching them high frequency words on how to pronounce certain words.” Teacher

“The gap is really huge, so we have learners that cannot even write and read a two letter word or three letter words. Now we end up teaching three letter words in Grade 4, which was supposed to be taught at the lower grades. So, we are now taking much of our time teaching, reading and writing from scratch.” Teacher

“To be very honest, the reading and writing skills are very poor, although speaking is much better. It’s a struggle. So, we are really trying with the reading and the writing to give learners more activities to write on a daily basis. We are also including their parents and encouraging them to support and to give them extra work so that we can get to where we are supposed to be.”
Teacher

“I have realised that most of the learners who are coming from Grade 3 to Grade 4, can’t read and write. Even when it comes to the use of the language itself, they can’t communicate at all. It’s a big challenge. Since you know that if a learner can’t read and write, you won’t expect that learner to go to the next level, you’re killing the learner’s future.” Teacher

“Learners are exposed to pronounce in mother language. Now switching the pronunciation from mother tongue to English, it is a problem. Instead of reading correctly in English, they somehow read it in the home language.” Teacher

“Learners are not fluent, not at all. The majority are even struggling with reading. Even when they are copying things from the chalkboard, they make a lot of spelling mistakes. They cannot even express themselves through writing. Giving them even a short essay, they cannot read and communicate in English.” Principal

Despite that majority of the participants mentioned that learners had problems with reading and writing, few of the school management cited that their learners could read although they were hardly able to comprehend what they read.

“Yes, learners can read, but they cannot understand some of the words. Reading is not a problem, but understanding is a problem.” Principal

“We have a reading period every Monday during the first period for the whole school. For me, I also read that time because if they see that I am not reading but marking then they start to play. They won’t really pay attention to their reading. Reading helps them to improve whenever you give them something to read. Like those English teachers, when they have their reading periods to assess them, learners read better.” Principal

At some schools, reading was compulsory. Teachers and learners were allocated 40 minutes reading period on the school timetable, once a week for reading. As learners read, their reading proficiencies were assessed by the teachers.

4.2.3 Satisfaction of Grade 4 learners’ level of performance

This section provides responses on whether the schools were satisfied with Grade 4 learners’ level of performances. Participants’ responses are presented in Figure 6 below.

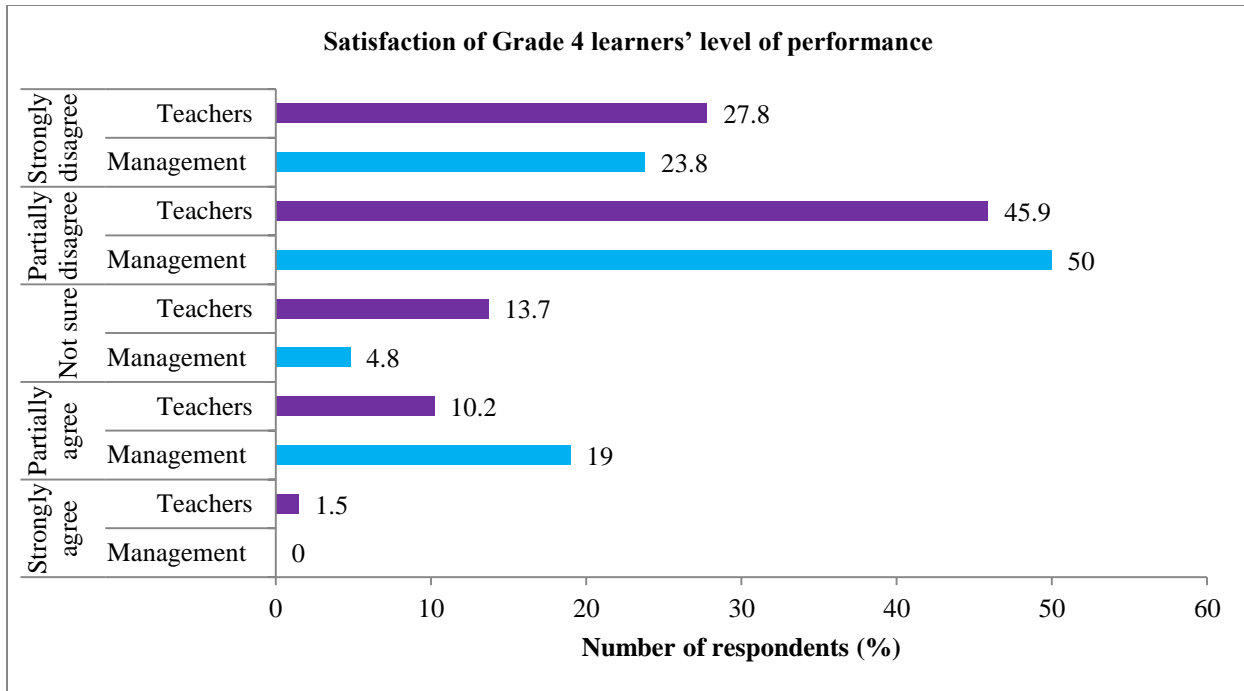


Figure 6: Satisfaction of Grade 4 learners' level of performance

As seen in Figure 6, 73.8% of the management and 73.7% of the teachers stated that they were not satisfied with the Grade 4 learners' level of academic performance. It was revealed from the interview that:

"I'm saying not 100% satisfied with the performance because of the way learners perform in Grade; 4 maybe because it's the starting grade. This gives us problems." Principal

"In my subject, I'm not satisfied with how learners perform. When it comes to problem solving it's really difficult. Because some learners do not know some mathematics terms even though we try hard. Sometimes we translate the terms in their mother tongue, but some learners tend to forget. So, it becomes a challenge both to the learner and the teacher." Teacher

"We are not satisfied. I cannot say who to blame. Because we all have to pull up our socks, you cannot blame where they are coming from. The foundation is not properly laid. You cannot give that blame or maybe like I said earlier, due to the influence of mother tongue. That's why learners are not coping. But teachers are trying." Teacher

“I am not satisfied, and I think everybody at the school is not satisfied including the parents with the performance of the Grade 4. Learners’ performances are always low, very low. This one is only brought by the fact that all the subjects are taught in English except Oshiwambo which they are not familiar with, so this hinders the performance of the Grade 4s, hence we are not satisfied.” Principal

Although, most of the participants indicated that Grade 4 learners’ performance was not satisfactory, some participants were optimistic about their learners’ level of performance.

“We are a bit satisfied even though we have many learners, most of the learners not all are still in the face of evolution from primary to junior or secondary level, but they are doing fine. Learners are doing fine and us teachers we are also working hard to make them feel that they have reached that level.” Principal

From the participant’s perspective, their learners were doing fine academically, and this was so as a result of teachers’ hard work.

4.2.4 Enjoying teaching subjects using English as a medium of instruction

According to the language policy, Grade 4 is a transitional year when the change to English as a medium of instruction takes place. The medium of instruction is the language through which a subject is taught. Hence, this section presents participants’ answers to whether they were enjoying teaching their subjects using English as a medium of instruction.

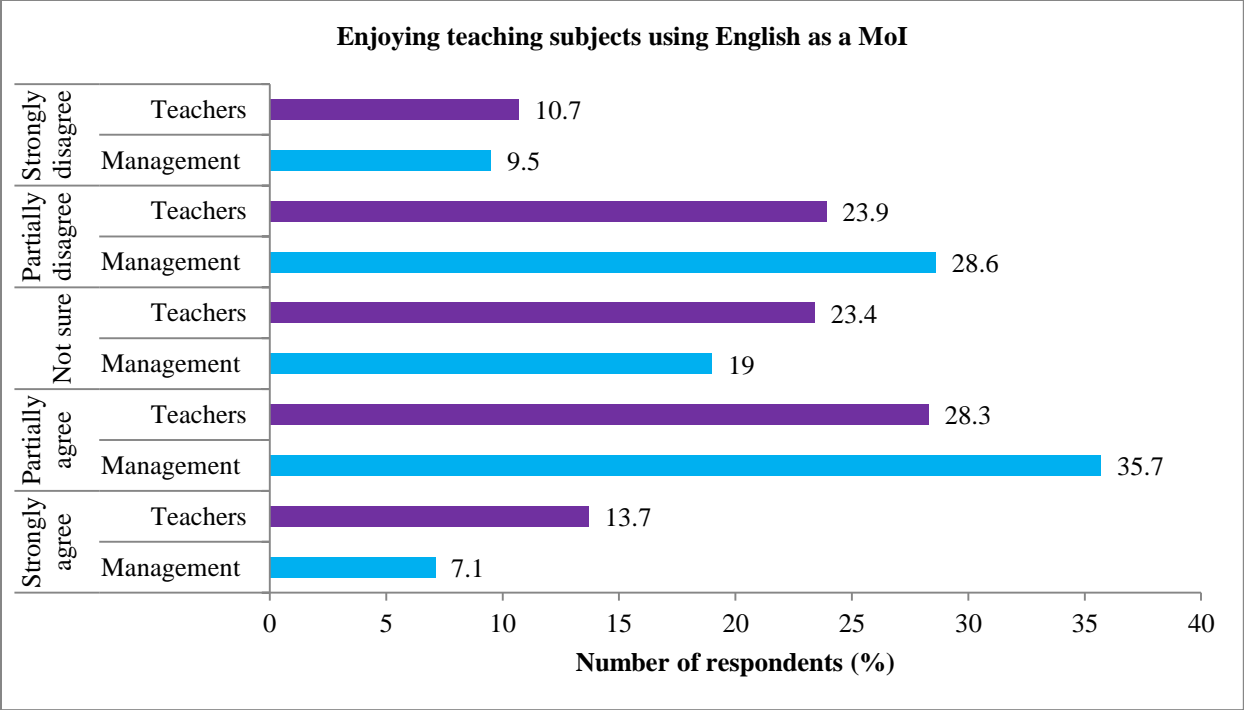


Figure 7: Enjoying teaching subjects using English as a medium of instruction

Figure 7 shows that 42.8% of the management were enjoying teaching their subjects in English as compared to 38.1% who were not enjoying it. Similarly, 42.0% of the teachers agreed to the statement as compared to the 38.1% of them who disagreed. However, 19.0% and 23.4% of the management and teachers respectively were not sure. Some participants who enjoyed teaching their subjects through English as a MoI said that:

“Yes, I am enjoying teaching. But then I am not motivated to teach the way I’m supposed to because learners do not understand. It becomes a challenge. It’s impossible for me to explain to them what they wrote, but overall I enjoy teaching using English as a medium of instruction.”

Teacher

“We really enjoy it because I teach Life Skills and I always go there with some story storytelling and giving learners sort of advice about what they should not do, and what they should do.”

Acting Principal

“Yes, in some topics. You can enjoy but in in some topics you do not. In order to try I usually change from English to Oshikwanyama so that I can remind them especially in mathematics the terms which are used and not familiar to them.” Teacher

The results show that some participants seemed not to experience problems as they were enjoying teaching learners through English language. However, most of the participants were not enjoying, and they attest that:

“I don’t think I’m enjoying using English in Grade 4 because you just speak to yourself. You speak English from the starting of the period up to the last. We find that these learners did not understand when you teach them.” Principal

“Personally, I’m not enjoying because the whole period I’m just code switching.” Teacher

“I do not enjoy it because the learners are not participating, only me who’s talking too much in the class. That’s why I don’t enjoy teaching Grade 4 in English.” Teacher

“I’m not enjoying it compared to other grades. When it comes to Grade 4 there is not enjoyment about the presentation of the lessons, even if I prepare very well. When you come to the Grade 4s and present the lesson there is no communicative approach between me and the learners...”
Principal

“I do not enjoy it because we prepare everything in English. The moment I enter the classroom you see the situation change. You wanted to teach them in English, but you end up translating and repeating everything in Oshiwambo for them to understand which is against the policy.”
Principal

“To be honest, we are not enjoying teaching our subjects in English because we have been forced. For you to make sure that your learners are getting what you are trying to teach them, you just have to code switch. You ask the same thing over and over. But still, the learners might

not give you the answers. So, I think there is no enjoyment when it comes to teaching. We are not enjoying our subjects. Your learners are not going to give you satisfying results.” Teacher

“I’m not enjoying. Seriously, on a serious note, you cannot enjoy the subject that you are teaching when your learners are not at the level where you want them to be. That’s why, in most cases, the situation itself can force you to switch off or to code-switch. Otherwise, if you just keep on preaching in English, you can go alone and sometimes most of your learners can even withdraw completely because they don’t understand what you are trying to say. So, honestly speaking, you’re not enjoying.” Acting Principal

“You don’t enjoy because when you post a question, no one is going to answer that question. You are not enjoying. You are thinking that maybe you are doing nothing in the classroom, usually switching to a vernacular language for them to bring them closer to the answer, helps. Learners are enjoying more when their vernacular language is used.” Teacher

As indicated by the participants, lack of communication and understanding between learners and teachers, lack of learners’ participation and learners’ vernacular language preference were some of the contributing factors to why some participants were not enjoying teaching their subjects. To some participants, the situation has forced them to code-switch during teaching and learning process.

4.2.5 Correlation between learners’ mother tongue abilities and successful transition to English

In section 4.2.5, participants were asked whether there was a correlation between learners’ mother tongue abilities and their successful transition to English as a medium of instruction. Participants’ responses are presented in Figure 8.

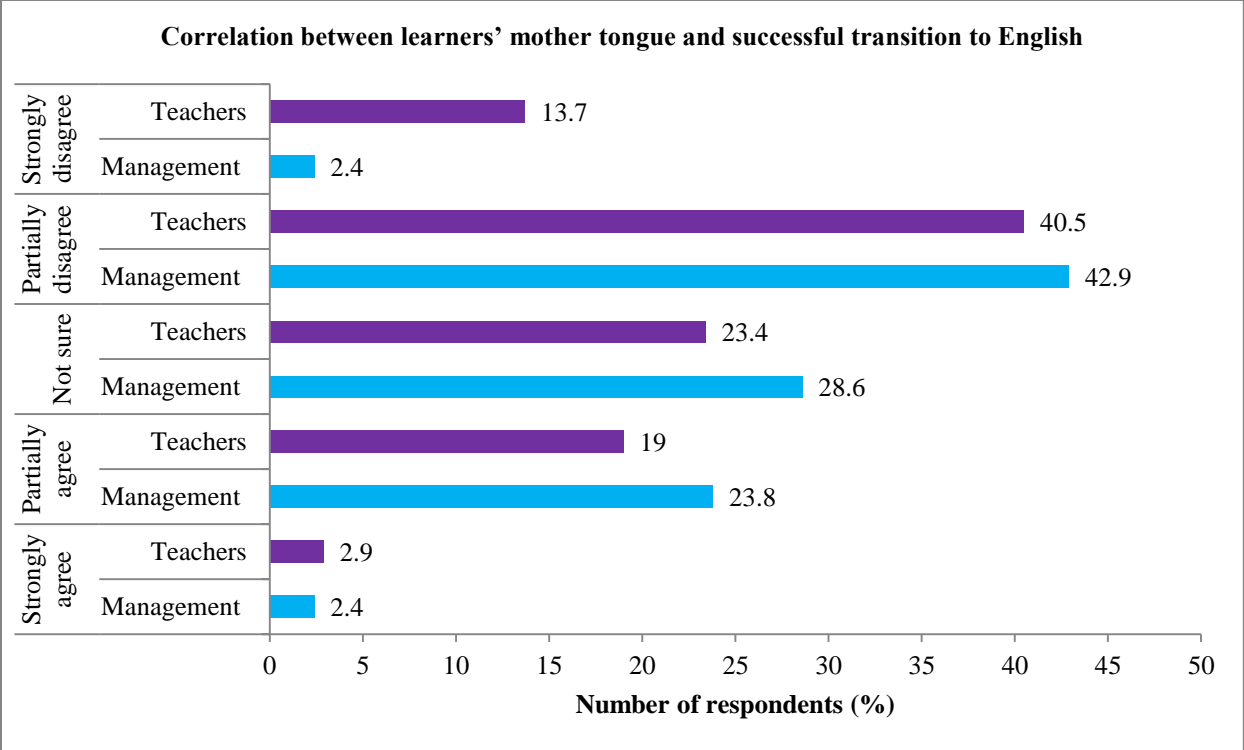


Figure 8: Correlation between learners’ mother tongue abilities and successful transition to English

According to the results shown in Figure 8, more than a half percentage of the teachers stated that there was no a correlation between learners’ mother tongue abilities and their successful transition to English as a MoI as compared to 21.9% of the teachers who agreed. However, only 26.2% of the management agreed while 28.6% and 23.4% of the management and teachers were not sure. Some of the participants who disagreed had the following to say:

“There’s no good relationship between what learners know about the mother tongue and their ability to use English. Even if you tell them to write a short paragraph, you find those learners who cannot express them in English. They end up just writing in their mother tongue, so you can see there is no relationship there. Learners’ abilities in mother tongue cannot be compared to their abilities in English.” Acting Principal

“In terms of learners’ abilities, they are very shy. Compared to Oshiwambo, they are very shy when speaking English. English is only spoken in class, when they are outside even if teachers instruct them to communicate in English they won’t adhere.” Teacher

Besides that, at some schools, there was a disparity in learners’ abilities in terms of expressing themselves in their mother tongues and English, which was not the case at some schools.

“Yes, there’s a relationship because whenever a learner masters their mother tongue it will be very easy for them to translate the same word or topic into the second language, English.”
Principal

Some participants believe that for the learner to speak or express him/herself in English, he/she should master his/her mother tongue first. Therefore, at these schools there was a correlation between learners’ mother tongue abilities and English as a second language in terms of speaking.

4.2.6 Preparing learners for the transition to Grade 4 by Grade 3 teachers

Grade 4 is a transitional grade whereby learners are no more taught subjects either through the mother tongue or a predominant local language. So, Grade 3 is the last grade at Junior Primary phase; thus, this section provides responses to whether Grade 3 teachers had prepared learners well for the transition at Grade 4.

