

Teacher-Learner Relationships and the Effect on Student Learning at Secondary Schools in the Khomas Region, Namibia

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Abstract

Given the limitations of almost no research information in Namibia and Khomas region about teacher-learner relationships and its effect on student learning in secondary schools. This study aimed at exploring and investigating factors affecting teacher-learner relationships and the effect on student learning at selected secondary schools in the Khomas Education region of Namibia. This study applied qualitative research approach/method and employed explanatory case study design within attachment theoretical framework. In-depth interviews, focus group discussions and classroom observations were used to collect the data. The study population consisted of 30 respondents (10 subject teachers and 20 grade 12 learners) from two selected secondary schools, and were chosen by using purposive sampling techniques based on specified criteria and thematic content analysis was used to analyses qualitative data. The study findings revealed that the majority of teachers and learners have common understanding and shared same sentiments that a positive teacher-learner relationship can only develop in a conducive learning environment, and motivation, communication skills are among central key factors that enhance student's learning in the secondary school. It also emerged that few learners argued having developed a negative relationship due to teachers' personal attitudes in the classroom learning. Findings of the study indicated that teachers' behaviours and level of education were vital factors affecting quality of teacher-learner relationships while the major factors were lack of physical resources and ill-disciplined learners. It also emerged that teachers have positive or negative influence on student's learning, depending on how they interact with learners in the school environment. The study further recommended that teachers should cultivate and build quite enabling and conducive learning atmosphere for effective teaching and learning. Thus this improves the student academic learning in the school learning environment.

Keywords: Teacher-Learner relationships, student learning, motivation, communication skills.

1. INTRODUCTION

The teacher-learner relationships are one of the important factors within the school classroom learning settings. Knoell (2012, p. 5) defined teacher-learner relationships “as emotion-based experiences” that emerged out of the teachers' on-going classroom interactions with their learners in the classroom learning environment. According to Anderman and Kaplan (2008) when learners believe that

their educators like and respect them in the school environment, they are more likely to develop a bond of hard work and make a difference in their academic work.

Furthermore, Anderman and Kaplan pointed out that parents and society at large, are more concerned about the deteriorating relationships between the teachers and learners and how this affects the learners' academic performance as well as progress of the learners in academic work (Anderman and Kaplan, 2008). The *Namibian Code of Conduct for teachers* outlined the expected teacher-learner relationships and its effect on student learning as well as academic success of learners in the school activities (Ministry of Basic Education, Sport and Culture, 2001).

Khaleduzzaman (2017) argues that building strong relationships between the teachers and learners is essential to the cognitive, social and emotional development of all the learners in the school environment. The positive teacher-learner relationships are a valuable resource for the learner's success. Furthermore, Sanders (2015) echoed the views of Khaleduzzaman (2017) by saying that having a positive relationship with a teacher allows learners to be able to work on their own because they know that they can count on their teacher if problems arise and that the teacher will recognize and respond to the problems. Additionally, Sanders (2015) says that as learners enter the formal school settings, the relationships with their teachers provide the foundation for successful learning adjustment to the social and academic learning environment. On the same note, Pianta (2014) postulated that talking with the teachers and conducting observations in the classroom learning about teacher-learner relationships will provide important and unique information for designing interventions. Khaleduzzaman (2017) concluded that building strong and supportive relationships with the teachers allows the learners to feel safer and more secure in the school settings, learners feel more competent, make more positive connections with other peers in the school environment. They also make greater academic learning gains such as social interactions, and learning opportunities to assist other fellow learners in classroom activities (Khaleduzzaman (2017). On the other hand, Liberante (2012) states that the teacher-learner relationships and interactions are influenced by a number of factors including teacher's attitudes and beliefs which in turn influence learners' academic performance and behaviour. Furthermore, the supportive relationships and interactions between the teachers and learners promote a "sense of school belonging" and it motivates the learners to "participate effectively and efficiently in the classroom lesson discussions" (Liberante, 2012, p. 2).

Muyoyeta *et al.* (2018) stated that insufficient teaching and learning materials in secondary school classrooms in the Khomas region has an impact on the teacher-learner relationships and interactions in the classroom. This results in teachers' failing to maintain discipline and manage their classrooms effectively due to learners' behavioural issues, such as noisemaking, back-chatting, sleeping, and disrupting classroom lesson discussions (Muyoyeta *et al.*, 2018). On the other hand, Ilias and Nor (2012) agreed with Muyoyeta *et al.* (2018), views by saying

that school management pays scant attention to aspects of social relationships and interactions in the learning environment, especially the interactions between the teachers and learners. This can be proven by many behavioural problems in the classrooms such as disputes, fights, bullying, gangsterism and many more. Poor teacher-learner relationships and interactions can create a negative learning environment that may cause poor learner performance in assessment activities.