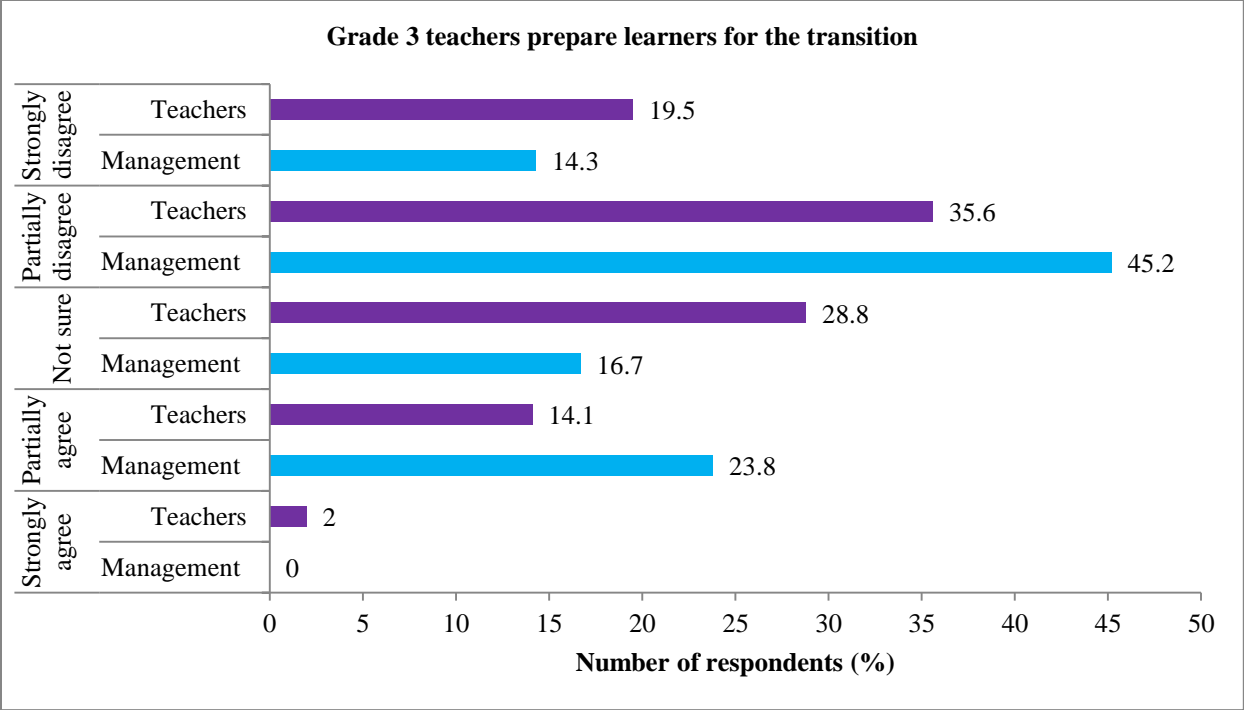


Figure 9: Preparing learners for the transition to Grade 4

Figure 9 portrays that school management (59.5%) and teachers (55.1%) indicated that Grade 3 teachers did not prepare learners well for the transition to Grade 4; however, only 23.8% (management) and 16.1% (teachers) who agreed to the statement. Meanwhile, some of the participants who said that Grade 3 teachers did not prepare learners well for the transition to Grade 4 revealed that:

“I think learners were not prepared well because of the pandemic that we have been going through. It really affected them because some topics were not covered, but when they came to Grade 4 it became a challenge.” Teacher

“I don’t think learners were really well prepared because they lacked proper spelling, reading and writing skills. But we are facing children that cannot even spell three letter words or even read anything.” Teacher

“The Grade 3 teachers did not prepare learners maybe the curriculum for pre-primary that link Grade 3 to Grade 4 is not well crafted. If we can go back to the drawing board and see, maybe

there must be something that we need to do to make sure that the transition becomes smooth and easy, not like at the moment.” Principal

“I really don’t think they are well prepared because the true factor is that our teachers who are in junior primary they also have language problems. That’s why sometimes you think if we could have the young teachers who can communicate very well and prepare these learners.

While some participants blamed Grade 3 teachers for not preparing learners well for the transition, some participants disagreed; instead they blamed the system. Here is what some participants attributed:

“Obviously, Grade 3 teachers prepared the learners, not to blame Grade 3 teachers but the system from pre-primary onwards. This school has one pre-primary class for English and Afrikaans, so learners are already introduced to English, but there are three pre-primary classes where learners don’t speak English until they get to Grade 4. So, it’s a difficult transition. We need a well incorporated language policy where learners are forced strictly from Grade 0 to Grade 3 to communicate, read and write in English already so that the transition from home languages to English as a medium of instruction in Grade 4 can be easier.” Principal

“OK, for me, I think these learners were not really prepared very well. But then, those lower primary teachers are just policy implementers. They just do what the ministry and syllabus says and that is the reason we are getting learners that are unprepared.” Teacher

“We can say that they did not prepare, but they prepared them according to the syllabus of Grade 3, but not according to the syllabus of Grade 4.” Acting Principal

“In most cases we blame Grade 3 teachers. Yeah, we feel learners are not well prepared. But now looking at some of the things like the language policy, then you feel that we are blaming the wrong people as they have prepared learners in their mother tongue. So, when learners get into English as a medium grade, it’s something else; so I would say teachers have prepared the

learners according to the policy guidance. Therefore, I think we might blame the Grade 3 teachers, but the fact is the policy is the problem.” Teacher

But they are trying in terms of mathematics and writing they have prepared learners; the only thing is the English language as their fluency is not well attended to.” Principal

“Yes, we might say yes. Because teachers prepared them according to what the policy says. They are right, but on the other hand. When it comes to English which is a medium of instruction from Grade 4, we might say teachers didn’t prepare learners well there, but otherwise they are not wrong, is the policy which is commanding them.” Teacher

“Of course, they are trying but the Grade 3 teachers alone cannot fully prepare learners so they can be ready to communicate in English in Grade 4 because they were supposed to start maybe with the Grade 1 and 2. I am saying this because I am living in town for example most of the learners who are staying in town although they are in Grade 1 or 2 they are communicating more in English better than in their mother tongue maybe because of exposure. Here, the Grade 3 teachers are trying but maybe because learners are not exposed to when they come from home, so it’s a challenge.” Principal

“For me, I think learners are well prepared from Grade 3 but the policy states that the medium of instruction in Grade 3 is mother tongue, and you can see to it that when learners come to Grade 4 they are well prepared except in other subjects like English and other subjects that has a medium of instruction in English they only struggle there with English. So, learners are prepared the problem is with the policy because they are not used to English as the medium of instruction from the previous phase.” Teacher

The participants pointed out that the education system in terms of language policy, lacks a well incorporated language policy at the Junior Primary phase and learners’ home background as some challenges. These were viewed as some pertaining issues that hindered learners’ preparedness for the transition instead of blaming the Grade 3 teachers.

4.2.7 Ensuring that learning with understanding takes place in Grade 4

This section seeks to find out whether Grade 4 teachers were ensuring that learning with understanding takes place when they teach learners using English.

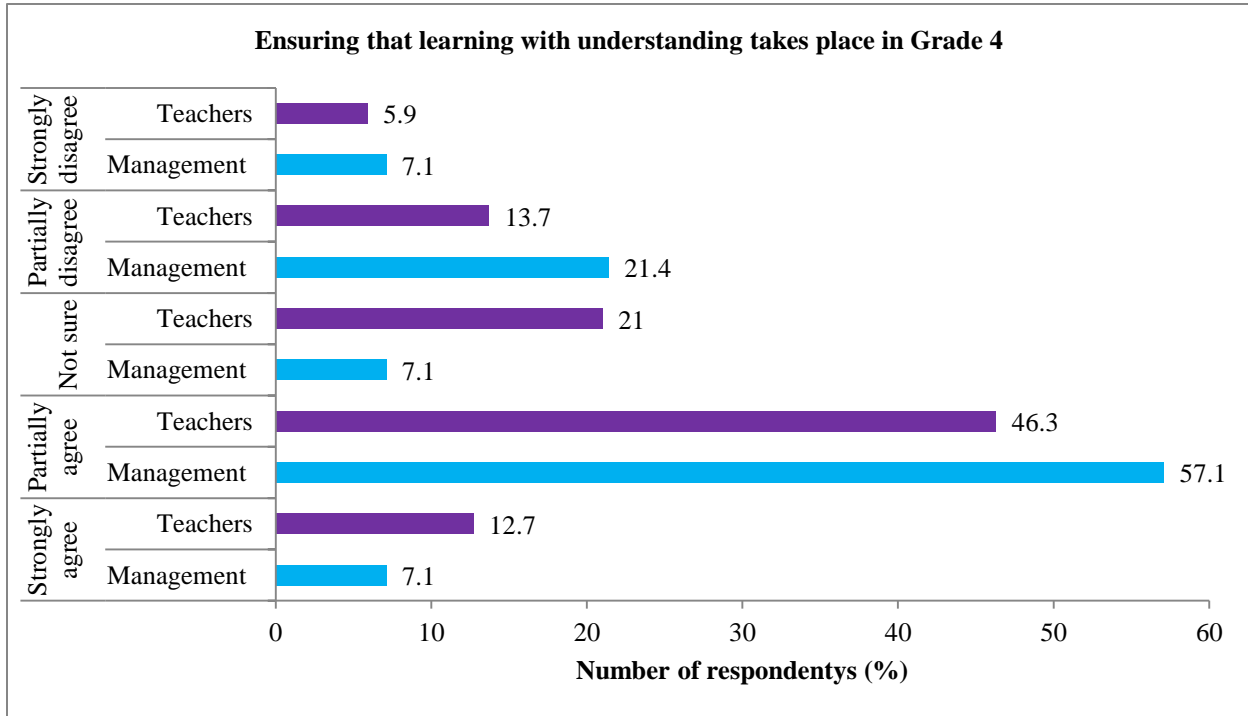


Figure 10: Ensuring that learning with understanding takes place in Grade 4

The school management (64.2%) and teachers (59.0%) agreed that Grade 4 teachers ensured that learning with understanding takes place when they teach learners using English. On the contrary, 28.5% of the management and 19.6% of the teachers disagreed. Some participants who agreed stated in the interviews that:

“Maybe, as my colleague pointed out that both of us, we don’t speak KKG [Khoekhoegowab]. And most of the learners in the two Grade 4 classes are KKG learners. It’s difficult for us to code switch, only speak English to ensure that all the learners do understand what we meant. Sometimes I can even make learners do roles plays, using other different tactics for them to understand what I was teaching or have taught.” Teacher

“Yes, teachers teach with understanding, and they use relatable examples that learners can relate to. They just follow the syllabus and scheme of work and provide examples that learners can relate to and engage them to acquire knowledge. Maybe one listens more when you are speaking or use visual aids. We involve learners, which mean our teaching style is not only teacher-centred but learner-centred. Learners have time to speak and then we see who understands and doesn’t understand. Then, we try other teaching methodologies or teaching methods to engage all learners.” Teacher

“Yes, teachers make learners understand, but learners may not understand when it comes to writing activities. According to what they have learned in their activities. Then we can see that one understands and the other one did not understand.” Principal

“Teachers are really teaching to make sure that learners understand. Although the policy stipulates that we should use English as the medium of instruction; it does not mean that it is a crime if you code switching here and there if the child does not understand. That means that if the children do not understand it in English, I can say it in their mother tongue and that will not be a problem. Learners understand Oshindonga better than the English language, so the methods, as my colleague said, we are changing them. And that’s how we are doing it.” Teacher

“When we teach, we are trying so that learners must understand, but the people that you are teaching don’t understand you. So, it’s something which is very challenging. You go there you explain, but learners do not understand what you are saying because of the language.” Teacher

“I think teachers are trying to make sure that learners understand and acquire knowledge, but I believe the challenge is that learners only meet English at school. That’s it. Teachers are really trying to make sure that these learners understood what they are taught, not necessarily just to cover the syllabus and move on.” Principal

“Ensuring that learners learn with understanding of what a teacher can teach, and after teaching, if you say that learners are not coping or did not understand well, that’s when the term code switching comes in, just to make sure that all learners understand. Yes, there are those

learners who can easily understand very fast. And there are those ones who can grip well in English. But then you can find that maybe 40% or 30% that do not understand well. Therefore, for these learners not to be left out, we make sure that we have to code switch so that they understand and move together with other learners.” Teacher

“Yes, but because learners have language problems then learning with understanding is not there in Grade 4. Sometimes, learners only memorise things because language is the key and if a learner does not understand, that means learning with understanding may not be there”
Principal

“We are teaching learners to understand. That why we are trying to explain the topics we teach in our vernacular languages.” Teacher

“No, teachers are trying their best to teach these learners to make them understand, not just to cover the lesson part. They are trying very hard and most of them are well trained. But the main challenge is to start teaching somebody from another level of learning, no matter how hard you try. That means it’s not that easy, but teachers are trying...” Acting Principal

Although, some participants indicated their commitments toward their work as to make sure that learners understood what they were teaching them. There were still some participants who felt that due to language barriers, they were only teaching learners for the sake of covering / completing the syllabus.

“Just to complete the syllabus, you know what teachers are doing. I don’t want to report this... Teachers are teaching for example mother “meme”, father “tate” or boy “omumati” and then one can say what is this now instead of telling them using pictures for them to understand. A pen is something which you used to write with and then you show them this is the pen if you don’t have a picture of that pen. As they say learners learn more when they are doing.” Principal

“The aim of every teacher is to make sure that at the end of the day competencies are met by the learners in respective areas. Unfortunately, some competencies are not met and to be specific in

Grade 4, because a barrier that we experienced in that area in English. Of course, at the end of the day there are some limitations as somehow learners are not meeting the competencies.”

Teacher

“Teachers are trying but with this current language policy is a challenge to them only if they could perhaps be allowed to code switch at certain times or point in time they would be forced to just code switch and to make sure that learning with understanding takes place. If not, then teachers may end up just teaching to cover the syllabus.” Principal

“Sometimes, teachers are teaching learners to understand the lesson but really it sometimes forces them not to finish on time. Yes, maybe when the teacher is bringing in the translation of English into mother tongue. Teachers are really trying because 75% of the lessons are in the vernacular while 25% is English.” Principal

As indicated, language barriers forced some participants to cover the syllabus only rather than to teach for conceptual understand. However, to some participants, they spent much time teaching learners to understand but this has also forced them not to finish / cover their work timely.

4.2.8 Exposing learners to new technologies / terms when taught in English than mother tongues

Participants’ responses on whether learners in Grade 4 are exposed to new terminologies / terms when taught in English than their mother tongues are provided in Figure 11.

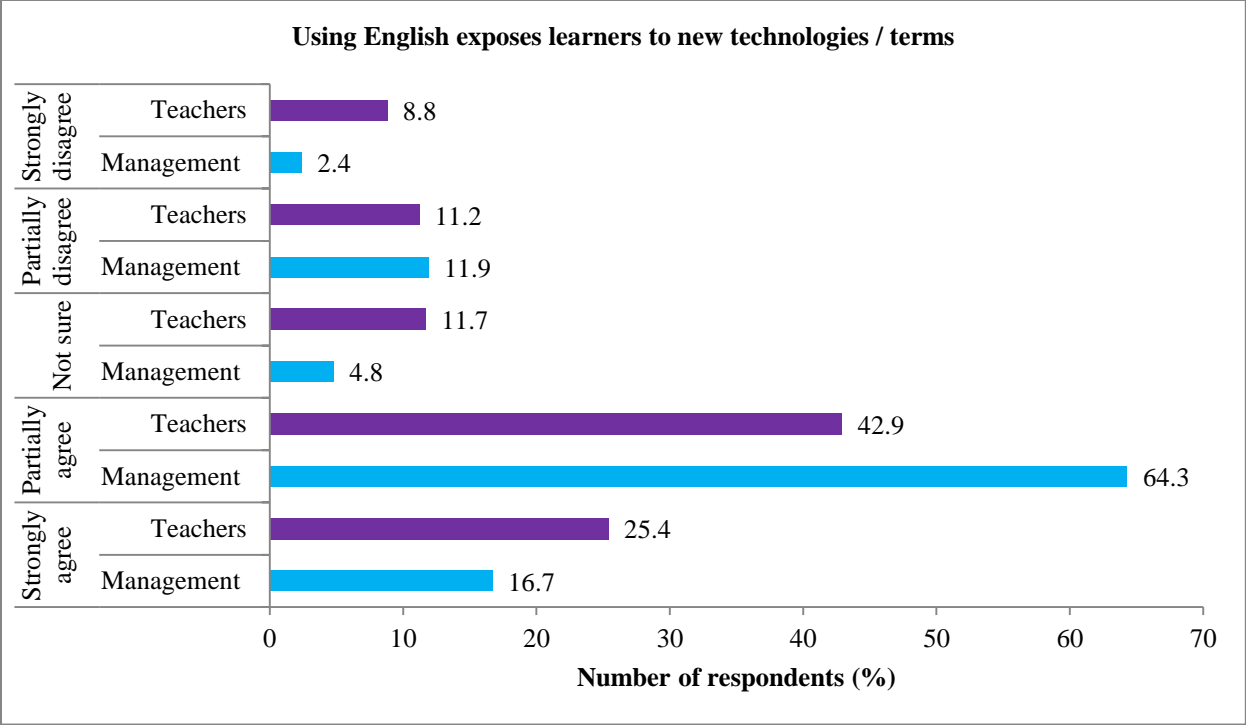


Figure 11: Exposing learners to new technologies / terms when taught in English

As portrayed in Figure 11, 81.0% of the management and 68.3% of the teachers believe that when teaching learners using English than mother tongue as a MoI, this exposes learners to new technologies or terms. On the other hand, 14.3% (management) and 20.0% (teachers) are not supporting the statement.

4.2.9 Coping of learners with cooperative learning through English as a MoI

Learners in cooperative learning are learning together and helping each other enjoy learning. Therefore, this section provides answers from participants on whether learners were coping well with cooperative learning using English as a medium of instruction.

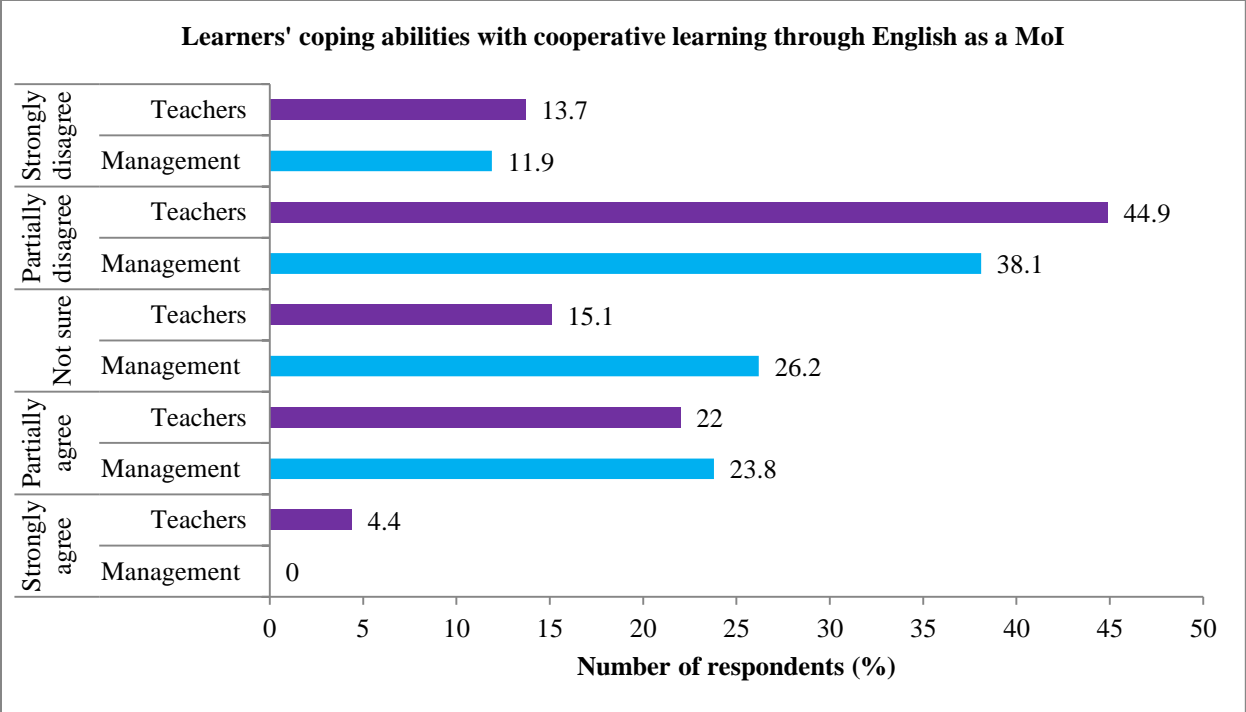


Figure 12: Learners’ coping abilities with cooperative learning through English as a MoI

Figure 12 shows that 50.0% and 58.6% of the management and teachers respectively indicated that Grade 4 learners were not coping well with cooperative learning when English was used as a MoI. However, 26.2% (management) and 15.1% (teachers) were not sure; whereas only 23.8% of the management and 26.4% of the teachers stated that learners were coping well cooperative learning.

4.2.10 Problems experienced by teachers when teaching through English as a MoI

Participants were asked whether teachers had experienced problems when teaching through English as the medium of instruction. Participants’ responses are presented in Figure 13 below.