Hallinan (2008) arguments by saying that “it is surprising that so many education policymakers have been seduced into the thinking that the simple quantitative measures like the test scores in the classroom assessment activities can be used to hold the school teachers accountable for the poor academic performance of learners and the achievement complex of educational outcomes in the schools”. Meyer and Turner (2002, p. 107) concurred with views of the scholars above by discussing their research findings further and illustrating the importance of learners’ and the teachers’ emotions during the lesson interactions in the classroom learning environment. They indicated that “through investigating teacher-learner relationships and interactions, our conceptualization of what constitutes the motivation to learn increasingly has involved the emotions as essential to learning and the teaching process in the classroom setting”.

According to Magwa (2018), the teacher-learner relationships is derived as a very important aspect in educational research in the pre-school and primary education in Zimbabwe but remains largely neglected in the secondary schools level. Most of the secondary school teachers are still uncertain about the type of teacher-learner relationships that would ensure the desired learning environment in this new era of the democratic education system in Africa.

Furthermore, learners’ voices were not well represented in the previous studies on teacher-learner relationships (Magwa, 2018). There has been no study so far that has addressed the factors affecting teacher-learner relationships and interactions in the secondary school classrooms in Namibia in the Khomas region known to the researcher. Given this background, therefore, this research study aimed at finding out the nature of the teacher learner relationships and the effects it has on the students’ learning in two selected secondary schools in the Khomas Education region in Namibia.

Research Question

To what extent do teacher-learner relationships influence student learning in secondary school classrooms as perceived by learners and teachers in the Khomas Region?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Framework

This study is informed by the attachment theory which was espoused by John

Bowlby and Mary Ainsworth's work, and Bowlby (1969) established the foundation for Ainsworth's Attachment Theory (Fraley and Spieker, 2003).

According to Bowlby (1969) research studies in the teacher-learner's relationships and temperament led him to the conclusion that when school learners establishes positive relationships with a teacher in the school learning environment, it provides the necessary sense of security and foundation for future interactions to a learner and with other learners in the classroom learning environment.

Bowlby added that those learners without such attachment, they will be less willing to take the risks and to learn new experiences that is vital to learning (Bowlby, 1969).

Attachment Theory and teacher-learner relationships

Attachment theory explains how learners establish and develop some learning bond as well as connections, and how they formulated positive learning relationships with teachers to relate to each other in the classroom settings and organise their classroom learning interactions experiences with the teachers in order to enhance their academic learning in the school (Bowlby, 1969). Researcher believes that the central key point to this theory is the assumption or belief that learners' who establish positive learning relationships with their teachers view their teachers as a secure base and feel safe when making mistakes in the classroom learning environment and they also feel more comfortable accepting the learning academic challenging classwork/tasks in the classroom setting necessary for improving their academic learning.

Teacher-Learner Relationships in the school learning environment

According to Da Luz (2015) developing good and supportive learning relationships are needed to create a safe learning environment and gives learners confidence to work without pressure and become motivated to learn effectively in the school. Further, Da Luz said that specifically when school learners are exposed to positive emotional relationships stimuli, they are better able to recall newly learned information. Nielson and Lorber (2009) stressed that learners feel more motivated and stimulated to learn and actively collaborate with the teachers when the classroom is running in a safe and supportive learning environment. The relationships between the teachers and learners affect the quality of students' motivation to learn and classroom learning experiences (Nielson & Lorber, 2009).

Davis (2003) noted that school operating as socializing agents, teachers can influence learners social learning and intellectual experiences via their learning abilities to instil values in the school learners such as effective learning; by providing classroom learning contexts that develops learners learning abilities; and by addressing learners need to belong; and by serving a regulatory function for the development of learning talents. Moreover, supportive learning relationships

with teachers may play an important developmental role during the transition to and through secondary school level (Davis, 2003). Pianta (2006) concurred with researcher Davis (2003) by claiming that student learning abilities to connect with their teachers is one of the attributes or factors that can make a great difference in the student learning environment..

Additionally, Myers and Claus concludes that the classroom learning environment consists of three overarching dimensions: the learning abilities for learners to develop relationships with their teachers and peers, the extent to which learners participate in the learning activities, and the general structure and order of the classroom learning environment provided by the teachers for conducive teaching and learning atmosphere in the classroom (Myers & Claus, 2012).

Effects of Teacher-Learner Relationships on Student Learning

According to Aina, Olanipekun, and Garuba (2015), maintaining positive classroom learning environment for student learning is the responsibility of an effective teacher. Further, Aina et al. (2015) stated that it was easy to distinguish between a teacher who is effective and the one who is not effective by the way they manage their school classroom environment when the lesson is going on, and managing the classroom well for effective student learning is the task of an effective teacher. Orji (2014) concurred with some scholars like Aina et al. (2015) above by postulating that the ability of the teachers to organize classrooms and manage the behaviour of their learners is central to achieve good educational learning outcomes and foster positive classroom learning relationships. Oliver and Reschly (2007) also affirmed that effective teaching requires among other things basic classroom management strategies and skills which include understanding of the nature of classroom learning environment, and stated that the teachers with problems in the classroom, have poor classroom management and ineffective in their teaching and learning classrooms, and this has a negative effect on the student academic learning outcomes (Oliver & Reschly, 2007).