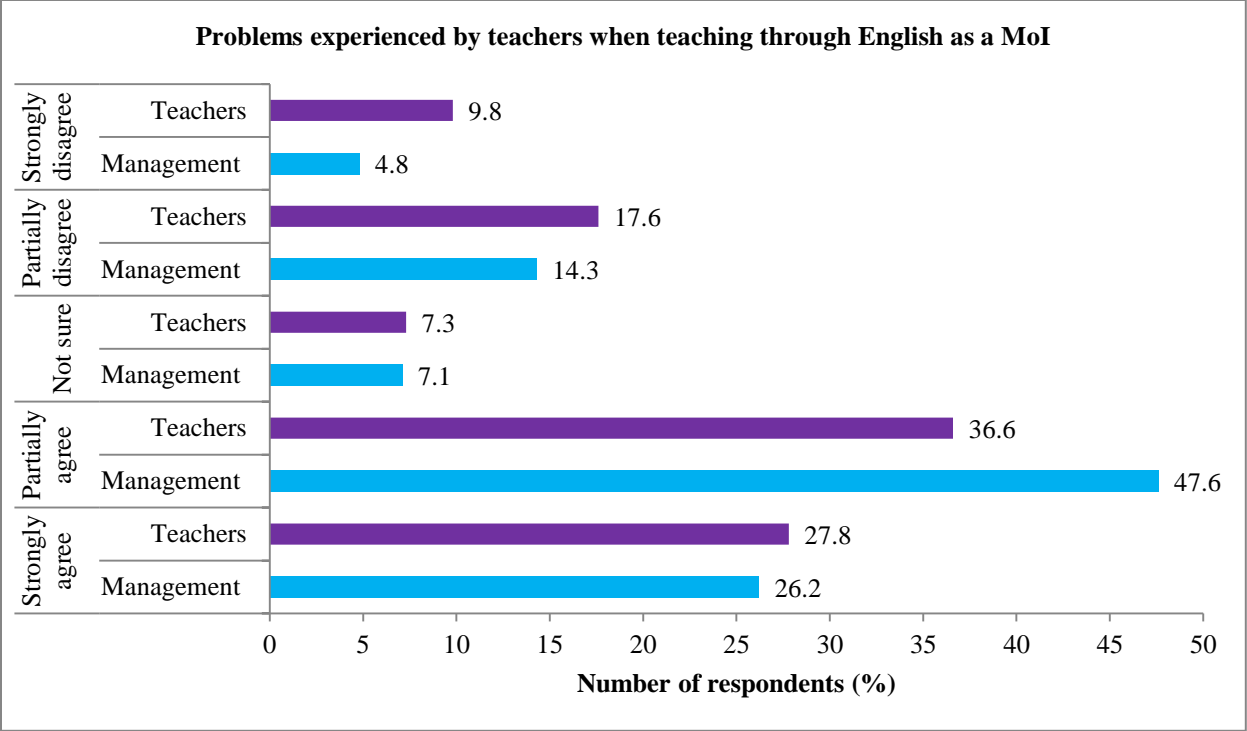


Figure 13: Problems experienced by teachers when teaching through English as a MoI

Most of the management (73.8%) and teachers (64.4%) indicated that teachers were experiencing problems when teaching learners through English as a medium of instructions. Here is what some participants had to say:

“There are definitely problems. Remedial teaching must be done on a regular basis because it’s not that easy to switch over from mother tongue from a lower primary suddenly going to English. That was the first trimester where I experienced and we are now in the second semester, but I think it should go better already now but there is a big challenge. And there are learners in between who don’t understand that much.” Principal

“The greatest challenge for us just communication barrier. Yes, you can go in the class well prepared, everything structured, you communicate whatever you want to communicate to the learners, but you are expecting it to be reflected in their books. And that’s not what you get.” Teacher

“You see, in Grade 4 it’s not like a class teacher. So, teachers come from different tribes or maybe speak a different language then learners speak different languages. So that means when you are teaching them, there’s no way that you can explain in their mother tongue. You all have different mother tongues in one class. For example, you are teaching about cell phone and then you are a Caprivian teaching the Oshikwanyama or Oshindonga learners now you are teaching about the cell phone... So, now how do you make them understand.... because of the language barrier.” Teacher

“When you teach subjects like Social Studies, Natural Science, learners do not understand English properly, so when you are explaining things they don’t understand since reading and writing are a problem. They don’t know how to spell and master those big words like archaeology in Social Studies.” Teacher

“Yeah, like in my case, most of the problems that we’re experiencing, like in my subjects, is reading. If learners can’t read, you don’t expect them to do anything.” Teacher

“The major problems that we’re experiencing with these learners, is spelling. They are unable to spell English words correctly. They are much familiar with spelling words in their vernacular language, so when you mention a word in English what comes in that learner’s a mind is Thimbukushu words. Then that learner will spell it in Thimbukushu; writing is the same, when you give them something like a test.” Teacher

“Writing and spelling, learners cannot spell the words correctly and majority of them are even shy to express themselves in the simple language that they know. Those are most of the challenges that I have encountered as a Grade 4 English teacher.” Principal

“Maybe the big problem could be communication breakdown. Somehow, I feel like I speak Chinese to them, the language they don’t know. You sometimes lose interest and don’t even concentrate.” Principal

“The first problem is writing, and the second one is speaking. And then the third one maybe is communication. In those cases, it’s reading, writing, and speaking. Those are the most challenges that we have.” Teacher

“One is the lack of communication; these learners find it very difficult to express themselves in English. So, sometimes learners have questions or something that they don’t understand but then they can’t really express themselves to seek clarity from the teacher. It’s really hindering learning since learners can’t really communicate.” Teacher

“Our learners have a problem with vocabularies, just to find the right vocabularies to use. Yeah, then spelling... they wrongly spell the words and wrongly pronounce them.” Principal

“The problems that I’m experiencing with the Grade 4 learners, they are very slow when it comes to writing.” Teacher

It came out of the interviews that, learners’ poor vocabularies; lack of communication ability; language barriers; learners’ poor reading, writing, and speaking skills were the biggest problems or greatest challenges most of the participants experienced when teaching through English as a MoI.

4.2.11 Improving the use of English as a MoI in Grade 4

According to the language policy, the major innovation in the policy was to ensure that English became the medium of instruction from Grade 4 upwards. To this effect, participants were asked whether the use of English as a medium of instruction in Grade 4 should be improved.

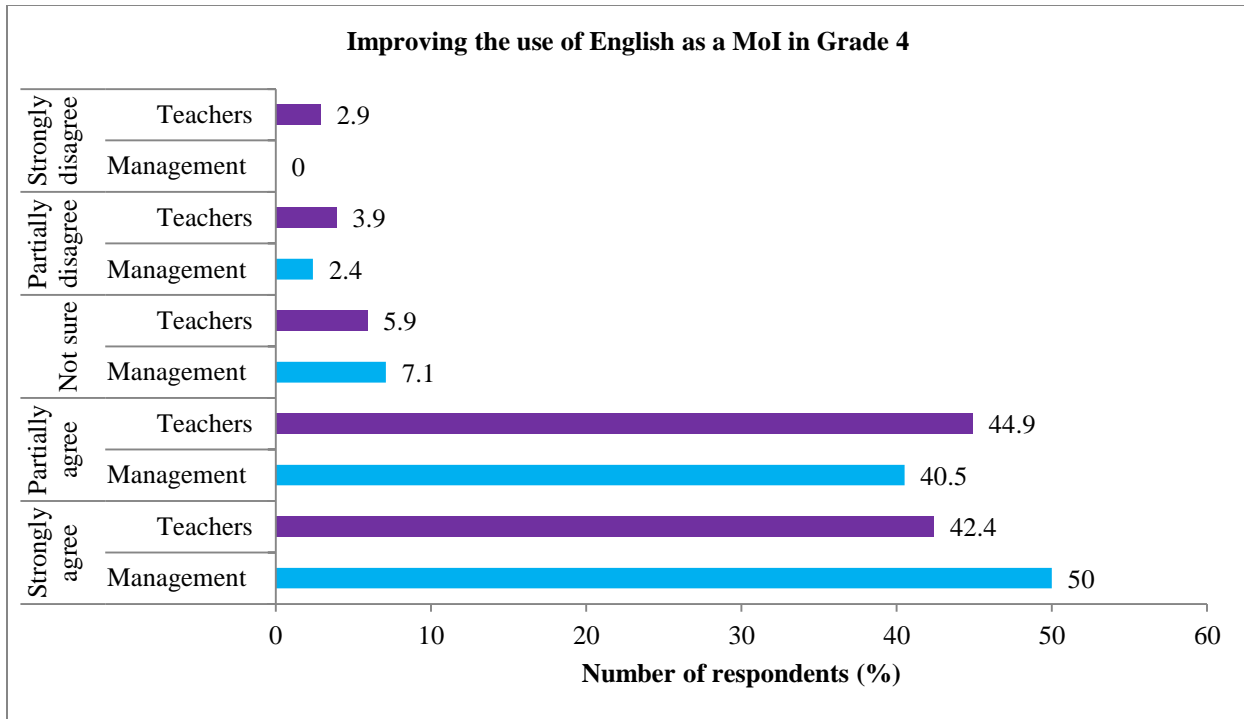


Figure 14: Improving the use of English as a MoI in Grade 4

Figure 14 portrays that more than eighty-seven percent of the management and teachers agreed that the use of English as a medium of instruction in Grade 4 should be improved. Some participants attributed to that, by saying that:

“I definitely think so. That can only be done if you have got good, qualified teachers for Grade 4 specifically for English. Yeah, it should start from Grade 4 to Grade 7 because I know in Grade 8-10 schools experience learners failing subject contents due to language barriers.” Principal

“Yes, it must be improved. But the only way we can improve this is to start with English from scratch, start with English from pre-primary upward, then when they will be in Grade 4, that their English will be better off standard.” Teacher

“The only way to improve it, is to amend the current language policy. The mother tongue to become a subject at junior primary phase and then English becomes the medium of instruction from junior primary phase to Grade 12.” Principal

From some participants' points of views, the use of English as a MoI in Grade 4 can only be improved if the current language policy is revised in order to start with English as a MoI at pre-primary and also to have qualified teachers in Grade 4.

4.2.12 Teaching learners in English benefits them than using mother tongue

The researcher wanted to know from the participants whether teaching learners using English as a medium of instruction is benefiting learners than being taught in their mother tongue. Thus, participants' results are provided in Figure 15.

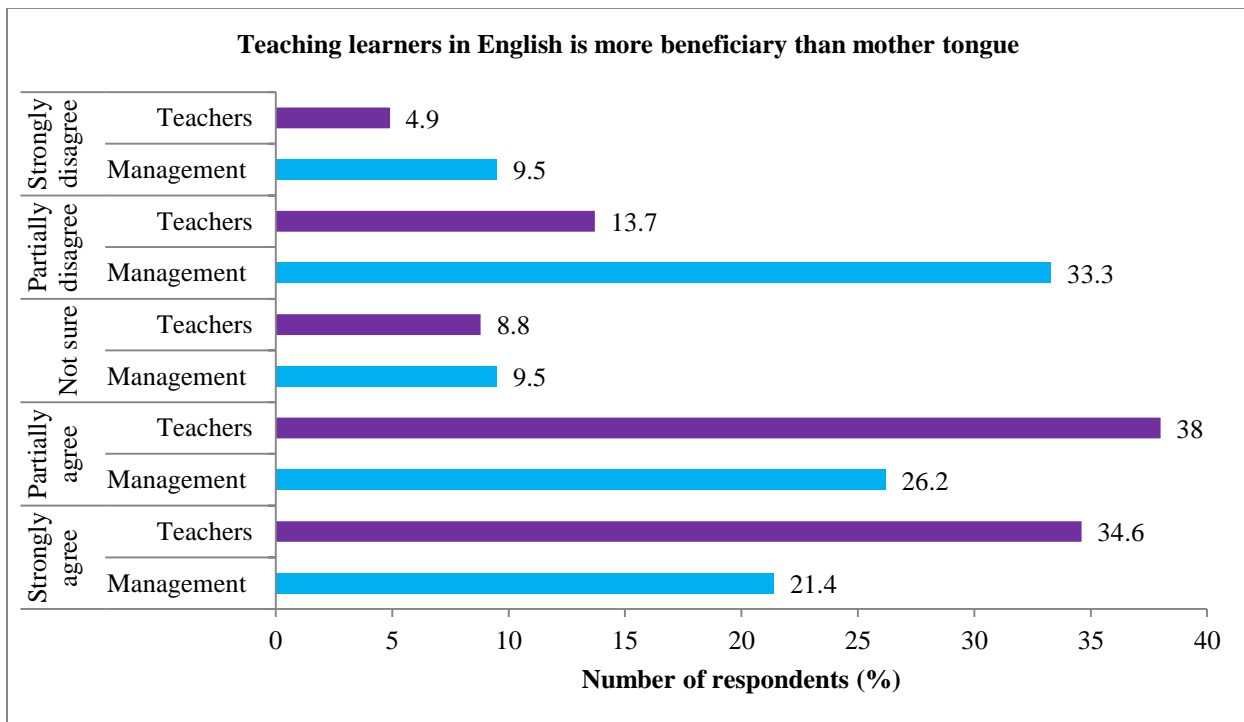


Figure 15: Teaching learners in English benefits them than using mother tongue

On whether teaching learners using English as a MoI benefits learners more than being taught in their mother tongue; 72.6% of the teachers and 47.6% of the management responded in agreement as compared to 18.6% (teachers) and 42.8% (management) who disagreed. Some of those participants who agreed have indicated that:

“English benefits learners because wherever you go you have to use English. With the mother tongue you will be limited. It limits people. It’s limiting our learners, even our future leaders. So, English is more beneficial and please English should be made a medium of instruction from pre-primary.” Acting Principal

“Yeah, I think English is benefiting learners because they won’t experience problems in expressing themselves wherever they go. It will also be easy for them to learn what they are taught by their teachers.” Principal

“Yes, it won’t help learners anything when you teach them in their mother tongue, because there’s no assessment in mother tongue. All the assessments should be in English and if you follow only the mother tongue every day, they will not be able to cope to answer question in English at the end of the day.” Principal

“There are more benefits because where are they going to use their mother tongue in real life if not only in their community, and in their household. Should I send now my learner to Angola, are they going to speak Oshiwambo? No, they have to speak English for them to understand each other. So, English should be groomed from scratch for communication and other subjects to go smoothly.” Teacher

“Obviously this is benefiting them because English is a medium of instruction, like even in most countries, learners are taught in English. They will be able to go anywhere. Instead of them being taught in their mother tongue where they are only restricted to the area of where the language is being spoken.” Teacher

“Yeah, I think the use of English is benefiting learners more when they go to upper grades. Everything that is being done there is only in English and after finishing school they can go to other institutions whereby they need to do presentations in English and when they are done they can go for interviews, interviews are being done in English, even if it’s an Oshindonga post. So, I think English is more beneficial to them.” Teacher

Some participants who agreed indicated that English is beneficial because it is spoken worldwide unlike mother tongue which is only restricted to a certain community or ethnic group. Conversely, some participants who disagreed have indicated that:

“English is not benefitting learners as we are talking right now in Grade 4. If teachers could have started teaching English in Grade 1 it could be more beneficial for the learners. If you compare learners who are in Grade 4 in the rural schools with those learners in private schools, so those in private schools perform better than learners in public schools because private school learners are more exposed to English as a medium of instruction. And these learners end up performing better even when they proceed to secondary level.” Principal

“It will be beneficial to teach learners in their mother tongue, because they started the pre-primary classes in their mother tongue so for them it would be beneficial. So, I think those learners that are taught in their mother tongue understand better. The A learner in Grade 2 or 3 is going to struggle in Grade 4. That learner will become a C and D learner in Grade 4 because of English.” Acting Principal

In spite of having the majority favouring the use of English in teaching, some participants felt that for the learners to know English, they should be able to express themselves first in their mother tongues.

4.2.13 Provision of assistance / support to the Grade 4 teachers

The language policy states that Grade 4 is a transitional year when the change from mother tongue to English as a MoI must take place. Thus, participants were asked whether Grade 4 teachers had received assistance or support from the school and/or Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture on how to teach in a transitional class.

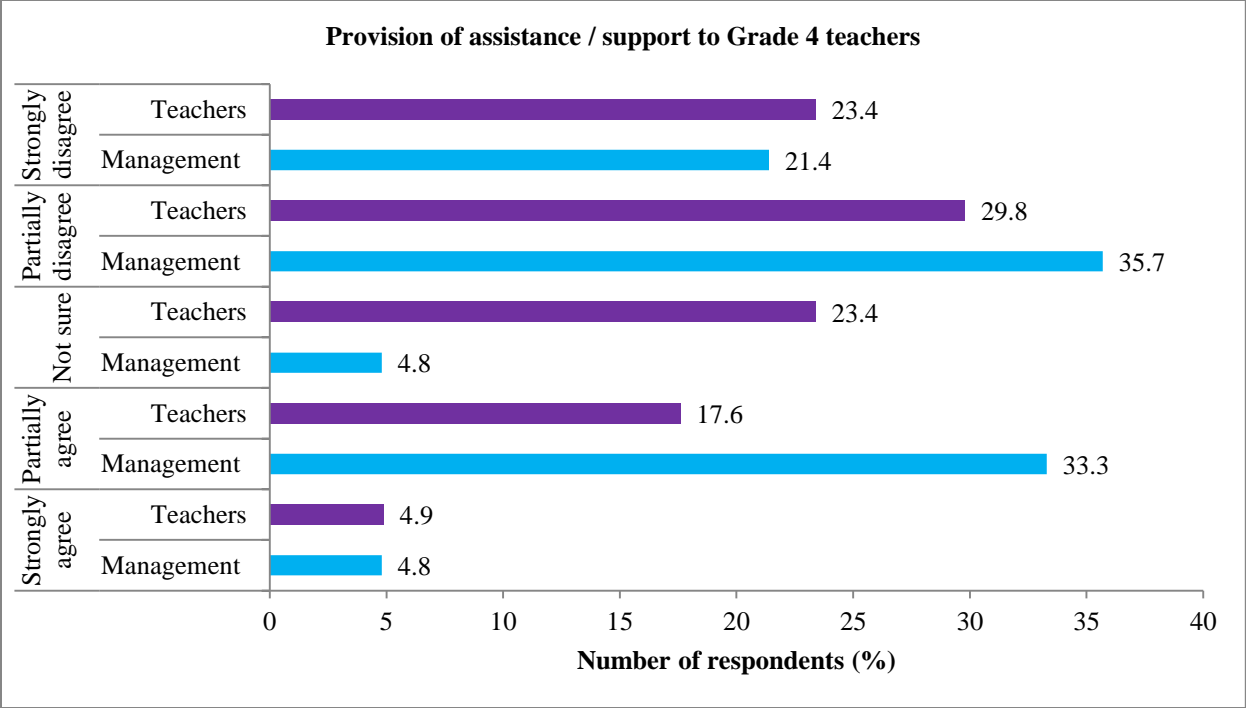


Figure 16: Provision of assistance / support to the Grade 4 teachers

As seen in Figure 16, more than half percent of the management and teachers indicated that Grade 4 teachers were not supported or assisted either from the school or from the Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture on how to teach in a transitional class. However, 38.1% (management) indicated that teachers received support or were assisted as compared to 22.5% of the teachers who agreed. And only 4.8% of the management were not sure equated to 23.4% of the teachers. Some participants who were not supported have indicated that:

“Not like in the olden days when subject advisors where the ones who trained teachers and gave them materials, but nowadays there is nothing like that as teachers struggle on their own on how to get the materials and how they should prepare lessons. Nowadays, subject advisors are not visible at schools and do not support teachers.” Principal

“I did not receive any support or training to teach the Grade 4s. Since this transaction issue took place, we never received any training and we’re looking forward for it if the ministry can provide something like that.” Teacher

“No, we only attended workshops for specific grade subjects. For example, there is a workshop for Life Skills teachers and there’s no specific training on how to teach those learners coming from Grade 3, you just find yourself teaching Grade 4.” Principal

“Not at all, I am a Math and Science teacher specialising from Grade 5 to 12 due to the circumstances of not having enough teachers, so I chipped in for that. I was not trained I’m just doing my own research on how to help these learners as teaching is my passion. I like my learners to pass with flying colours. I am just going out of my own way on how to teach these learners.” Principal

“No, I did not receive any up to now as I said I once taught Grade 4. I expected to get the training even from the Senior Education Officers, I don’t know if it is a question of finance. There was so many times that we requested for the training even at school but we do not get any in most cases we are told that we are not able to come since they need finances, but I did not receive any training. The only help I got is from other teachers who taught Grade 4s.” Principal

“Not at all, I never receive training on how to teach Grade 4 learners neither at the circuit level nor at the region or anywhere else. What I do is, I only try my best to see the best ways that I can be able to deal with the Grade 4 classes for them to be interested in the lesson, but no training was ever received.” Principal

“I was not trained for this Grade 4 because when I was at the university and I completed that is when they changed the curriculum so we were only trained how to teach Grade 5 to 7. Then 2016 when we started working, the curriculum changed for Grade 4 to upper primary so it was difficult for us to cope. We did not even teach that content when we are practicing, so it’s really a challenge to us.” Teacher

It was indicated by some participants that the lack of training and support on how to teach Grade 4 has left some teachers with ‘up to the teacher’ syndrome’. This means that these participants were assisting each other on how to prepare and teach lessons to the Grade 4 learners, without

proper knowledge on whether they were doing it right or wrong. However, at some schools, participants were trained and supported. Here is what they have attributed:

“Yes, I received the training because I was teaching Grade 4 as a class teaching...” Teacher

“Yeah, some of us were teaching certain grades, but the time the new curriculum started, we were attending the workshops on how to teach those learners.” Teacher

“The training on how to teach the Grade 4 learners was done by other teachers. Yeah, sometimes it’s not even planned and only done when you meet together for lesson planning. Like maybe that you have no experience or idea on how to deliver the lesson and then the teachers that have been in the field for many years can guide you through on how it’s supposed to be done and how it is done. So even during induction as well, you get taught on how you are going to teach and what you’re supposed to do. That’s the support that we have received. We also get support from SEOs [Senior Education Officers] on how to plan the lessons or how to possibly teach certain topics and so forth.” Teacher

“Yes, we did receive from a teacher from Seaside... to help us like which documents we should use and how to use them, how to teach and how to assess. She came to help us since we are junior primary teachers who were just transferred here.” Teacher

Fortunately, at some schools, Grade 4 teachers were assisted and/or supported on how to teach Grade 4 classes. This was done either by Senior Education Officers, teachers from other neighbouring schools or they attended the training workshop on the implementation of the revised curriculum.

4.2.14 Teacher training institutions equips Grade 4 teachers with skills and techniques

Some institutions of higher learning in Namibia are training teachers and equipped them with relevant skills and knowledge needed in enabling them to teach learners and manage the

classroom. Therefore, this section provides responses on whether teachers were equipped with skills and techniques at the teacher training institutions on how to teach in a transitional class.

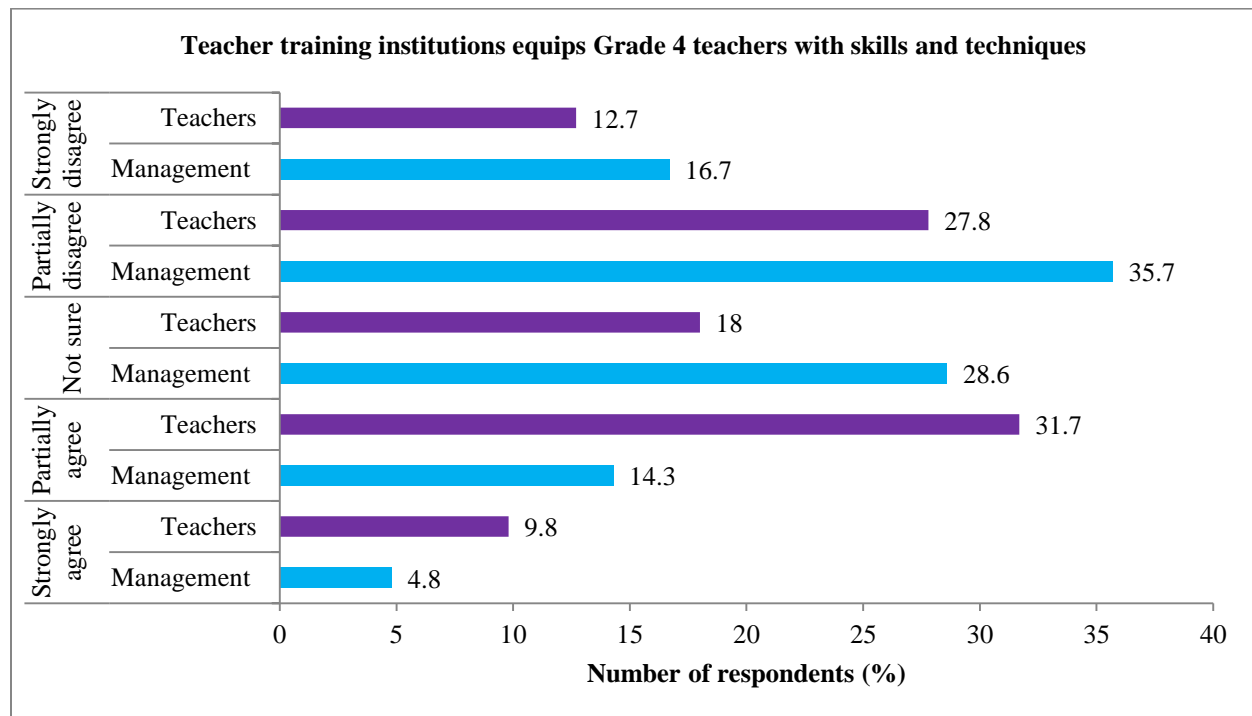


Figure 17: Teacher training institutions equips Grade 4 teachers with skills and techniques

Based on the results presented in Figure 17, the management (52.4%) and teachers (40.5%) indicated that teachers were not equipped with skills and techniques from the teacher training institutions on how to teach in the transitional class. However, 41.5% of the teachers stated that they were well prepared to teach the Grade 4 class.

4.2.15 Lesson preparations that allow Grade 4 learners' interactions

Figure 18 provides responses to whether Grade 4 teachers know how to do lesson plans that allows learners' interaction when taught in English as a medium of instruction.

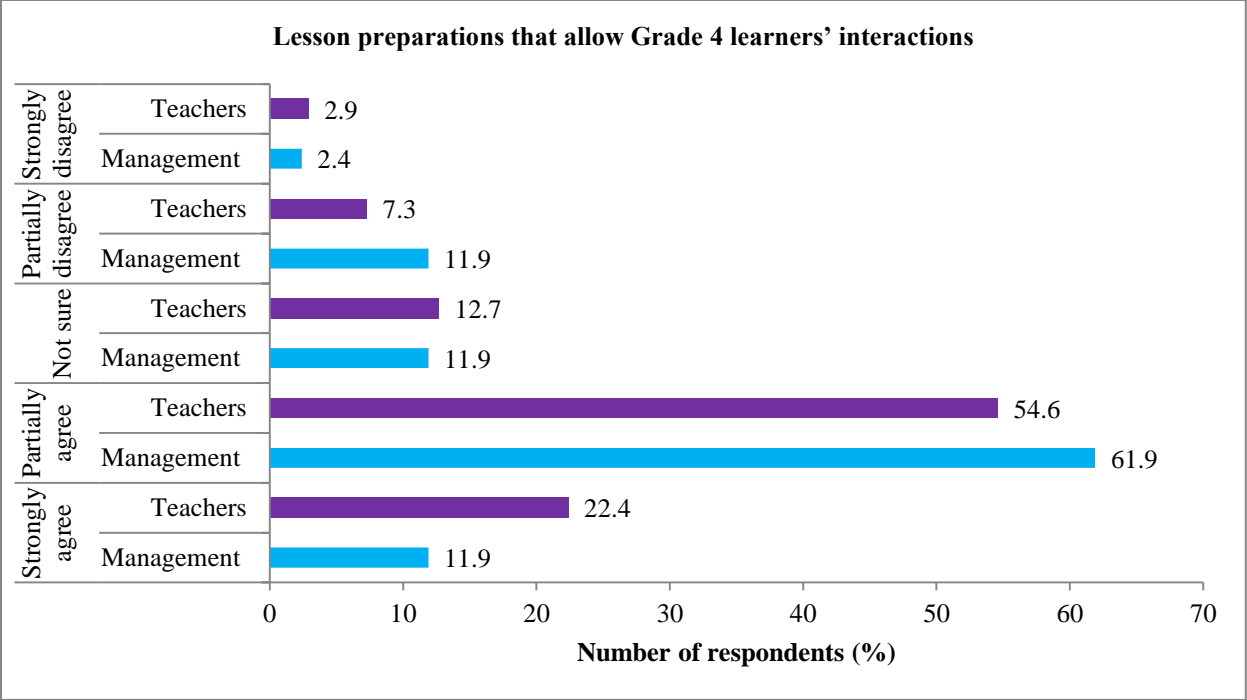


Figure 18: Lesson preparations that allow Grade 4 learners’ interactions

More than seventy percent of the management and teachers stated that Grade 4 teachers know how to do lesson plans that allow learners’ interaction as they were taught in English as a MoI. And only 14.3% of the management and 10.2% of the teachers indicated that teachers did not know how to prepare these lessons. From the interviews, some participants said that:

“I believe teachers know how to plan lessons that allow learners to interact. As a teacher, when you are planning a lesson, the big question that you are supposed to ask yourself is what you are going to teach, how you are going to teach it in terms of the approach where you want learners to be actively involved. I believe a teacher can do that through the learner-centred approach, and there are lots of activities that allow learners’ interactions through role plays, group discussion, open questions and so forth.” Teacher

“Yes, teachers know but the problem is the learners themselves. How do they interact if they are not fluent in English language?” Acting Principal

“As a language teacher, when I’m planning, I give room for the learners to interact either with me or with each other. For example, last week I was busy teaching a dialogue. It’s a conversation between two or more people. Yeah, some lessons allow learners to interact.”

Teacher

“Because as we plan our lessons, we include language across the curriculum. We include reading and writing and then I think this is all good that we can do. But due to the fact that our learners cannot meet us halfway with the little English that they have I think that becomes a challenge” Teacher

“When we plan our lessons we include group work for learners to interact with each as learner-centred. We give learners an opportunity to give their own opinions.” Teacher

“Yeah, 99% of my teachers are professional teachers. They are either trained in colleges or universities. Lesson planning is like the core of teaching. Teachers know how to prepare interactive lessons. So, I did not actually find teachers that are not good in lesson planning. The lessons are planned as expected.” Principal

“We know how to plan lessons if you want your learners to interact in the lesson, unless you have to use teaching aids such as pictures where the learners can see what is happening and then they’ll participate in the lesson. That’s the only way that they can interact.” Teacher

“Yes’ teachers are preparing lessons that allow learners to interact with each other, but not in English. Even if you give them group work activity, they cannot do it in English; whether in Social Studies or English, they’re always discussing in the mother tongue because they have little knowledge of English.” Teacher

“Teachers are, although some of the English teachers who are here teaching some grades were not supposed to teach English only that the school does not have enough qualified teachers. The problem is only when you find a teacher who is not trained for that subject.” Principal

“Yes, majority of teachers if not all are familiar and they are experienced when it comes to preparations of activities and also lesson plans that help learners to interact in English. Sometimes they talk to some learners who cannot confidently express themselves and understand some of the English terminologies that they used.” Principal

Even though, some participants knew how to plan effective and participatory lessons, they had experienced some challenges as some learners were not able to confidently express themselves in English nor did they understand some English terminologies used.

“I said no, because 50% of us know how to plan and which type of activities to use according to learners’ levels and so forth. Even if my lesson is effective, those learners don’t understand because first of all we don’t understand each other when we communicate in English as a medium of instruction.” Teacher

“Yes, I am aware teachers are doing that, but the problem is that even if you prepare lessons including all activities that develop learners’ communication skills; coming to the presentations it will not be easy for them even if you put them in groups. So it’s difficult for them to express themselves in English or to interact with one another. When you move around you can hear them speaking in their mother tongue and not in English.” Principal

From some participants’ perspectives, even if the planned lessons require learners to be in groups to develop their communication skills, these learners were still hardly interacting with each other due to language barriers.

4.3 Factors influencing the transition of MoI

This sub-section aims to find out what the key factors that influence the transition from mother tongue education to English as a medium of instruction during teaching and learning process are.

4.3.1 *The significance of mother tongue instructions in the early grades towards the English attainment from Grade 4*

The language policy states that learners must be taught through the medium of their mother tongue in the early years of schooling and that all languages must be treated equally. It further stipulates that mother tongue undoubtedly plays a crucial role in the acquisition of any second language, i.e. English in the case of Namibia. Participants were asked whether home language / mother tongue instructions in the early grades significantly improve English attainment in Grade 4 and upwards.

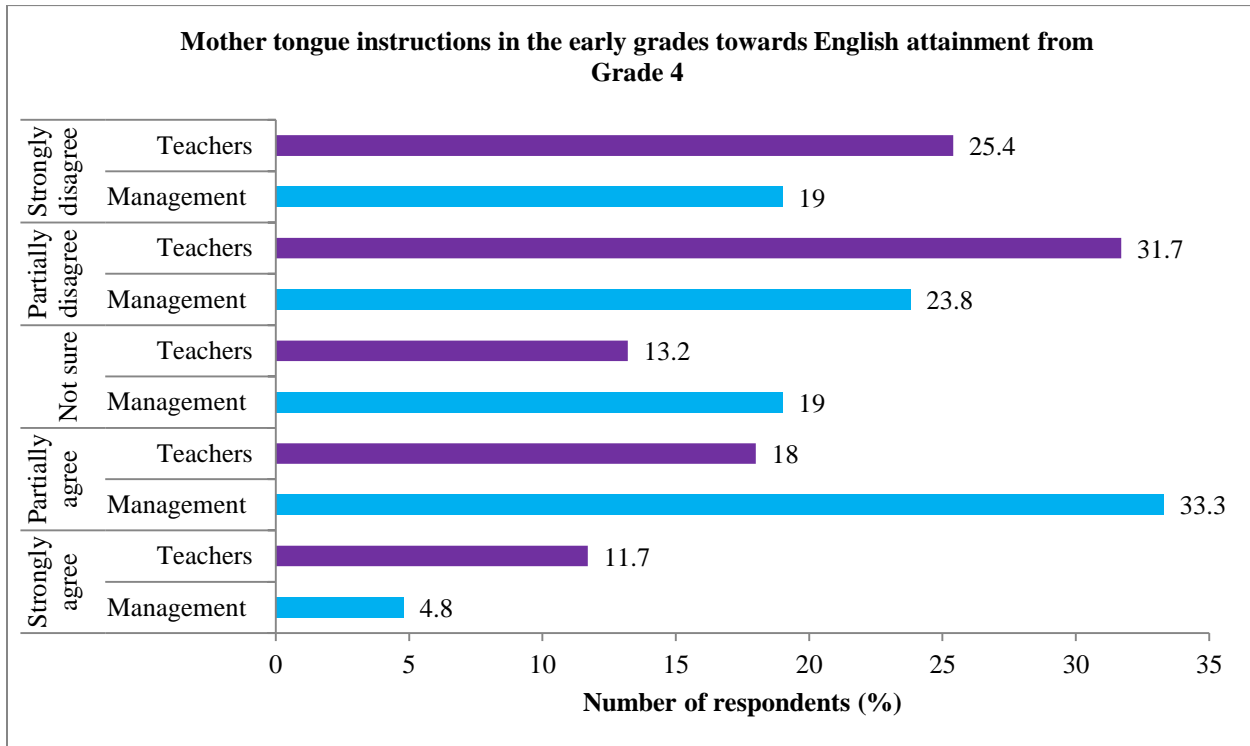


Figure 19: The significance of mother tongue instructions in the early grades

Only 38.1% of the management and 29.7% of the teachers agreed that when learners are taught in mother tongue in the early grades, this improves their English acquisition significantly as from Grade 4 as compared to 42.8% and 57.1% of the management and teachers who disagreed. One of the participants who agreed said that:

“To some extent I agree, because from the pre-primary we teach learners using their mother tongue can help them improve their English. Because they learn English through communication, from that level up to when they come for Grade 4 at least they are better in English as it was the case before.” Principal

Many of the participants were of the opinions that teaching learners in their mother tongues in early grades would not help them to improve their English proficiency. Here is what some participants said:

“No, no! Teaching learners in mother tongue makes learners very lazy because they get so comfortable. This child speaks mother language at home and come to school, same thing. In what way does it benefit when that child now has to change to English?” Teacher

“I don’t think so. I strongly believe that from pre-primary we should prepare learners fully in English so that they can be fluent. If they are taught like we were taught in our days, it was strict, and we did well when we came to Grade 4 as I was able to express myself well in English. I can write a full sentence very well without so many errors and clearly write a paragraph. We did not struggle, but now the learners are failing to write a paragraph because they were not taught it in English.” Teacher

“No, I say no. The way it is done now is really not helping learners to acquire English in their primary phase especially in remote areas. Learners are using mother tongue more and now they find it difficult to switch to English. I would say if they started maybe or if they change the way of doing things like to start English at the junior phase, it might really help.” Teacher

“No, I think the system is killing learners. It’s hard for them to relates to what they are getting in Grade 4. If English can start from Grade 3 or let me say junior primary, they can easily relate to what they were taught in the past grades because learning new things in Grade 4, it’s always tough. I feel pity for those that are teaching them content subjects, for example, if you are giving them vocabularies words in Social Studies, they cannot relate. They won’t know what you’re

talking about because in Grade 3, they heard about it in Thimbukushu so they will not understand anything.” Teacher

“No, not at all... I don’t think so. It’s just a brain game to us because what we are seeing here children need to be taught in English as a medium of instruction. I don’t say we must do away with vernacular, but it must be there as a subject because we are preparing children for secondary school and university and for life after school. Why should we teach them in our vernacular if it is not a recognized language worldwide?” Acting Principal

“Learners cannot improve because here they are learning English. Here in Grade 3, they are learning in Oshindonga, they cannot improve, because English is the medium of instruction and they’re struggling. They don’t understand how to speak or how to write. I don’t know if they can improve because they are using mother tongue in Grade 3.” Teacher

“I strongly disagree because learners get used to their vernacular especially this side in the remote areas, they’re just meeting English at school when they only communicate with teachers in English. They don’t get exposed to any other languages apart from their vernacular. In lower grades, junior primary phase to be specific if they happen to be taught in some of the subjects in English, then you can say those learners will be used as they are coming to Grade 4.” Teacher

“I don’t think so; you master a language if you use it frequently. So, in this case I don’t think enough time is given to English. When you speak a language is where you can pick up its vocabulary, it is where you know how to say it. But if little time is given to you to that specific language, you don’t grab anything. That’s why they say practice makes perfect, but I don’t think there is any link between mother tongue and English.” Principal

“No, I’m not in support of that and I don’t think it will in any way help learners to know how to speak English from Grade 4 upwards because learners only get an opportunity to speak English in the English lessons. Throughout, all the other subjects are being taught in mother tongue which will limit the English terminologies and it will also significantly affect learners’ English

proficient. So, I must say that it is of no use to teach in mother tongue while learners will need more English in upper grades than the mother tongue.” Principal

According to the participants, some reasons why they opposed the use of mother tongues in early grades are that, learners would become very lazy because they get so comfortable with their mother tongue. Mother tongues would not prepare children well for secondary school and university (life after basic education). Vernacular language is not a recognized language worldwide, mother tongue limits learners from English terminologies which significantly affect their English proficiency.