Knoell (2012) agreed with Orji (2014) views by expressing that teacher-learner relationships and interactions is very important in the learning environment, because it makes student learning successful. The relationships and interactions between the teacher and learner is essentially the fundamental basis for effective teaching and learning. Knoell also pointed out that good teacher-learner relationships may be even more valuable for learners with good behaviour and learning challenges in the classroom lesson discussions (Knoell, 2012). On the same note, Aina, Olanipekun, and Garuba (2015) found that most learners learn best in the classroom where they are able to freely express their feelings. Moreover, Knoell (2012, p.12) supported and agreed with Aina et al., (2015) sentiments by saying that learning occurs best in the learning environment that contains a positive interpersonal relationships and interactions and in which a learner feels more appreciated, acknowledged, respected, and admired. Furthermore, Knoell argues that learners who enjoyed

close and supportive learning relationships with teachers are more involved and works harder in the classroom learning, persistence in the face of difficulties and cope better with the learning challenges in the classroom activities (Knoell, 2012).

Positive Teacher-learner Relationships from Teachers' views

Hussain, Nawaz, Nasir, Kiani & Hussain (2013) claimed that today's knowledge dissemination by the teachers is becoming an issue without the mutual understanding and the relationships between the teachers with learners. The literature done by Baker (2006) revealed that positive relationships between the teacher and learners is necessary, and is becoming fundamental in the holistic development learning of the learners. Further, Baker stated that many studies have pointed out the importance of understanding the development of high-quality teacher-learner relationships on the student academic learning outcomes in the classroom. Positive teaching relationships in the classroom learning environment is essential such as closeness like mutual respect, caring, and warmth-supportive interactions between the teachers and learners (Baker, 2006). According to Hussain et al. (2013) for learners who are at the secondary school level, positive teacher-learner relationships are connected to the learner's successful adjustment to the school academic learning and the school liking. In addition, Hussain et al explained that such positive relationships are related to decreases in the learner's aggression in classroom settings.

On the other hand, Pianta and Hamre (2009) argued that the negative teacher-learner relationships in the secondary school level are associated with the learner's low academic performance in the classroom learning, the low school connectedness, and poor self-esteem.

Teacher-Learner Relationships Development and Contributions to Student Learning

According to Pieratt (2011) it is very important to understand how teacher-learner relationships are developed and affecting student learning in the school environment, because according to Pieratt learners who are placed in a positive learning environment are more likely to develop a good relationship with their teachers. McCombs (2007) agreed with Pieratt (2011), opinions by adding that developing a good relationship in the classroom learning environment is very important, because learners are more likely to work hard and improve their academic performance in the subjects of the serious teachers who are teaching well and give learning opportunities to learners. Furthermore, McCombs stated that in a caring classroom environment, learners are pro-active in the lesson discussions and builds positive relationship with teachers, and other peers. This enables teachers and learners to show mutual respect for each other, create social responsibility, develop an appreciation for diversity, develop emotional teaching and learning, and manage and resolve classroom conflicts with learners in the

classroom (McCombs, 2007). Furthermore, Aness (2003, p. 63) described these teacher-learner relationships communities as those that are characterized by “strong, caring ties that are analogous to family bonds”. By developing communities that are committed to its members, teachers can develop bonds with learners that are similar to those shared within a family. A sense of unconditional caring within a classroom provides learners with hopes and sense of comfort and care that they often need to be successful in the classroom activities (Aness, 2003).

Teacher-learner Classroom Interactions and influence on learners’ academic performance

According to Louise (2016) it is not surprising that several studies have found a significant value in the interactions between the teacher and learner in the classrooms. Furthermore, Louise explained that the role, and interactions with the teacher is essential part of the learning experiences. The research on teacher-learner interactions has revealed that learners perceive interactions between themselves and their teachers as important influence to their academic learning performance and participation in the classroom settings, and to the quality of the teaching and their own learning. Additionally, Louise reported that the quality and quantity of the teacher interactions positively correlated to perceived learning, and that learners who felt that they knew their teachers, participated more actively in the group discussions in the classroom (Louise, 2016). On the same note, Putri (2014) agreed with research studies done by Louise (2016) by saying that classroom interactions make the learners more participating in the teaching and learning process. It means that classroom interactions encourage learners to be involved in the teaching and learning activities, and equally important, learners are not the only participants in the classroom interactions since the teacher is also a participant. In addition, classroom interactions help teacher-learners to share the information that they get from the materials at each other (Putri, 2014