4.3.2 *Learners from low socio-economic families’ achievement of English proficiency as compared to those of well-off families*

According to the language policy, proficiency in English does not automatically ensure effective participation in society. Therefore, participants were asked whether learners from low socio-economic families take longer to achieve English proficiency than learners from more privileged homes.

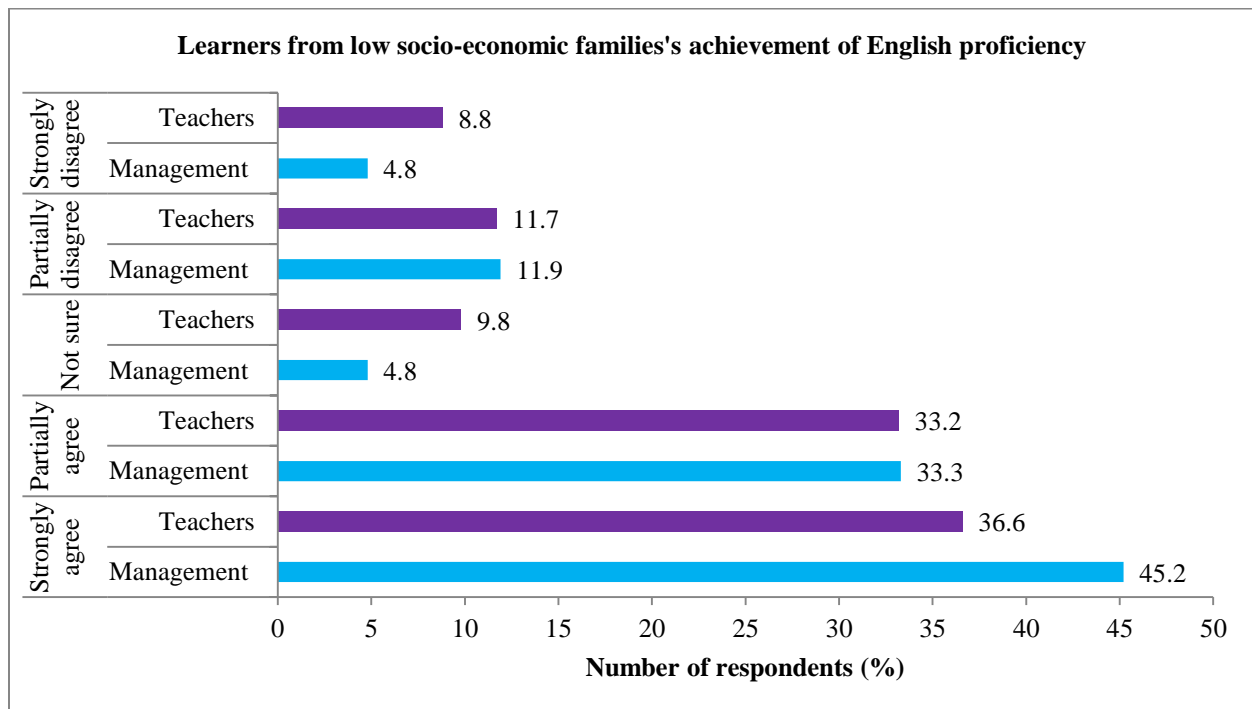


Figure 20: Learners from low socio-economic families' achievement of English proficiency

The findings presented in Figure 20 show that the majority (78.5%) of the management and 69.8% of the teachers agreed that learners from low socio-economic families take longer to achieve English proficiency than learners from more privileged homes. Conversely, only 16.7% (management) and 20.5% (teachers) disagreed, whereas 4.8% of the management and 9.8% of the teachers were uncertain. The following are the reasons provided by some participants who believed that learners from low socio-economic families take longer to achieve English proficiency than learners from more privileged homes.

“Yes, I think so because learners who come from poor families are not exposed too much to technological equipment. There is no TV at home, there’s no radio whereby they can learn a thing or two. But the learners from the more or well-off families can at least catch something from the television or from the radio.” Teacher

“I agree... because learners who come from a good social economic background, their English proficiency cannot be compared to the learners that are from the poor background. Some grew up with television from an early age and this is something that’s already exposing them to the English language, and then that is where they already learned new English terminologies. They can communicate with their parents and friends in English, while learners from the poor background are not exposed to the English language because in most cases the level of education of their parents is most likely low. So, they are not even involved in their children’s education.” Teacher

“100%. Let me elaborate. Learners who are from better social economic background they will have access to many things like televisions and they are exposed to English language than other learners who are from poor backgrounds who don’t have even a radio. Their families have smartphones and other gadgets which expose them to the official language which is English, unlike the poor ones. So, learners’ background plays a big role.” Principal

“Yes, it’s obviously because the one who are from a better off background sometimes even at home the English words are being thrown there and then they watch TV and cartoons. This one from poor background, the only time they encounter English is in the classroom at school only.”

Teacher

“Yes, learners from poor families lack exposure as there are no media for them to watch maybe cartoons or listen to radios and other things. But learners that are from better or rich family are exposed to TV games from their childhood and when they come to school this one knows how to pronounce something in English already and this one doesn’t know everything have to come and start from scratch, so that’s really affecting them.” Teacher

“Yes, for example learners who are schooling in town and learners who are schooling in villages. Learners in town are exposed to a lot of things like televisions, magazines than learners that are in villages as most of them are from poor backgrounds and they don’t watch TV, they don’t have access to magazines, and they don’t try speaking English. So, it’s hard for them to learn a language if they’re not exposed to it. It’s tough for them.” Teacher

“Yes, I agree because learners from the low economic background only come to meet English at school. Most of them are from the families where no one can speak English; there is no radio, newspapers, and televisions for them to learn. Therefore, it is difficult for them to gain English compared to those who are from the better off families where they watch television and listen to radios. There are those who speak English to interact with them. And like in our case most of the learners are staying with their grandparents where they cannot communicate in English therefore it’s not easy for them to learn English.” Principal

“It could be because learners from well off families have televisions in their homes. They watch television every day, so they learn how to speak English from watching television, unlike learners from low social economic who don’t listen to English. So, they only meet English at school. I think learners from rich families can cope and most of the parents are educated; they speak to their children in English.” Teacher

On the contrary to the above-raised points, some participants attested that:

“I must be very honest. You cannot say learners from low or high are doing better, throughout the years of experience I have seen that learners coming from poor families are so eager to learn to get out of poverty and they don’t want to end up being poor like their parents, I can tell you. It also depends on the learners and parents who are working together with the school.” Principal

“No, whether a child is from a rich family or poor family, it doesn’t matter when a child is mastering schoolwork. Sometimes a child can come from a rich family, watching TV, but still, it’s not really helpful. But a child who is from a poor family and their parents are supportive. That child can still master in class.” Teacher

From the above extracts, some participants felt that for the child to achieve and/or master English proficiency, it has nothing to do with his/her home background. Also, it does not matter whether a child came from the rich or poor family but what is more important is personal commitment and parental support.

4.3.3 The age of introducing learners to English as a MoI is the determining factor in the child’s learning achievement

The fact that for pedagogical reasons it is ideal for learners to study through their mother tongue, particularly in the early years of schooling when basic skills of reading, writing and concept formation are acquired. Thus, in this section, the researcher seeks to find out from the participants whether the age of introducing learners to English as a MoI is the greatest determining factor in the success of child’s learning. Participants’ responses are provided in Figure 21 below.

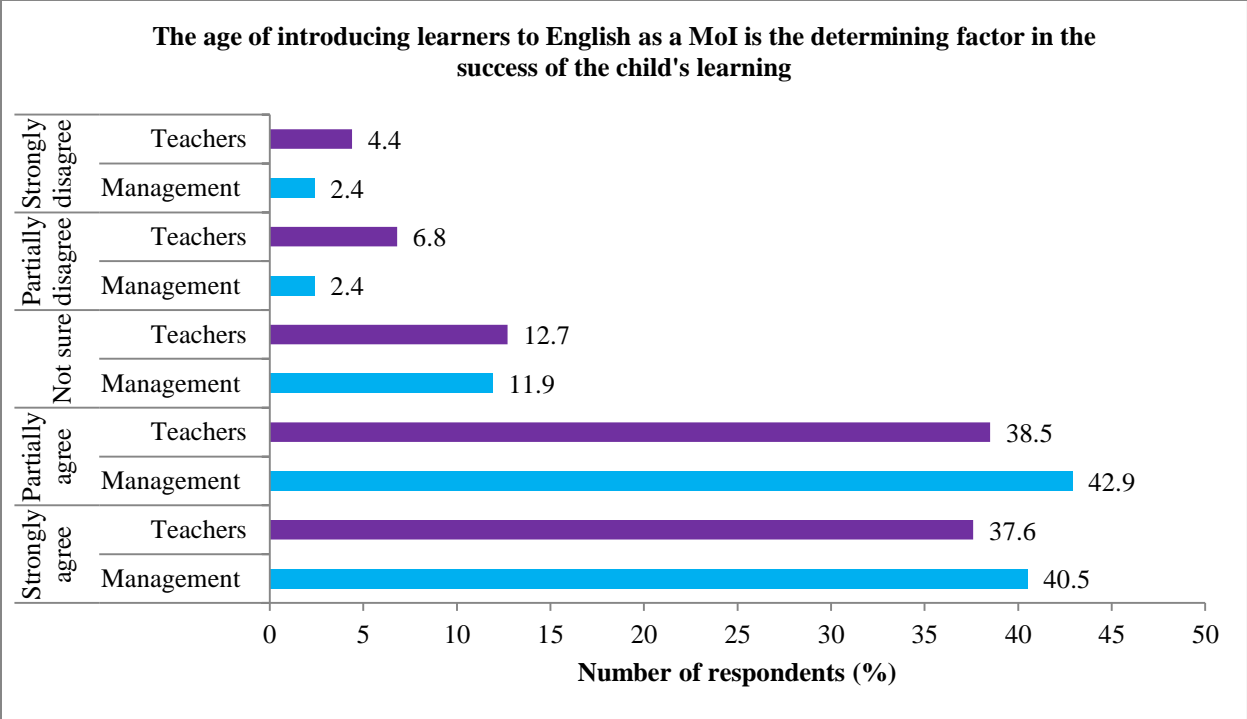


Figure 21: The age of introducing learners to English as a MoI is the determining factor in the success of the child’s learning

A high number of participants (management, 83.4% and teachers, 76.1%) agreed that the age of introducing learners to English as a MoI is the greatest determining factor in the success of child’s learning as compared to 4.8% (management) and 11.2% (teachers) who disagreed. The following are extracts from some of the participants who agreed.

“Very much, it’s great if you introduce English at the beginning that’s perfect from whichever grade, even from kindergarten. Yes, the earlier we introduce English to our learners, the better we will achieve good outcomes in education.” Acting Principal

“Well, I would say the earlier the better to introduce our children to English to better prepare them for the future so that they grow up with it.” Teacher

“I think learners should learn fast when they’re young so that they can catch up fast compared to when they’re a bit older.” Teacher

“Yes, age matters. You might find different people with different thinking capacities or knowledge wise, but the age matter most because when you teach a child at a young age, he learns more faster than someone who’s grown. Yeah, when you’re teaching children something, especially another language, they acquire faster than at the grown-ups.” Teacher

“Age plays a role because learners who start doing things while still children know more things as they grow and experience a lot of things. But when you start to know things at a pace while you already a grown-up person, you hardly catch up as much.” Teacher

“I think the earlier the better. Yes, the earlier the child is exposed to English, the better. That child will be able to cope in life. That’s my understanding.” Acting Principal

“I think learners learn fast and better when they are very young, and they are also interested in learning new things. So, yes, a child will learn a new language as from the age 5 to 6 starting from pre-primary without losing their mother tongue. There, a child learns a language fast and they also have the ability to compare if what they say is in English or in Oshiwambo.” Principal

“Age is one of the determining factors that will also affect the success of the child in learning the language; that’s why it is very important if English can be introduced to these learners at an early age as possible.” Principal

“It is quite fine when you start with English at an early age because when they are going through the process of learning, they are improving. So, I support that learners must start early because the younger they start, the better they learn English.” Teacher

On the contrary, some participants were of the opinion that the age of introducing learners to English as a MoI is not the determining factor in the success of the child’s learning. They stated that:

“No, I don’t really believe in age because we have even the grown-up people who can learn a new language and they just do fine at it. I think it’s just the exposure of a learner to that

language. It doesn't matter at what age, but we believe the earlier the better in terms of school. However, I don't believe that just because a learner is ten years in Grade 4, he cannot acquire English like a learner who is seven in Grade 1. Both can, it just depends on the exposure." Teacher

"I think age have nothing to do with it, because if we compare private schools, same learners start from pre-primary with English but here the thing is only the policies. So, what I can suggest is that we should start at the early age, and then it won't make any harm to the children. It will benefit them more." Teacher

"I don't think age has something to do with their learning, for example, I teach a child in Grade 1 she was eight or nine or ten years there, but that child when I was teaching, she understood everything, it was not really a struggle with that kid. Maybe she was affected by other learners because she's big and others are small, but for me age doesn't matter." Teacher

Some of the participants sensed that children succeed academically when they are exposed to the language at any age and not necessarily while they were at early ages. Although, they were of the view that it is better to start with English as MoI during pre-primary.

4.3.4 Teachers' role on learners' academic achievement despite learners' little home language proficiency

Even though, learners enter schools with little home language proficiency, participants were asked whether teachers are the ones who play the most important role in the learners' success or failure.

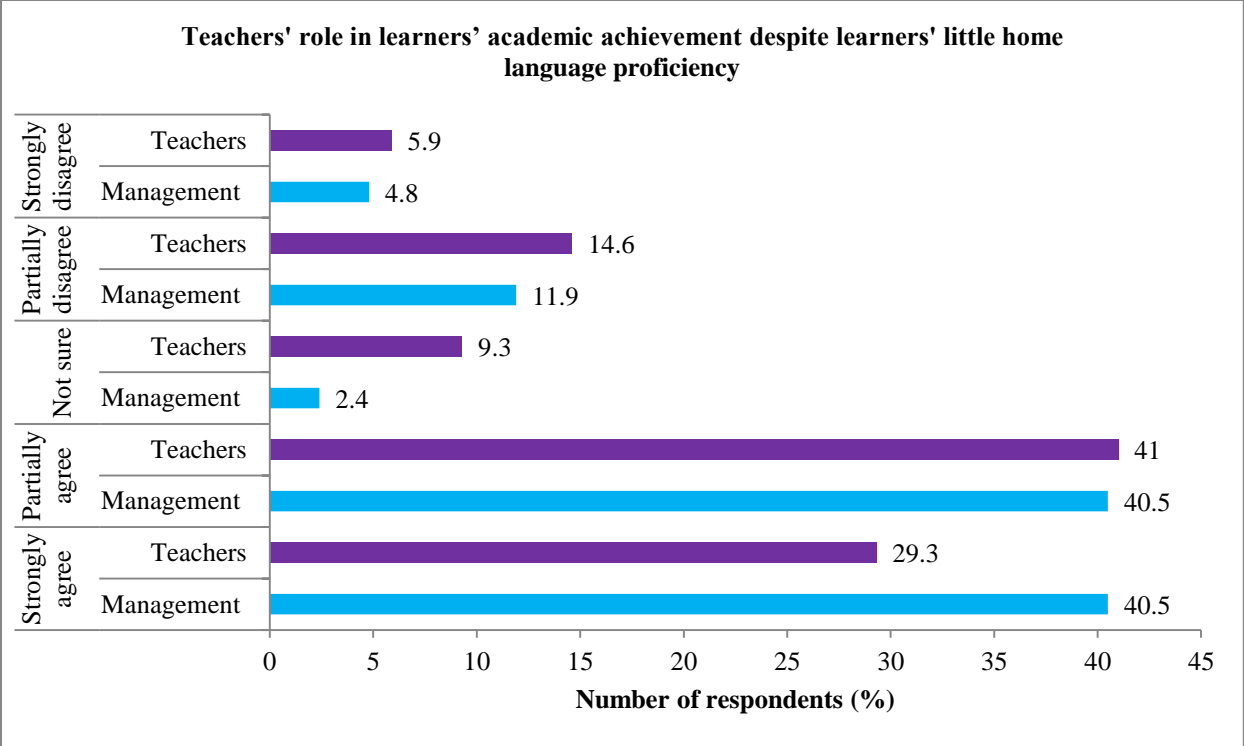


Figure 22: Teachers’ role in learners’ academic achievement despite learners’ little home language proficiency

According to Figure 22, majority of the management (81.0%) and teachers (70.3%) agreed that teachers had the role to play towards learners’ academic achievement despite the fact that learners enter school with little home language proficiency. Despite most of the participants having agreed, only 16.7% of the management and 20.5% of the teachers disagreed. Some of the participants who agreed said the following:

“A teacher has a big task and role to play in the learners’ performance, promoting or not promoting; although, it’s not entirely for the teacher to make learners pass.” Teacher

“Yes, as a teacher you have to play your role because when a learner comes from home, they only have little knowledge; hence more knowledge will come from teachers. When the learners come to school, the teachers are the most important people to play a teaching role in a child’s life.” Teacher

“I think teachers have great influence in learners’ performance because the future of our learners is in the hands of teachers. It depends on us as teachers how serious and capable we are. And how ready are we to sacrifice and go extra miles to teach, shape and prepare these learners for their future ahead.” Acting Principal

“The teacher has a lot to do with a child’s success or failure because a teacher is responsible for adding knowledge to what the child already knows. The teacher really plays a big role.” Principal

“Yes, it is teachers’ role. Teachers play their part, but there are also others issues like learner’s factors such as background, the community in which the learner is coming from, the family status, and the devices at the learners residing areas such as cell phones that teachers may have nothing to do about. So, it’s a 50/50 thing.” Principal

“Okay, teachers play a major role when it comes to the child’s learning because they are the ones who are trained to do so. However, parents do have a part to play also to meet teachers halfway, especially when teachers give homework; parents should be at home, ready and able to help children to complete the task or maybe do a research that need to be carried out.” Principal

Some of the respondents, who disagreed that teachers were the role models and had the role to play on learners’ academic achievement despite learners’ little home language proficiency, mentioned that:

“I don’t really agree because I think the parents will also play the major role. Yes teachers can, do but parents can also assist teachers and their children with school work. So, both teachers and parents are needed for the child’s development.” Principal

“It’s not the teacher only, but it’s the teacher and the parents. Thus, as we are saying, education starts at home. Parents must therefore do something at home, and then the teachers also do something at school. They must meet each other halfway for the child’s better performance.”

Teacher

“But when it comes to learners failure, I don’t think teachers are the contributing factors because as a teacher you can try your level best; however, because learners are not exposed, there’s nothing you can do although you tried. Of course, you can try to improve learners’ level of English proficiency when you are here but when they go back to the community there, they speak their own language.” Principal

“I think it’s not only teachers but more like both teachers and learners including parents. They should all play their part in their success and failure. Learners must also show interest in learning, what is being taught and parents must also be supportive to their children. It involves 3 people.” Teacher

“Nowadays, we have younger teachers who are not motivated, or they took up the profession just simply because of the money, these teachers come to work for the sake of coming when in the class with children they want to enjoy a Wi-Fi, being on Facebook during the lesson time.” Principal

It was quite shocking and interesting to hear from the participants that some teachers, especially the younger ones were not motivated to be the role models to the learners. They lacked professionalism.

4.3.5 Teachers’ quality and expertise on learners to master English language proficiency

The researcher was interested to know whether teachers’ quality and expertise are the most significant determinants of how learners will successfully master the English language proficiency. Participants’ responses are presented in Figure 23.