According to Egeberg, McConney and Price (2016) teachers have a powerful influence in the classroom interactions between themselves and learners. While there are many factors that affect the teacher-learner classroom interactions, the research studies found these factors to be on the learners’ behaviour and learning attitudes as a key component (Egeberg et al., 2016). Furthermore, Hattie (2003, p. 2) suggested that the answer to improve teacher-learner classroom interactions and learning performance of learners “lies in the person (teacher) who gently closes the school classroom doors and performs the teaching act, the person who puts into place the end effects of so many educational policies, who interprets these policies, and who is alone with learners during their 15,000 hours of schooling”,

Improving teacher-learner relationships in the school environment

The teacher-learner relationships are highly transactional with the behaviour of the teachers impacting and influencing the behaviour of the learners in the school learning environment, and the same process is occurring in the reverse (Sutherland

and Oswald, 2005). In the same vein, Sutherland and Oswald said that bidirectional influences shape the behavioural and relationships trajectory of the teacher and learner in the classroom teaching and learning process. Further, learners who act out may be less rewarding to teach, such that they receive fewer chances to connect with the teachers at school and it reduces the individualised classroom learning opportunities (Sutherland and Oswald, 2005). According to Barker (2015) the teachers tend to avoid the aggressive and disruptive learners, and they focus their teaching efforts and positive attention on more prosocial learners in the classroom settings. They are more likely to reprimand the disruptive learners rather than redirecting their behaviour, and in turn these learners are less likely to comply with the requests. This attention reinforces the appropriate school behaviour and further it motivates the learners to be involved in the teaching and learning process, and it pleases their teachers. While most of the teachers are able to develop positive relationships with cooperative and compliant with the learners, the teachers vary in their teaching ability and willingness to work towards developing a positive relationship with more difficult learners (Barker, 2015). However, Sutherland and Oswald (2005) argued that as discussed previously, a large proportion of the prospective learners arrive to secondary school level with some more behavioural difficulties, thus placing them at risk of establishing negative relationships with the teachers in the classroom learning. Therefore, there is an obvious need to support the teachers and learners in developing a good, low –conflict relationships with all the learners in the school learning environment, including those who may pose greater difficulties in building relationships with teachers (Sutherland & Oswald, 2005).

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative research approach. In this study, explanatory research design was used whereby the experiences of Grade 12 learners and teachers were explored through in-depth interviews.

Population

The population for this study comprised 2 377 serving teachers and 3 676 Grade 12 learners in 47 Secondary Schools in the Khomas Region.

Sample

The purposive sample for this study consisted of 10 serving teachers and 20 Grade 12 learners from two selected secondary schools in the Khomas educational region. In this study, the researcher made use of purposive sampling to select two secondary schools from the defined population. Purposive sampling was utilised to select participating schools by asking Khomas Regional Office to identify two secondary schools based on the following criteria:

One secondary school with hostel and day facilities, and another one without hostel facilities.

A good behaving secondary school between teachers and learner (for example good relations and interactions in the school learning environment and academically performing school), and an ill-disciplined secondary school where by teachers and learners do not conduct themselves accordingly, and academically under-performing.

Purposive criterion sampling procedures were used by asking the principals from two selected schools to identify and select 5 Grade 12 teachers who knew positive teacher-learner relationships and 5 Grade 12 teachers who thought negative teacher-learner relationships in each selected secondary school by consulting and contacting Khomas regional professional performance evaluation.

Learners were selected by asking their subject teachers to identify 10 learners who related well and built sound classroom interactions with teachers and other learners. Another Ten learners who had behavioural problems, and did not actively participate in class activities formed the sample of this study.

Research Instrument

The interviews and observations were employed to collect data from the sample for this study. The Grade 12 teachers were interviewed and focus group discussions which involved ten learners in the group were held while classroom observations three times per subject teacher were conducted during the data collection period. Interviews with teachers had 10 open-ended questions. Individual interviews were conducted with ten selected Grade 12 teachers from the two schools, and focus group discussions with ten selected Grade 12 learners from the two selected schools.

A checklist for classroom observations was used to keep record and write down notes about the physical classroom environment, teacher-learners' classroom participation and interactions in the classroom.

Data collection procedures

The interviews and observations were used to collect data from the sample in this study. The researcher made appointments with all research respondents and presented them with the letter from the Executive Director of the Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture, as well as from the Director of Education for Khomas Region, officially permitted the researcher to collect data. In addition, the researcher orally briefed all participants about the nature and purpose of the study. The researcher further made appointments to set a time for the interviews. Individual interviews were carried out with 10 Grade 12 teachers from the two selected schools and the focus group discussions with 10 Grade 12 learners in each school. Classroom observations were done three times for each subject teacher. The researcher interviewed each participant at agreed upon time and preferred

venue. Each interview lasted between 35-45 minutes. Furthermore, all interviews were tape recorded in order to capture the information from the participants. These were later transcribed verbatim.

Data Analysis

The researcher used thematic content analysis, and inductive approach to qualitative data analysis. Qualitative data obtained from open-ended individual interview questions with teachers and focus group discussions with learners, and classroom observations notes were analysed by using thematic content analysis. Prior to commencing with the actual data analysis, all interviews were first transcribed and then the researcher repeatedly read through the raw data in order to get an overall understanding of the responses from the participants' point of view.

The researcher identified broad themes by writing down short phrases, ideas or concepts that stood out while reading through the raw data and these served as labels for sections of the data. Thus, the themes that emerged from this process were gradually grouped to provide rich and deep characterization information of teacher-learner relationships and the effect on student learning at secondary school level in the two selected secondary schools. After finishing with coding, the researcher assembled the data belonging to each category and performed preliminary analysis. Where it was necessary, the researcher recoded the existing data (Creswell, 2014).

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Two themes emerged from the analysis of the raw data. These themes are explored in detail for the purpose of finding answers to the research question.

Theme 1: Teachers' and learners' perceptions of the development of teacher-learner relationships

From the study findings, it is clear that developing positive teacher-learner relationships is vital and improves student academic performance in the school environment. Three teachers had expressed their views on the theme:

Teacher A: Teachers should encourage the learners even when they are giving wrong answers in the teaching and learning discussions. They should involve all the learners in the lesson activities. Know their names and tell them that they can do it and pass with good marks. Allow the learners to discover and figure out some problems and give them the opportunities to try and solve the problems in the classroom.

Teacher B: Teachers should appeal to the learners' interest, and give them the chance to attend to outside classroom activities. Speak to the learners with respect, and involve your learners in the teaching and learning. Show some trust to your learners and monitor unintentional behaviours in the classroom.

Teacher H: Teachers must motivate the learners to set their subject targets as well as by positively influencing them to achieve their goals. They should guide and advise them to study very hard and achieve their expectations. To encourage them to have positive thoughts in their studies and act responsibly in the classroom. On the same note, two Grade 12 learners presented their opinions as follows:

Learner 2: By showing respect to teachers and dignity being diligent and smart learners, and endure what the teacher is telling you to do, and to be always a good behaving learner in the class.

Learner 20: I for one firstly believe that they should be respect between the individual learners and teachers, learners should follow the rules of the classroom, and engage in the class discussions, conduct themselves in a respectable way. The teachers must have strong world ethic and try to adopt different teaching methods according to the type of learners they are dealing with in the classroom.

Based on the teachers' views, it can be interpreted that relationships development between the teachers and learners is influenced by their interactions in the learning environment. The teachers should have open communication with learners and respect learners' dignity in the school. According to Pieratt (2011) learners who are placed in a positive learning environment are more likely to develop good relationships with their teachers. McCombs (2007) added that developing good relationships in the classroom learning environment is very important because learners are more likely to work hard for the teacher that they know and like.

Participants' understanding of positive teacher-learner relationship

The positive teacher-learner relationship is the teaching and learning that invites both teachers and learners to be active participants in the classroom. Further, a strong bond, interactions and good communication for conducive learning atmosphere. During the interviews with teachers, three subject teachers expressed their views and understanding on the theme as follows:

Teacher F: I understand positive teacher-learner relationships as the relationship which is based on teaching and learning atmosphere. Where by the learners want to feel listened to, valued, nurtured and looked after, and it is your role as the teacher to provide them with that love of caring. The teacher is in a position of authority and power, and the influence of a teacher can play a significant and consequential role in the lives of the school learners they teach.

Teacher G: Is when the teacher and learner are working together to achieve a certain goal, in order for learners to pass a certain subject they should always be positive, in terms of time on the task, respect their teachers and one another and listen and follow what they are being told by teachers. The teachers should always provide conducive learning environment to the learners in many ways.

Teacher I: Being a positive teacher towards learners, I should not be a negative teacher. Being polite, good, understanding them, treat them with respect and support them when they do not understand anything. A positive teacher-learner relationship is a good relationship between a teacher and the learners. When they have mutual respect for each other in the teaching and learning classroom, understanding and good communication in the classes.

During the focus group discussion with Grade 12 learners from two selected secondary schools on the same theme two learners said:

Learner 8: A relationship in which both the learners and teacher are willing to learn from each other. There should be no negative tension that occurs between a learner and the teacher. It is the general positive understanding between the learner and teacher, communication wise and building a friendly environment for both teachers and learners.

Learner 7: What I understand by positive teacher-learner relationship is the good connection between a learner and the teacher. The connection must be good to the point where by a learner can ask anything related to the previous topics discussed in the classroom.