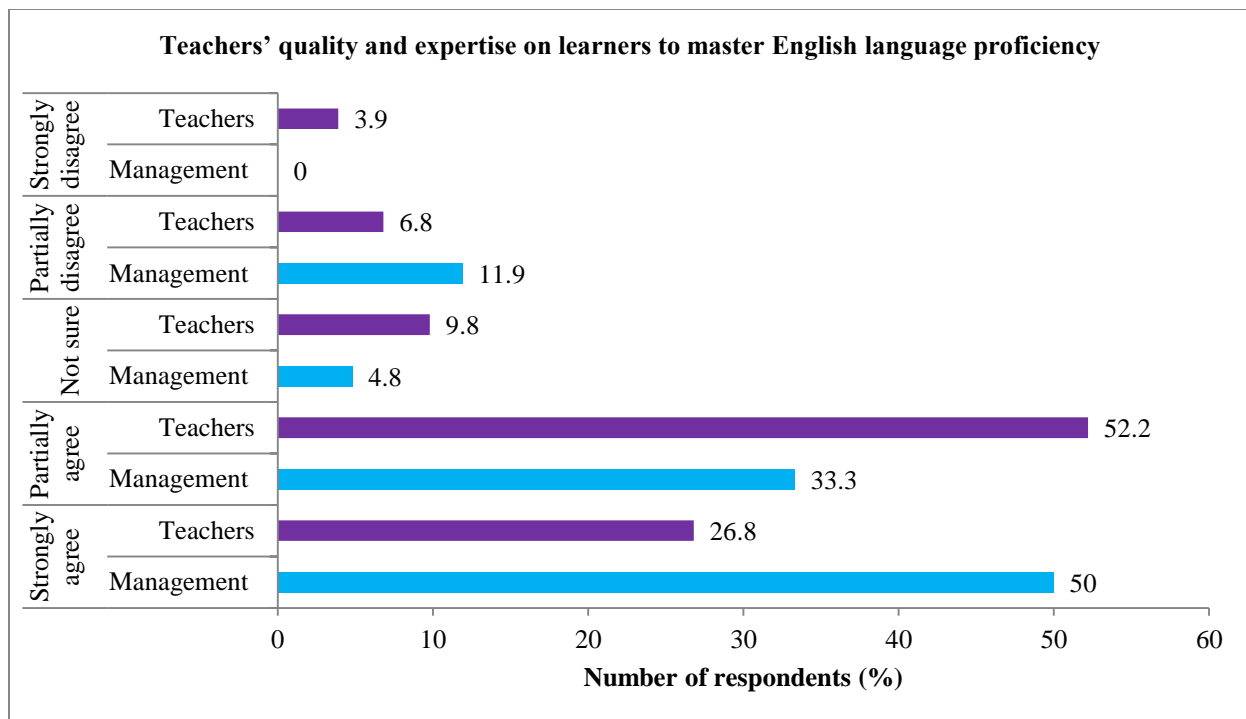


Figure 23: Teachers' quality and expertise on learners to master the English language proficiency

In Figure 23, 83.3% of the management and 79.0% of the teachers agreed that the teachers' quality and expertise are the most significant determinants of how learners will successfully master the English language proficiency. They claimed in the interviews that:

“Yes, teachers' expertise matter because they have diverse of teaching methods. If a learner does not cope with learning how to read, this teacher resorts to another method because of his expertise and experience unlike the novice teachers.” Principal

“Yes, the teaching methodology, behaviour, attitude, and love of the teachers towards these learners determine how they catch what they are taught well.” Principal

“Yeah, teachers have a big role to play. Some learners come without any knowledge to school, but teachers have to assist through maybe by coming up with the reading clubs and teaching aids in the class. Yes, maybe they have to do drama just to assist those learners in their English proficiency if you leave them like that, they won't know anything.” Teacher

“I agree and believe that teachers also play a major role in developing the language of the child because they need to teach the child very well. To teach the child communication, tenses and whatever is needed at school. If the child is lucky enough and from an environment where English is spoken at home then parents can also continue...” Principal

“I think it’s the quality of the teacher. If a teacher comes from home knowing what is expected of him or her, he will definitely do more, and these qualities will add to the child’s performance and building the vocabulary skills of a child.” Principal

“Yes, this is the determining factor because learners copy what teachers do. Learners normally catch up with a lot of vocabularies through the interaction with their teachers. So, it’s very important if English can be taught by highly experienced teachers who can express themselves confidently in English, who are good at grammar usage that will significantly help learners to master the English language proficiency.” Principal

“I think teachers play a role because learners they tend to imitate how their teachers speak. So, if the teacher has for example poor accent or pronunciation; that’s how learners will be pronouncing. Yeah, that’s how I understand it.” Teacher

The findings from the interviews indicated that teachers’ quality and expertise matter the most. In addition, their teaching methodologies, behaviour, attitude and love are what influence learners to master the English language.

4.4 Challenges faced by teachers when teaching using English

This sub-section aims to investigate the challenges that hinder the teaching and learning process when the medium of instruction is not a mother tongue.

4.4.1 Provision of training to the majority of Grade 4 teachers

The language policy for schools in Namibia stipulates that mother tongue instruction in Grade 1, 2 and 3 should be strengthened through materials development and teacher pre- and in-service training. Since the policy is silent on the training of Grade 4 teachers, the researcher was keen to know whether the majority of Grade 4 teachers are trained to teach Grade 4 classes or not.

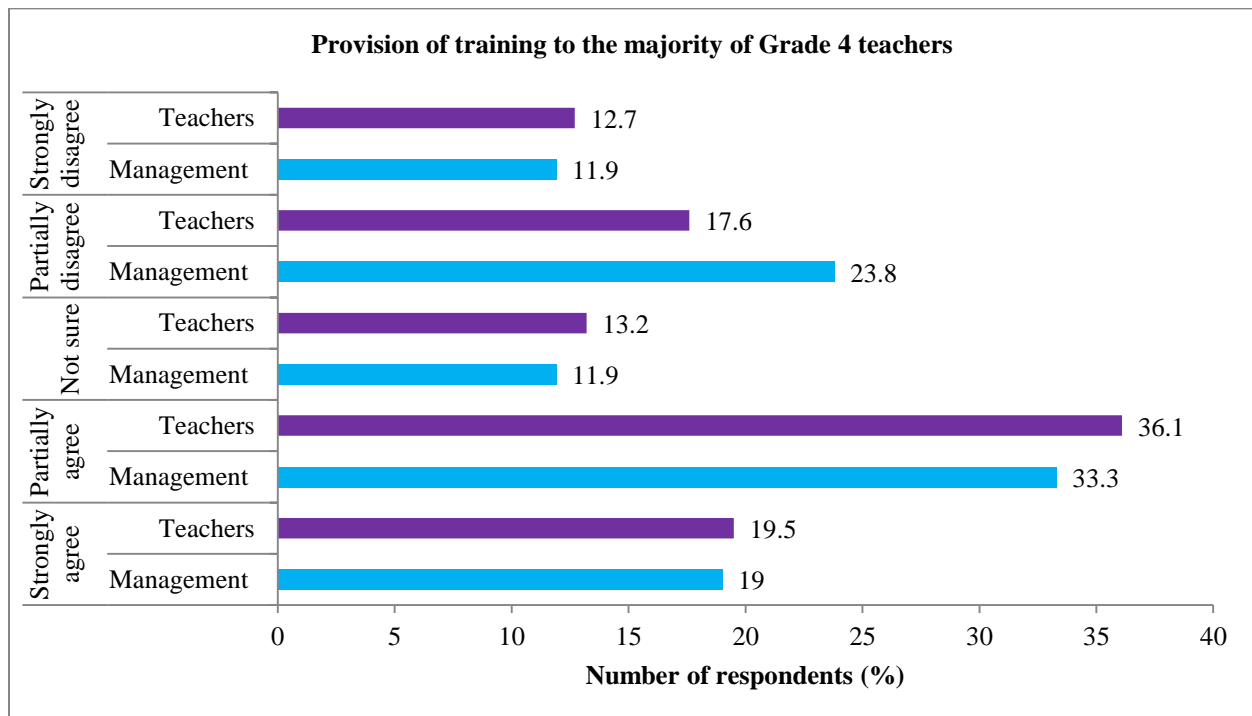


Figure 24: Provision of training to the majority of Grade 4 teachers

According to the results in Figure 24, 52.3% of the management and 55.6% of the teachers indicated that most Grade 4 teachers were provided with the training on how to teach Grade 4 classes and compared to the management (35.7%) and teachers (30.3%) who responded with the opposite. At some schools, respondents indicated that they were not trained.

“We have not received training since I came at this school in 2018 when it was only Grade 1. We moved like that; no training was done.” Acting Principal

“I personally did not receive training; I was just given the Grade 4 class and did not receive any support.” Teacher

“Not from the school but I think when they were at different colleges or educational institutions where there they got training, I think they got it with this change of curriculum, they still need to have trained because they lack necessary skills.” Principal

At some schools, the results from the interviews revealed that Grade 4 teachers were not trained on how to teach Grade 4 classes. However, some participants indicated that they were only trained during their studies at the institutions of high learning but that was not adequate as the trainers were also not knowledgeable enough about the revised curriculum.

4.4.2 Grade 4 teachers’ code-switching during teaching and learning process

Due to the language barriers in the classrooms, this section seeks to find out whether there were some Grade 4 teachers who resort to code-switch during the teaching and learning process.

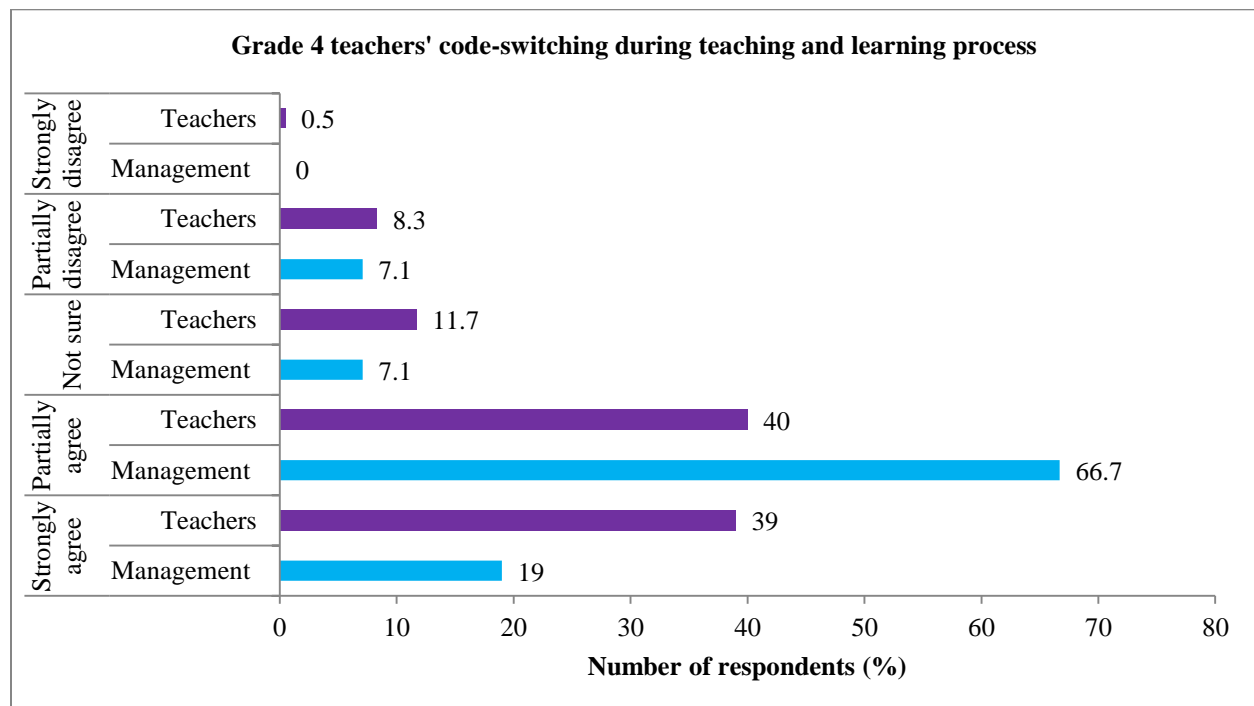


Figure 25: Grade 4 teachers’ code-switching during teaching and learning process

As seen in Figure 25, more than seventy percent of the participants; that is 85.7% of the management and 79.0% of the teachers indicated that some Grade 4 teachers do code-switch during the teaching and learning process. Some of the reasons why they were code-switching were:

“For constructing effective communication, if I speak English, learners cannot comprehend what the words are. You have to code switch so that learners can understand and know what you are saying.” Acting Principal

“Yeah, we code switch most of the time for saving our lessons, but then it’s also a challenge to code switch some classes where you do not know the language that these learners are used to. So, the reason for code switching is basically to make learners understand the content better. So if we are just teaching in English and these learners are just looking at you, they do not understand anything that you are teaching. Then there is no teaching taking place, so we are now forced to code switch where you can.” Teacher

“It’s because of these learners most of the words that we are using become vocabularies to them. Therefore, it forces a teacher to code switch.” Teacher

“What matters is to the ability to ensure that learning with understanding takes place in the classrooms regardless of whatever language. That’s why it forces me to code switch into mother tongue to ensure that learners understand what is expected of them and what they need to learn.” Principal

“Ok, sometimes we switched off from the medium of instruction to mother tongue because after teaching and explaining at the end of the lesson you assess the learners at the end of the lesson then you find out that these learners did not understand. Most of them don’t perform well, then you repeat in mother tongue.” Teacher

“To be honest so many times I code switch just to make learners understand but that guilty is always there because the exam would come and there will be nobody who will explain to them. However, in some cases you have no any other option you are just being forced or you will just find yourself saying it in your mother tongue and that is not what you want to do. The situation itself sometimes forces us to do so because you have a task which learners need to complete you explain in English several times, but learners are just staring at you.” Principal

“Yeah, in most cases we code switch to cement what we have taught, and to a certain extent just to create that understanding and you could really see that some terminologies are a bit difficult for these learners to grasp. That’s where we find out most of our cases in code switching.”

Teacher

“We are switching to the mother tongue because some terminologies are not familiar to the learners.” Teacher

“Yes, code switching in my lessons or class is a must; otherwise, if I don’t do it my learners will walk out of that class without learning anything. I’m always trying to code switch for them to understand and make sure that I have a book where they write vocabulary words of that specific day for them to understand but code switching is part of us; there is no way we can separate it from us.” Principal

“We normally code switch, like every day we have to switch for example all the subjects are in English except for Oshindonga. So, I have to read the sentence and translate it into their vernacular for them to understand or when I post a question, I have to repeat it in Oshindonga so that they can understand. So, when I repeat it; that is when they get to understand and also translate their answers in English.” Teacher

Language barriers, lessons’ saving time, constructing effective communication, ensuring learners’ conceptual understanding in terms of subject contents and English terminologies were some of the reasons why most respondents were code-switching during the teaching and learning

process. Nevertheless, some of the respondents were not code-switching due to some reasons as alluded below.

“Well, I don’t speak the language that my learners are speaking, but if my language was same as those learners’, I could be code switching, but it’s just unfortunate that I speak a different language and they are from different...” Acting Principal

“Personally, if I don’t code switch, learners won’t understand. I can probably say a sentence in Otjiherero because now the kids end up teaching me their mother tongue because it’s unfair if I explain in English then in Khoekhoegowab then the Otjiherero children are left out. Learners will not understand if I didn’t code switch.” Teacher

At some schools, cultural diversity plays the crucial role and it was embraced in terms of racial integrations in schools. Thus, some respondents were not code-switching simply because they came from different ethnic groups and cannot speak learners’ mother tongue. But some respondents admitted that if they could speak the mother tongue of their learners, then they could have code-switched as well.

4.4.3 Expression of most of the Grade 4 learners with ease and confidence in English

In order to be literate, one should not only speak English well, but also know the written form of the language, since language is the system of human expression by means of words. Thus, participants’ responses about whether most of the Grade 4 learners had difficulty in expressing themselves with ease and confidence in English are presented in Figure 26.

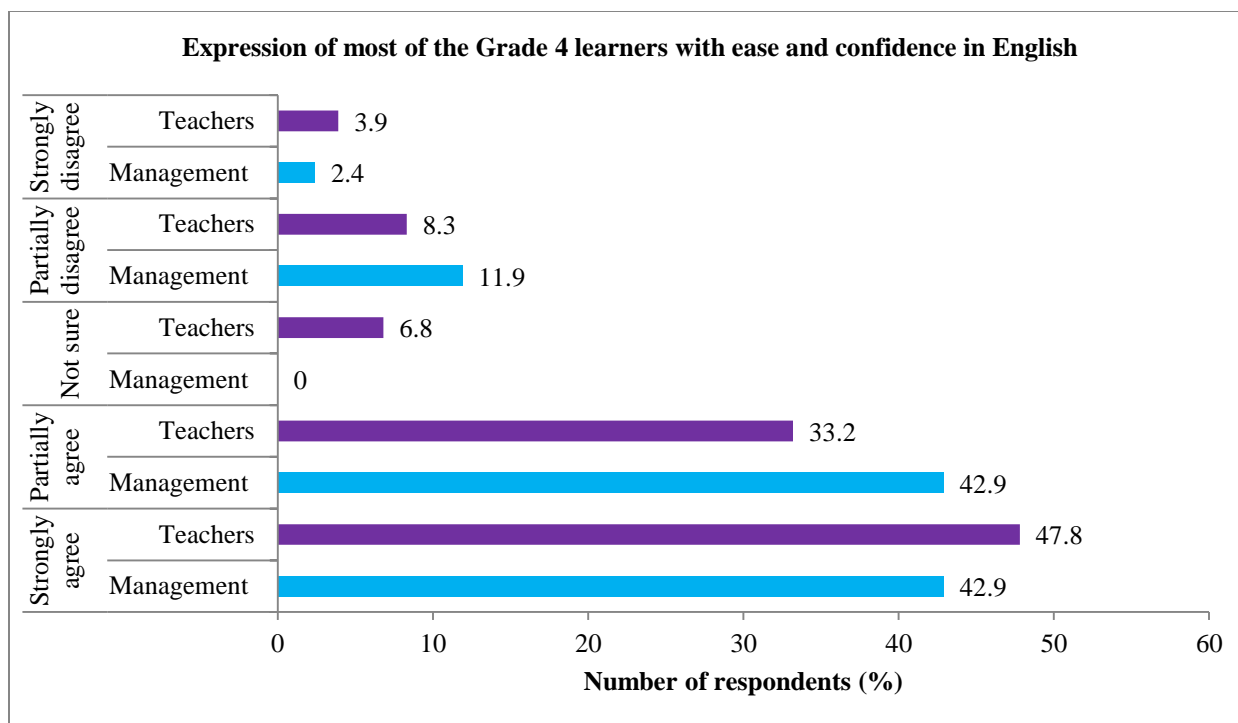


Figure 26: Expression of most of the Grade 4 learners with ease and confidence in English

Most of the management (85.8%) and teachers (81.0%) indicated that most of the Grade 4 learners had difficulties in expressing themselves with ease and confidence in English as compared to 14.3% (management) and 12.2% (teachers) who disagreed. When the school management and teachers indicated that most of the Grade 4 learners were not expressing themselves freely in English, they meant the following:

“I would not say most but a few of them, had difficulties in expressing themselves in English and these can be divided into different parts; it could be that the child lacks self-esteem because they fail to communicate or use the language properly. But some are confident, so they use the language even if it’s not that fluent, but they’re confident in speaking and saying what they have to say, and their views and thoughts are also being heard.” Teacher

“There’s shyness because learners are moving from their vernacular to English now, they speak and we correct them when they are wrong. Now, majority of them can speak in English.” Acting Principal

“Learners are not confident to express themselves in English because they have language problems. That’s why sometimes when you post a question to one of the learners, he or she might just stand up without saying any word. They lack confidence and they are too shy.” Teacher

“Yeah, very much, they are not confident, and it really affects them. It doesn’t matter what age you are.” Principal

“Yes very much, they don’t express themselves confidently in English because they don’t understand or they cannot construct words to express themselves. So even though we as teachers always motivate or giving them hope that when you talk to your friends it is always good to speak in English. We are always trying many tricks to help them express themselves confidently in English but not as they express themselves in mother tongue.” Principal

“They’re not confident enough because they don’t really know how to speak English, thus they feel like if they try, their peers are going to laugh at them.” Teacher

Some participants stated that the problem of the learners was that either learners lacked self-esteem, or they were shy to speak English. But, at some schools according to the participants, learners had no problem to speak English. Here is what they said:

“Yeah, most of them are only those ones who are from higher socio-economic groups, those ones that are very eager to talk. They can express themselves and with others very well in English. Also, most of our learners are from poor backgrounds, so they’re struggling to express themselves in English.” Principal

“It depends on the learners, but they have that confidence to learn, especially when the teacher also motivates them not to be absent from school because they are mostly absent.” Principal

Some participants had mentioned that learners who struggled or had difficulties to express themselves in English were faced with some challenges such as poor learners’ background and/or low socio-economic status and lack of teachers’ motivation.