Based on the data, the positive teacher-learner relationship is the teaching and learning that invites both teachers and learners to be active participants in the classroom. From the above study results, it is also clear that both teachers and learners have a good understanding of positive teacher-learner relationships in the school.

Based on this study findings, researcher found that both teachers and learners had a common understanding of what was meant by a positive teacher-learner relationship by aligning it to the same central key-words i.e. strong ties, mutual respect, good communication, conducive learning environment, and respect and among many others.

These views seem to support Bajaj's (2009) understanding of a positive teacher-learner relationship that referred to it as when teachers and learners talk to each other with respect and use appropriate language, and work together in the classroom. On the same note, Varga (2017) referred to positive teacher-learner relationships as a bond and connections that include the teachers who think about their classroom practice and search for ways to enhance it. These teachers give learners the authority and choice in the classroom environment. These educators make their learners feel a sense of belonging in the learning settings (Varga, 2017).

Ways used to develop positive relationships with learners in the classroom

The teachers had interesting views on this theme.

Teacher D: Every teacher has his/her own boundaries that you set in order to protect yourself, but at certain points you will have to loosen your walls and allow the learners inside of your walls to a certain extent. By giving personal experiences as an example, it gives the learners a platform to get to know you and that you are a normal human being and they can relate to you very well. Teaching with enthusiasm and passion and displaying a positive attitude. Also treating my learners with respect and finally, I believe in showing interest in my learners lives outside the classroom.

Teacher C: By praising each attempts, and encourage participations in the classrooms. By acknowledging each wrong attempts and give them some feedback or written corrections.

Teacher E: By trying to engage and involve them in the lessons at all the times, by willing to listen to everything they say even some times it is not academic issues. By showing them that you care and constantly give support, bring the learners more closely and it positively impact our relationships in the classroom.

Two Grade 12 learners expressed different arguments on this theme during the focus group discussions:

Learner 9: When teachers are in the class teaching, the learners must listen very well. The learner must obey the classroom rules, and whenever the teachers asks questions, the learners should answer and she/he must ask questions where they do not understand, learners should always show good examples to others. The learners must always wear properly in order to be well mannered when there are in the class, and always smile in the class in order to develop some ethical behaviour in the class.

Learner 18: The positive relationship is developed when learners obey and follow the classroom rules that are set up by the teacher. Also learners have to participate when the teacher is asking questions in the class in order for the learning environment not to be negative. The teacher should also have to socialise with their learners in a positive way in order to create and build a strong bond between them.

It is evident that the appropriate ways for teachers to develop positive relationships with learners in the classroom is to involve them in the classroom lesson discussions and formulate classroom rules together. Pieratt's (2011) findings seem to support the views expressed above in that he pointed out that positive classroom relationships are developed when learners feel a sense of support and trust from the school environment. According to Pieratt once these positive emotions relationships are met by the teachers, the learners

are most likely to engage in meaningful positive learning relationships in the classroom with the teachers. Learners' views above seem to be supported by McCombs's (2007, p. 75) who notes that in a positive learning environment "the learners' perceive themselves that they are cared about, respected, in a positive relationships with their teacher and the other peers, and that it is safe to make and improve their learning mistakes".

Types of relationships teachers engage in with learners in the classroom

Four teachers made comments on the above aspect:

Teacher G: A positive relationship where by learners knows that when they do something good you praise them and when they do something wrong any punishment can follow the wrong behaviour, but nevertheless they should always know their limits that you are the teacher and they are the learners in the classroom.

Teacher I: A positive one, I always create one. I let them express themselves, and ask them a bit about their back ground, motivate them and encourage them to focus on their studies.

Teacher J: Teacher learner positive relationships, and friendly towards learners, helpful and caring them in the classroom.

Teacher C: A positive peer learning, the teacher uses the fast learners or the students who grasp the concept to explain to the others in the classes. A positive advisory relationship, the teacher advice and encouraging learners, even when they find the work tough to handle.

Three learners commented thus on the same theme:

Learner 18: Positive relationship, because our teachers most of them motivate us, and they also look and care out for us, as if they are our second parents when we are at school. They also try to create open communication especially in cases when we are in trouble and you don't know who to talk too, we can always go to them for help.

Learner 19: Good relationships (a positive one). I always do my homework in order for the teacher to have hope and trust in me in the class. The teacher always understands us as learners, and they punish us whenever we do something very wrong and this is good, because we will learn a lesson that we can't repeat it again. The teachers always shows good example to us so that we can follow and we do well in the school and in the community in general.

Learner 8: Positive relationships occur when you have a good performance, however negative relationships will take place when you are not in good understanding with your teacher in the class. Sometimes positive and sometimes it is negative, because the teachers are sometimes answering the learners with an attitude in the class.

It is well explained that the types of relationships teachers engage in with learners is positive in nature, because teachers need to create conducive learning environment and motivate learners to work hard and improve their academic performance. Based on the teachers and learners' views above, the researcher argues that it depends on the individual teachers; some will be engaged in a positive relationship with learners in the classroom, if learners are behaving well, and other teachers will be in negative relationships with learners who are not conducting themselves according to classroom rules. According to Khaleduzzaman (2017) relationships whether positive or negative in nature have proven to have profound effects on the quality of student learning in the classroom. Further, Teachers and learners opinions above seem to be supported by Sanders' (2015) who found that positive teacher-learner relationships which include physical support, a sense of belonging, having a sounding board for emotional reactions and opinions, being able to say what you really think, providing a reassurance of worth, opportunities to help other learners, and validation and support for the way learners do things and interpret learning experiences in the school classroom. Based on this finding, researcher concludes that positive teacher-learner relationships results in learners to develop strong self-esteem and positive learning ability in the school environment.

Theme 2: Influence of teacher-learner interactions on learners' academic performance

Three teachers expressed their views on this theme:

Teacher E: Positively, I have realised that most learners tend to put more efforts on the subjects which they have good relationships and interactions with the teachers'. In most cases they do not want to disappoint the subject teacher because of fear that the relationships will break down. These interactions help the teacher to understand and know more about these learners, what happens outside the school and it help us teachers to provide the necessary guidance to this specific learner.

Teacher F: Teacher-learner interactions can influence students' academic performance either positively or negatively depending on how the interactions is done in the classroom learning. For instance, if the teacher-learner interactions are bad, then this will influence students' academic performance negatively, and students will not like the subject taught by that specific teacher.

Teacher B: Yes, in a positive way that it enabling learners to feel secure and safe

in their learning environment. It helps learners and teacher to improve their academic outcomes, and it helps learners to be highly motivated because they put their trust in their teachers. Teachers are the role models to their learners, therefore, if they love teaching, learners will also love and enjoy learning.

Some of the learners said the following on this sub-theme:

Learner 14: I think that the teacher-learner interactions have a big impact on the learning of students in the secondary schools. A learner who has a positive interaction with his or her teachers is likely to pass with good marks than a student with negative interactions with teachers' in the class. Positive interactions with teachers gives the learner selfconfidence, and negative teacher learner interactions creates a bad learning environment which results in poor academic performance and bad behaviour from the learner side in the class.

Learner 18: Positive effects, because if interactions are positive one then this learner will try by all means to focus and put all their efforts in their school work, which is also one of the most important dreams of learner's educations. While if the interactions is negative, the learners can easily lose focus towards their school work and this can be a bad and negative example, especially to the school girls in particular they will have lower academic performance.

Learner 7: It depends on the learner's self-esteem. Sometimes the learner will, take it lightly but some will take it at heart and it will have a negative effect on their academic performance and future carriers' plans. The teacher's comments will keep on replying in that individual learner's minds for a very long time, and this will have a negative result to learners in the classroom learning.

Learner 12: Teacher and learners in secondary schools tend to have a more positive interactions and it affects learners' academic performance positively as they become more interested in doing their school work. But less learners have negative interactions with the teachers especially school girls, because some teachers (male's one) tend to fall in love with school girls which lower their academic performance at secondary school, because the girl learner will not do the school work, as they feel that they are more in romantic relationships or loved by male teachers in the school.

Based on their opinions, it is clear that teacher-learner interactions influence learners' academic performance in the positive direction, and teachers' interactions play a crucial role. The researcher points out that teacher-learner interactions has a positive influence on the learners' academic performance in the school. Thus, it is important for teachers to interact with learners on a daily basis during school

working hours. In explaining and supporting the sub-theme above, McDonald (2013, p. 20) clarified that “teacher-learner classroom interactions involves teacher practical actions and instructional techniques to create a proactive learning environment that facilitates and supports learners active participation in both academic and social and emotional learning”. Furthermore, McDonald said that with the diverse backgrounds, interests and capabilities of learners, meeting their classroom expectations and involving them in meaningful learning dialogue required effective teaching methodologies. Jones et al. (2013) state that developing interactional learning environment enables learners to be involved in the meaningful activities that support and influence their academic performance, this interactional learning environment, can only truly be attained when teachers understand their own interactions and their learners’ participation needs in the classroom (Jones et al., 2013).

Policy framework or school rules guiding teacher-learner relationships and interactions in Namibian schools

Some teachers expressed little understanding on this sub-theme during interviews:

Teacher F: Yes, the policy says that the teachers-learner relationships and interactions should not be romantic, but be professional in the school learning environment.

Teacher A: Yes, in the teacher’s code of conduct, a teacher is to set the basic professional services that improves the teaching and learning. This is further elaborated under the topic teacher-learner on the 2004 government gazette of the republic of Namibia.