4.4.4 Implementation / introduction of English as a language of learning and teaching in Grade 4

Despite an overwhelming preference of English as a medium of instruction, participants were asked if English as a language of learning and teaching was not well implemented / introduced in Grade 4 at the beginning of each academic year. Participants' responses are provided in Figure 27.

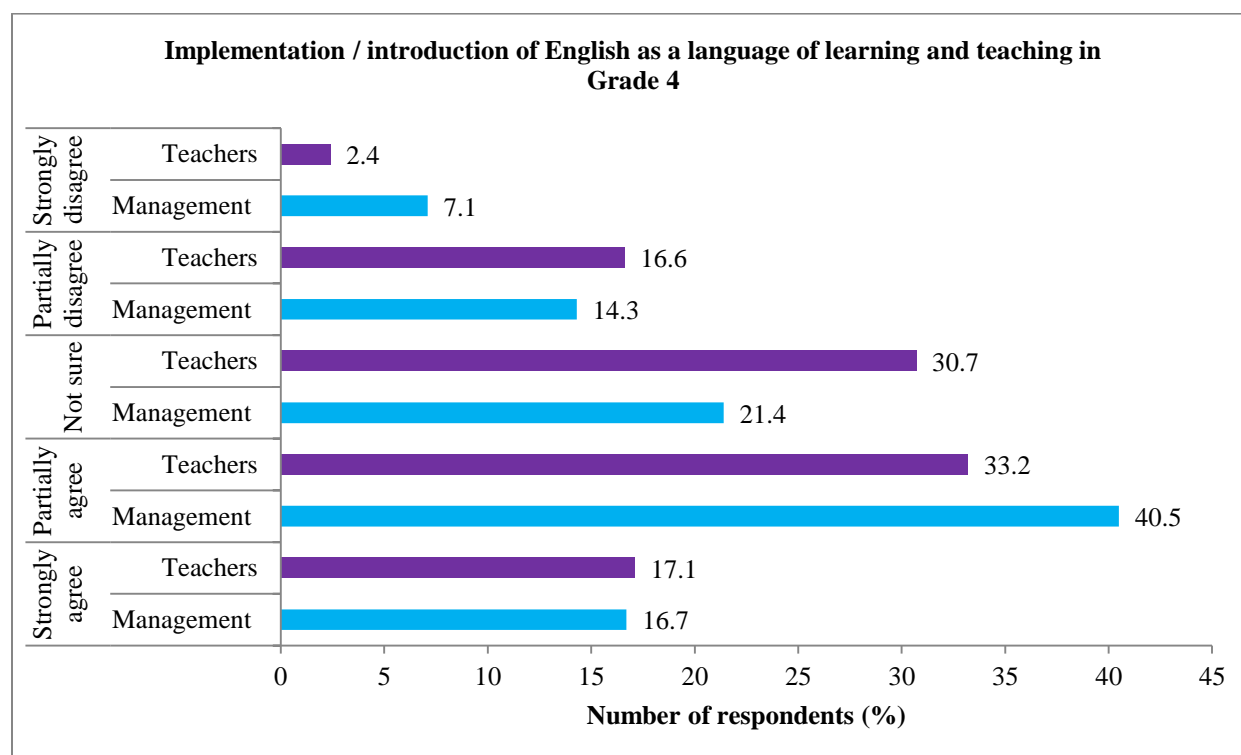


Figure 27: Implementation / introduction of English as a language of learning and teaching in Grade 4

According to the participants' responses provided in Figure 27, 57.2% and 50.3% of the management and teachers respectively indicated that English as a language of learning and teaching was not well implemented / introduced in Grade 4 at the beginning of each academic year. Whereas, only 21.4% (management) and 19.0% (teachers) who disagreed as compared to 31.4% of the management and 30.7% of the teachers who were not sure. From the interviews, participants who agreed stated that:

“Yes, that one we used to give induction that all subjects here in Grade 4 are no more taught in the mother tongue. We are using English, and they have to start practicing English and you ask questions if you don’t understand in English and if you don’t understand the instruction you ask your friend. Even if you want to make noise, make noise in English and we ask permission in English everything is in English.” Principal

“I can say that was done when learners were welcomed in Grade 4 so they were introduced to new teachers and phases and different teachers of different subjects. They introduced their subjects respectively, and then they welcome their learners and informed them on how they are going to be taught. These teachers already knew that these learners were new, and that they are going to be taught in English for the first time.” Teacher

“Yes, our school is having that plan in place. When learners are moving from Grade 3 to 4, we always prepare them not to be confused or puzzled. We always prepare them at the beginning of the year by giving them a small coaching clinic on what Grade 4 entails. We always let them know what the year ahead will be like, and putting most emphasis on the English language. Like now, they were doing Environmental Studies, Natural Science, Mathematics in their vernacular; all those are dropped and starting them with English. We are always doing that at the beginning of the year.” Principal

At some schools, participants indicated that they had induction programmes in place where they orientated learners at the beginning of each academic year. One of them introduced learners to the subject teachers especially Grade 4 learners who came from the class teaching grades. Grade 4 learners were also informed about what Grade 4 entails which included the list of subjects and that these subjects are only taught in English.

Conversely, at some schools English as a MoI was not well introduced to the learners during the starting of each academic year because these schools didn’t have a formal induction programme in place. Consequently, learners had to figure it out on their own and see how they would cope

with English as a MoI as they progressed. The following are some of the extracts from the participants.

“No, I don’t think so, individually as a teacher, I enter in my Grade 4 class and start teaching Social Studies in English without informing learners to understand why am I teaching in English since they are used to mother tongue. I think there is no a platform whereby learners are told officially that the way you were taught that side is not how we do it here.” Teacher

“I don’t think so; maybe learners were not well guided and orientated. Maybe that’s what we need, and we need training on that one.” Principal

“I think that’s a “NO”. There’s no formal induction that takes place at our school where we introduce our learners to the new phase, to say. Learners are informally informed by teachers, subject teachers or class teachers of what they are expected to see. But I have never seen a formal platform where we bring these learners together to give them induction on what is expected from them.” Teacher

“But we just assumed that learners knew that they are going to Grade 4 and then they start everything in English and there was nothing like induction. It’s a wakeup call and we need to do that. It’s very, very important because it’s like you end up at school you are new and nobody orientate you telling you where the principal’s office is and the class. So, you just find yourself in the system.” Principal

“I must say the implementation of English as a medium of instruction in Grade 4 was not well implemented. Number one, learners were just surprised that teachers are coming speaking in English without knowing that this is what they expect. I think this could have started in Grade 3 especially the last term, where the Grade 3 teachers could perhaps be allowed to start teaching learners in English as a medium of instruction to prepare them for Grade 4 and make sure that they are well informed that in Grade 4 they will not be taught in their mother tongue as a medium of instruction but in English.” Principal

The introduction of English as a MoI to the Grade 4 learners was a wakeup call to some participants. Thus, according to these participants, some learners were surprised to see teachers teaching subjects other than English in English without them knowing or being informed in advance that they will be taught using English and not in their mother tongue like in Grade 3.

4.4.5 Challenges of teaching an overcrowded Grade 4 classes using English as a MoI

Figure 28 below provides responses from the management and teachers on whether overcrowding classrooms makes it more challenging for the teachers to meet each learner’s needs at his/her required level; particularly, when preparing learners and facilitating the transition from mother tongue to English.

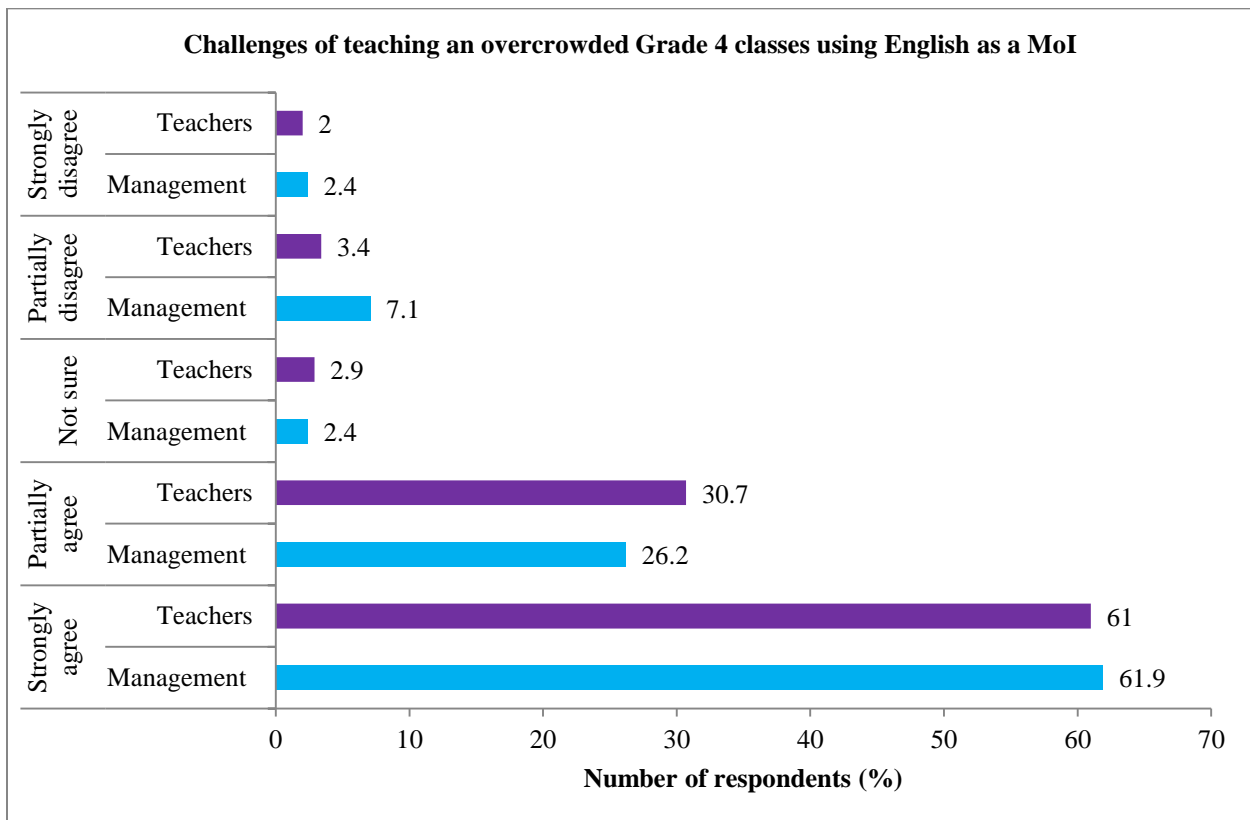


Figure 28: Challenges of teaching an overcrowded Grade 4 classes using English as a MoI

As presented in Figure 28, the majority of the school management (88.1%) and teachers (91.7%) indicated that overcrowded classrooms were a challenge for teachers when preparing learners

and facilitating the transition from mother tongue to English. As a result, teachers could hardly meet each learner's needs at his/her required level. These are what they said:

"An overcrowded classroom is very challenging because children are too many. You cannot attend to each and every child, and the time is not enough." Teacher

"Yeah, overcrowded classes are a contributing factor, no proper teaching takes place. Teacher cannot give individual learners attention. Yeah, it also disadvantages learners compared to private schools where teachers assess only few learners." Principal

"The overcrowdings definitely have an impact. So, it's a challenge on its own because now when you are teaching and then you are also expected to give learning support to those that are not able to understand the content. It is very difficult for me to do the learning support moving from this learner to the other. The policy already clearly stipulates that the ratio of one teacher learner is 35, but then now we are finding ourselves with the ratio of 1 teacher 50 learners or 40 something learners; it is really not practical." Teacher

"I teach about three Grade 4 classes and then these two are really overcrowded. There are many learners in the class. There is one where the number is Ok, and if you compare their performances, you see that this class, which is not overcrowded, performs way better than other Grade 4s which also creates a huge gap for me as a teacher, because now these ones are way ahead than the other ones." Teacher

"Yeah, an overcrowded classroom makes it more difficult because when you are teaching the languages, especially when we are receiving these learners. To help these learners you really need enough time with every one of them so that you get enough time to see and diagnose where they need help. So, because of the overcrowded situation, it makes it very hard for a teacher to give individual attention and so forth. So, it's really hard." Teacher

“It is a challenge because when you are teaching English, you want to observe and assess. You want to help each learner, but you have overcrowded class. So when you try to assess learners 1 by 1, you won’t able to do it on that day...” Principal

“Yeah, definitely, overcrowding is one of the problems unlike in private schools because they’ve got their own norms on how to admit learners. Because we cannot deny learners access to admission, as what our policies say we just take as many as we can because the policy says that although we are compromising quality education.” Principal

“Yes, that’s what kills most of our learners. I’m failing to understand it if we are saying pre-primary is 25 learners, come to Grade 1 is 89 learners in one class. Lucky enough we are on a cohort basis; it’s very difficult to control these learners. It’s very difficult to assist each and every learner. It’s very difficult to know each learner’s level.” Principal

At some schools, especially those in rural areas, classrooms were not overcrowded. The following citations are what some participants from these schools attested to.

“Not really because our learners are just 35 sometimes. If they are more 38, we don’t have a class which is 45. It is just a system itself. We don’t have the challenge of correctness, which is affecting...” Principal

“Yeah, at our school, it’s a different issue as we are not sitting with issue of overcrowding. But we are sitting with the issue of teachers having a lot of subjects and classes. For example, teachers teach different subjects, like a teacher teaching two subjects at Grade 4 and the very same teacher also teaches Grade 8. Most of the rural schools, classrooms are not overcrowded but teachers have a lot of work to do.” Teacher

At some schools, learners were less in classrooms, but the workload was a challenge. Teachers were overloaded with multiple grade teaching. This means that some teachers were teaching many subjects in different grade phases. Thus, they were unable to meet each learner’s needs at his/her required level.

4.4.6 *Culture of cooperative collaboration between teachers and parents to prepare learners for the transition*

Through the language policy for schools in Namibia, schools are free to organise co-curricular activities to promote any language and culture. Thus, the researcher wanted to know from the participants if schools did not have a culture of cooperative collaboration between teachers and parents to prepare learners well for the transition from mother tongue to English as a medium of instruction.

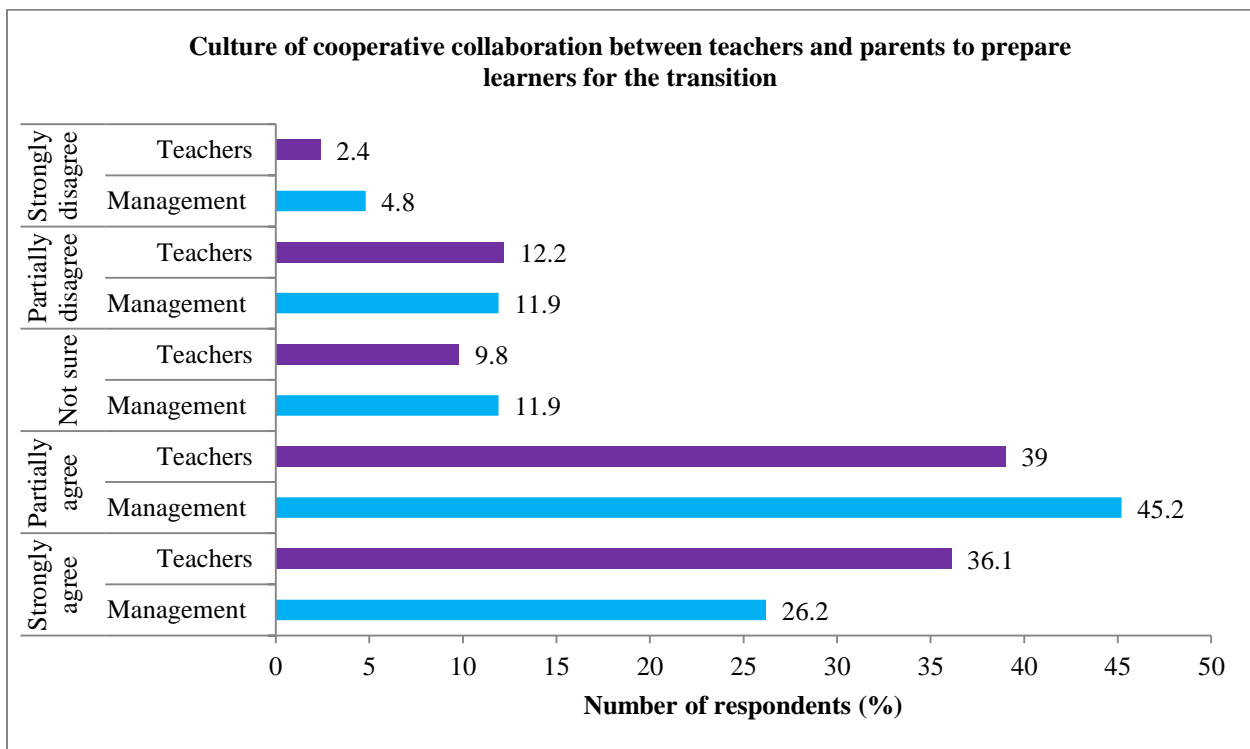


Figure 29: Culture of cooperative collaboration between teachers and parents to prepare learners for the transition

Figure 29 portrays that 71.4% of the management and 75.1% of the teachers stated that there was no culture of cooperative collaboration in schools between teachers and parents to prepare learners well for the transition from using mother tongue as a medium of instruction to English. However, 16.7% and 14.6% of the management and teachers respectively indicated that the

culture of cooperative collaboration was at the schools. At some schools, parents were hardly involved in their children's schoolwork. To this effect, some of the participants stated that:

“Like us here in the rural areas it is very difficult since most parents are also illiterate, they just send these learners to us as teachers without doing any their homework the next day. We are finding it difficult here compared to town schools.” Principal

“Parents are forced to be involved, once every two weeks and newsletters go out to the parents. Teachers are also reporting on regular times and all the teachers have got personal or WhatsApp groups where they communicate with parents. So, there is no chance for the teachers to cover the parents to get away. And then with parents' evenings, it is clearly explained to them how they can support their own children.” Principal

According to some participants, there were difficulties and challenges such as illiteracy and unwillingness that hindered parents from getting involved in schoolwork of their children. But, at some schools, parental involvement was appreciated.

“There is a cooperation culture between the teachers and parents. And when we have parent meetings, we always give messages to the parents and encourage them to be part of their children's learning. The only problem we are encountering is that most of the parents are not well acquainted with English. So, it's the good thing that the ministry has come up with family literacy classes where parents are being taught to how to help learners at least basics of English, unfortunately most parents do not turn up for these classes.” Principal

“Yes, parents are coming forth but at a snail pace. We are not blaming them because the majority felt that it is teachers' responsibilities to ensure that learners do what they are supposed to do, on whether they have done their homework. Again some parents want to assist but homework is normally given in English so, only if the homework could be given in mother tongue then parents can be able to assist.” Principal

“Parents should really work together hand in hand with teachers. It is also their responsibility to be involved in their children’s education. They should not just lay back and leave it all to the teachers.” Teacher

“Yes, there are those who can be able to help their children with homework that we give them at school and there are those learners that are staying with their grannies only. So, most of the learners can be helped but there are some individuals that have no one to help them. So, sometimes it’s a challenge.” Acting Principal

At some schools, there were good and healthy relationships between them and parents despite the fact that some learners were staying with their grandparents. However, to a certain extent and unfortunately, some of these grandparents were unable to help their grandchildren with homework because they were not well acquainted with the English language.

4.4.7 Parent/guardian’s views and responsibilities on education

This section seeks to find out whether most of the parents/guardians were illiterate and regarded the education of their children as the responsibility of the school. The responses to this notion are provided in Figure 30.

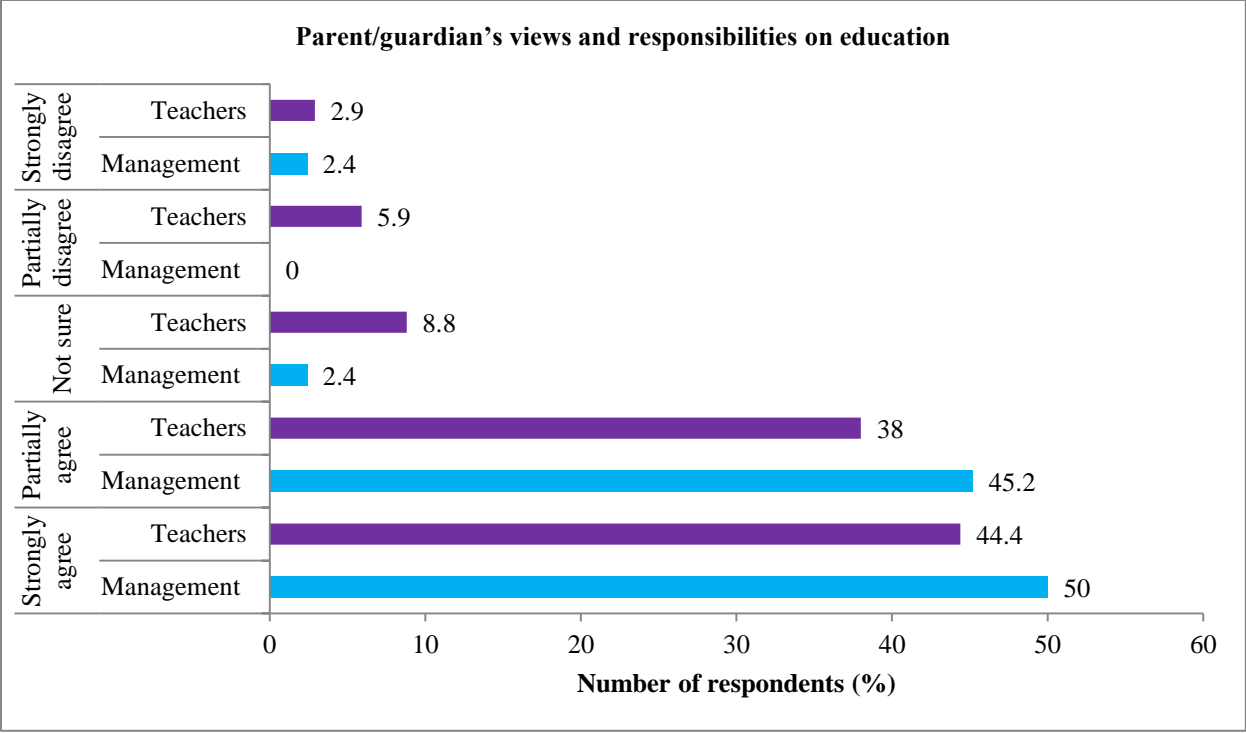


Figure 30: Parent/guardian's views and responsibilities on education

As seen in Figure 30, 95.2% of the management and 82.4% of the teachers indicated that many of the parents/guardians were illiterate and regarded the education of their children as the responsibility of the school.

4.4.8 Accessibility of Grade 4 learners to the reading resources

The language policy stipulates that a foreign language is a language which is not a native language in a country, and it is usually studied either for communication with foreigners who speak the language, or for reading printed materials in that language. Thus, the participants were asked whether Grade 4 learners have little or no access to reading resources such as books, magazines and newspapers written in English at school.

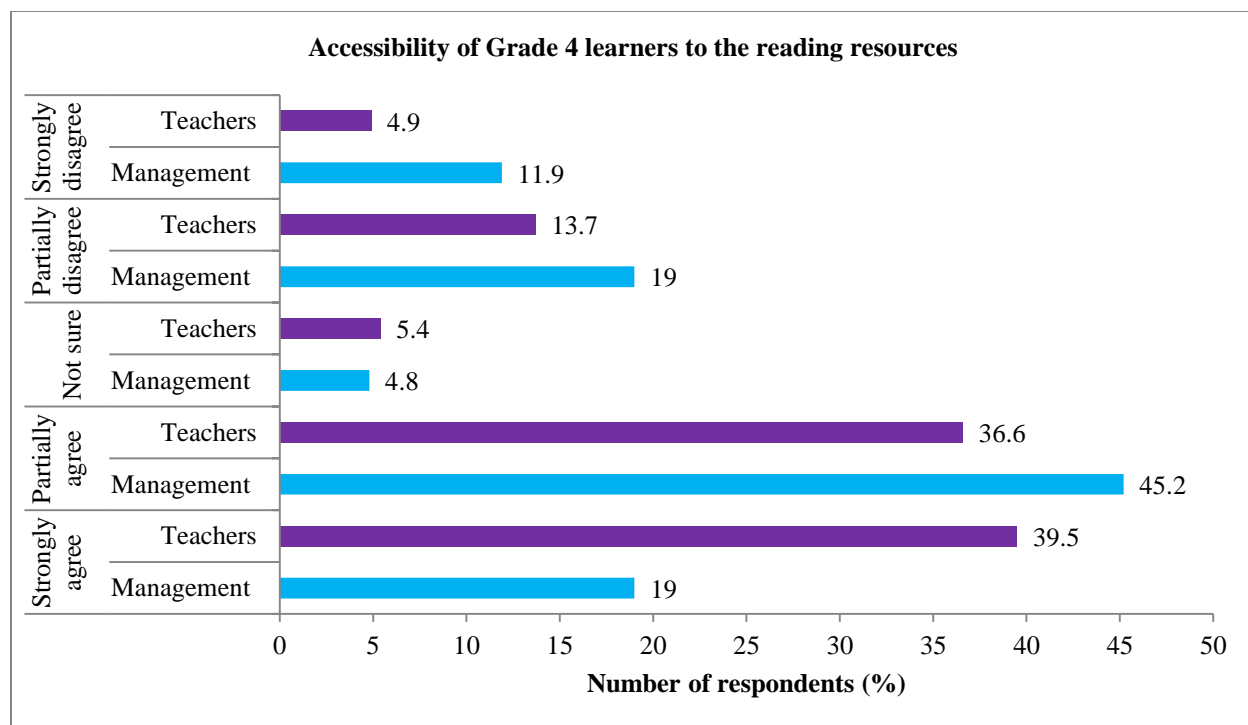


Figure 31: Accessibility of Grade 4 learners to the reading resources

The results shown in Figure 31 indicate that 64.2% of the management and 76.1% of the teachers agreed that Grade 4 learners have little or no access to the reading resources such as books, magazines and newspapers written in English at school. Only 30.9% (management) and 18.6% (teachers) disagreed. The scarcity of reading resources was mentioned by the participants as follow:

“These learners don’t have resources, for example, subjects’ texts books for Natural Science. There are no resources and then we are living in a community where we cannot even have access to newspapers and magazines. So yes, children do not have access to reading materials.”

Teacher

“As we speak the last time we received textbook was 2016. When the new revised curriculum was implemented, and these books were not even enough. We always have four classes of Grade 4 learners but we only find ourselves with less than 15 books for the two classes. When it comes to reading the passages, teachers are forced to make copies. Newspapers, since I said, we source here and there to give them something to read. But nowadays with the shift of the new

technologies newspapers also getting few people who supposed to read the newspapers they are now reading them from their phones and not in hard copies anymore, and magazines are very scarce. We've the school library, but with very few books." Principal

"There's nothing at all since we don't even have a library. You can even see the facilities around here, and even with the teachers themselves, like in my situation I'm teaching a subject without even a single textbook. So, what do you expect from learners." Teacher

"To be honest, we don't have enough books for reading; we don't even have newspapers. We make use of these fewer, maybe 10 books per class. It's very difficult now to give out if you're have 56 learners in a Grade 4 class." Teacher

"We have no access to reading sources such as books. If I can relate to the community the majority of our community only speak the vernacular language, so majority don't read newspapers to share with the learners at home. So, the Grade 4 learners are finding it difficult to have access to any reading materials at schools. And to go extra miles to download any article; even print out for the learners it is a challenge" Principal

The interview results revealed that there were no sufficient reading resources such as textbooks at some schools. The worrisome situation was that learners at some rural / community schools had never read newspapers or magazines and there was not even a small library at these schools. At some privileged schools, learners used to get newspapers from teachers to read but due to technologies, teachers were no more buying newspapers, instead they only read them online. On the contrary, some participants regarded themselves as fortunate because their learners had access to reading resources and materials. They attested that:

"Yes, we have a mini library, but since it was damaged by rain, the books are kept in the computer lab and teachers are taking learners there during the reading period and giving out books for the learners to read. We also allow learners to go on specific days to visit the community library in town." Principal

“We have our reading periods; we have few books and limited resources. Teachers are going extra miles. That’s why at the school we are looking at good facilities for making copies and so on. There is no library at this school.” Principal

“Yes, we have a small library. It’s only that this is a government school and you are 100% aware that government schools don’t have the necessary resources as we want it to be because of limited resources. But the books are not enough for everyone to use.” Principal

“The school does not have a library, but we have a store room where we keep our books, especially when it comes to the reading period, we utilise those books and teachers are also bringing their part by bringing newspapers and old magazines from home that the learners can use in classes and also in the reading period.” Principal

Even though, some schools had textbooks and other reading materials but lack of libraries was a matter of concern. Some of these schools kept their textbooks and reading materials in storerooms and/or computer laboratories and only giving them to the learners during reading periods. However, some schools were fortunate to have community libraries where their learners used to go and do some readings.

4.4.9 Socialisation of majority of the learners with English home language speakers

According to the language policy, the use of English as a language of wider communication only further enhances greater participation in social welfare activities. Thus, this section sought to find out if the majority of the learners in some areas around the visited schools do not come into contact with English home language speakers to socialise with them. Participants’ responses are presented in Figure 32.

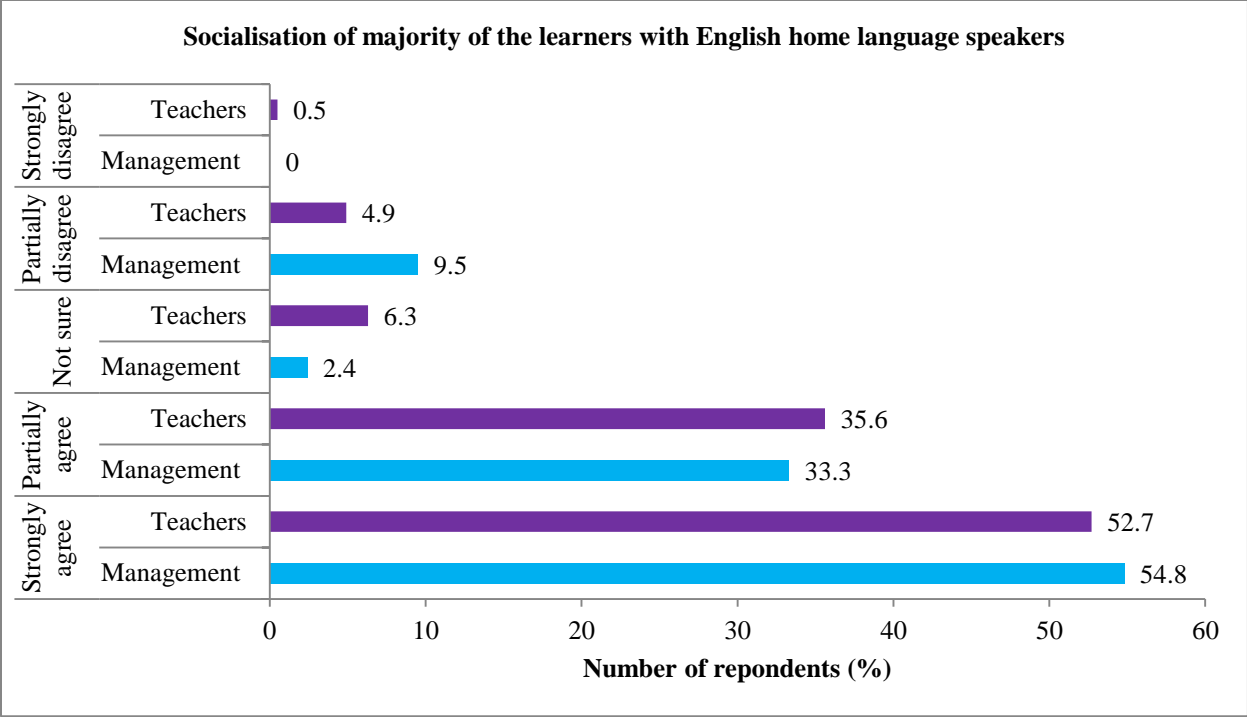


Figure 32: Socialisation of majority of the learners with English home language speakers

More than eighty-eight percent of the management (88.1%) and teachers (88.3%) stated that the majority of the learners in some areas around the schools visited do not come into contact with English home language speakers to socialise with them. Whereas, 2.4% (management) and 6.3% (teachers) were not sure. Most of the participants from the interviews revealed that majority of the learners hardly come into contact or socialise with people whose English is their home language. Here is what they said:

“What I observed in our community is that there are different cultures. If a learner comes from a KKG or Damara area, they speak more of that language instead of English. And when a learner comes from Oshindonga or Oshiwambo speaking area, they speak more of that language instead of English.” Teacher

“Socialization is one of the challenges in education system, especially in rural area where I’m staying. Most of the learners in rural area don’t socialize with children from upper class, they only socialise with their classmates who don’t speak English but only speak their vernacular

languages. Unlike in countries like Zimbabwe, if you go in rural village most of the children and a person who is 99 years old speaks English. So, we must improve.” Acting Principal

“No, not at all, as most of these learners in this community don't get in touch with certain communities where English is being spoken as a mother tongue. When they go out of the school ground, these learners are mostly communicating in their mother tongue. So English is being used just in the class.” Teacher

“Well, this is a rural school, unfortunately. You know most of these families that are English speaking most of them are closer to town or they are just in towns. They would just be hanging around and interacting with whomever they meet whether family, friends and so on and only speak Oshiwambo.” Principal

“They are not used because our community here speaks the same vernacular, only the dialect of Oshiwambo. We don't have people who speak English as a first language.” Teacher

“I don't think so, even during break time. We tried once to say that every Wednesday during break time let's just speak English if we find you speaking Oshiwambo then we punish you. Yeah, it didn't work. They're more comfortable in Oshiwambo. Even during lessons, I mean during the English period you find them borrowing pens and they are saying it in Oshiwambo.” Principal

“Community wise, the majority are Oshiwambo speakers and it's hard for these learners to interact with English speakers. Majority of them do not even have that access to go to town and do not have access to people of that group.” Principal

“Majority of speakers among our communities speak the same language, Oshiwambo. So when our learners are out of school, they speak their mother tongue. So, I don't think they have been exposed to English speakers down the community there.” Teacher

According to most participants, their learners were only socialising with other learners who speak the same language. With this socialization, learners had a slight chance of improving their

English communication skills because they only or mostly speak English when they are at school.

5. Summary of major problems and challenges experienced by Grade 4 teachers when teaching learners using English

- *Overcrowded classes:* at some schools, classes were full, and teachers were unable to give individual learners attention as compared to private schools where teachers assess only few learners. Overcrowding classes are compromising quality education.
- *Lack of reading materials/resources:* at some schools, Grade 4 learners had limited or no access to English reading resources such as subjects' texts books, magazines, and newspapers.
- *Learners' unpreparedness:* some participants stated that Grade 3 teachers did not prepare learners well for the transitional grade.
- *Lack of training:* some participants stated that since the transition took place, they did not receive any support or training on how to teach Grade 4 learners who just came straight from using mother tongue as a medium of instruction.
- *Unsatisfactory performance:* at some schools, learners' performances were not satisfactory because learners were not familiar with English terms used during teaching and learning process.
- *Poor communication skills:* Most of the participants indicated that communication barrier/breakdown from the learners was the greatest challenge as there were no constructive and effective communication between learners and teachers during the teaching and learning process. Hence, learners had poor English communication skills when reading, writing, speaking, and listening.
- *No culture of cooperative collaboration:* Majority of the participants stated that there was no culture of collaboration at schools between teachers and parents to effectively get involved in their children's education as some parents were illiterate.
- *Lack of understanding:* some participants mentioned that due to language problems, learners do not understand and are unable to comprehend what teachers taught. Therefore, some

participants were forced to teach in their vernacular language and/or code-switching to make them understand while others were just teaching for the sake of covering the syllabus.

- *Unwillingness and reluctance:* at some schools, participants stated that learners, especially those from low / poor economic backgrounds lack free participation and are reluctant to speak or express themselves with confidence in English as compared to their counterparts who were exposed to gadgets such as TV and cellphones where they watched cartoons.
- *Lack of parental involvement:* most of the participants indicated that most of the parents/guardians were illiterate and regarded the education of their children as the responsibility of the school. Thus, they hardly attend parents' meetings and assist their children with homework to prepare them for the transition.

6. Recommendations

- *English as a MoI at Junior Primary:* English as a medium of instruction should start from Pre-primary like what private schools do; simply because it is the main language used in the whole world and to avoid higher failures in Grade 10 and 12. So, the use of English as a medium of instruction and assessment should start at an early stage of early grades, not only from grade 4, because it's really challenging, year in, year out with the same problem, learners cannot read.
- *Training and support:* Grade 4 teachers should get more training and support on how to teach during the transitional stage.
- *Home languages:* home languages must be taught as subjects on their own and not as medium of instructions in schools.
- *Collaboration:* The Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture must collaborate with institutions of higher learning such as Unam, IUM etc., or whoever is responsible for the curriculum / framework for these institutions to make sure that student teachers are equipped with relevant skills and knowledge needed in enabling them to teach effectively, especially the Grade 4 class (transitional grade).
- *Teachers' consultations:* teachers as policy implementers who are on the ground should be considered and consulted when it comes to policy and curriculum development and/or reviewing.

- *Areas of concern:* teachers should teach learners English focusing more on the spelling, reading and writing skills. Because if learners didn't master those skills, then they will hardly master other subjects.
- *Code-switching:* teachers should be allowed to integrate mother tongue and English (code-switch) in Grade 2 and Grade 3 to ensure that learning with understanding takes place. And at the time learners reach Grade 4, they have already mastered few English vocabularies.
- *English reading materials:* learners should be given enough extra reading materials which are at their level for them to improve their language proficiency including reading, writing and speaking skills.

7. Conclusion

This study has investigated the transition from mother tongue to English as a medium of instruction. The study aimed to understand the experiences, perceptions and practices of the school management and teachers on the transition from mother tongue to English in relation to awareness and access, factors influencing the transition of the MoI, challenges faced by school management and teachers when teaching Grade 4 learners using English as a MoI among others. In addition, the summary of the findings focusing on the major problems and challenges experienced by participants when teaching learners using English are provided. Moreover, some recommendations on how to overcome the highlighted problems and challenges are also made.

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