Teacher G: Yes, there is a policy which says that male teachers should interact with learners but they should not engage into sexual relationships with school girls-learners, because that will affect their academic learning very negatively, and they will perform very poorly academically in the school assessments. The teacher should have to treat all the learners the same but not discriminating them in the teaching and learning environment.

Teacher B: Yes, there is a policy, for example the National policy guide for senior secondary schools in Namibia. There is also a learning support teacher manual. There is a National safe schools’ frame work part A and B for Namibia education for all in Namibian school that explains quite clearly how the teacher should relate and interact with school learners in the school learning environment.

Four learners during focus group discussions were of the following views:

Learner 12: Yes, the school rules says that teachers are not allowed to get intimate relationships with the learners, and teachers are not allowed to look at learners’ appearances or give them answers freely “spoon feed”. Teachers’

have to make sure there is no close contact between them and learners, and as learners we are also not allowed to seduce our teachers. Teachers should not give learners answers in exchange for something valuable.

Learner 19: Yes, teachers must respect their learners and put sexual contact with them away, learners should also respect their teachers. The teachers must never talk about private things to learners but rather focus on educational matters in the classroom. Teachers must beat school learners when they do not show respect, and learners must respect the teachers whenever they do something wrong in the class.

Learner 1: Yes, there is a school rules and regulations that guides the teacher-learner relationships in the school learning environment, for example, the one that says that teachers should not have intimate relationships with students, and learners must respect teachers in the school.

Learner 2: Yes, but they do not give us the respect we need, and some of them come to school late, and dodge classes. They are sometimes using or use their cell phones in class while teaching and learning is taking place.

It seemed from the results in this study that many participants had little information, knowledge and understanding of the Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture's policies, directives, rules and regulations that guide the teacher-learner relationships and interactions in secondary schools.

Based on this study results, it is evident that Ministerial policies, rules and regulations are available in the schools and at Khomas Education region, but many teachers and learners lack reading culture and they are not up dated about these policies that guides their relationships in schools. From study findings, Researcher found that some teachers lack information about Ministerial policies that guide and inform educators on teachers-learner relationships in the schools. Thus, most of the teachers during interviews were unable to answer the research question on the policy framework that guides teacher-learner relationships in Namibian schools. Additionally, Ministry of Basic Education, Sport and Culture (2001) reports in *Namibian Code of Conduct for teachers* states that the teachers should conduct themselves within theoretical framework policies, respect learners' dignity in order to improve teacherlearner relationships and students learning in school. Teachers should not develop sexual relationships with school learners, because that might contribute to poor learners' academic performances in the school and hinder their future carriers. Further, the code of conduct inform the teachers that they have social responsibility of in-parting knowledge and skills as well as assisting every learner to achieve his or her full academic learning potential in the school curriculum programmes (MBESC, 2001).

Observations of classroom learning environment.

The researcher also carried out classroom observations with in the two secondary schools in order to find out the interactions taking place in the selected teachers' classrooms. The findings are given below under six headings:

a. The physical aspects of the class:

The sizes of the classroom in the two schools varied. Some classrooms were small, while other were big and accommodate more than 35 learners. The numbers of learners in the classrooms ranges 18-40 learners at one school and at the other school range is between 28-40 learners in the class. The seating arrangement was quite fine and well organised from all the schools. Some furniture were found to be very old and others look new in good condition at both schools.

b. The use of teaching and learning materials in the classrooms:

Mostly text books were often used by teachers and learners in the classrooms. Schools lack self-made materials in their classes in order to stimulate learners' creativity in the classroom.

c. Teacher attention to learners in the classroom:

Some teachers knew their learners by names, and had good eye contact with them in the classrooms which building positive relationships. Some teachers were unable or have failed to do that in their classes.

d. Classroom management control by teachers:

Teachers managed very well their classes, and disciplined learners according to classroom rules, and other teachers were unable to manage their classes effectively, and as a result had some ill-disciplined learners in their classes.

e. Teacher's classroom interactions with the learners:

In both schools many teachers had a friendly and good classroom interaction with their learners. All in those classes the learners were actively involved and participating in the teaching and learning. Learners in commercial and languages classes were not very active, and did not interact with each other or with the teachers.

f. Learners' classroom interactions with the teacher:

Many learners were very active and participating in the class lessons, and some ask teachers questions for clarifications. Other were shy to show up in the teaching and learning situation, could not even express themselves due to poorly communication skills in English as a medium of instructions

used in the classes, and lack of teaching methodologies. It seems that views above are supported by Jones, Jones and Vermette's (2013) who state that the nature of the learning environment is very difficult to understand, because it involves the interactions and applications of various aspects related to the classroom. These include aspects such as classroom rules, school discipline procedures, teaching methodologies, learners' characteristics/behaviour and teacher-learner relationships in the classroom.

5. CONCLUSION

It is clear, from the results and findings that the majority of teachers explained how a positive teacher-learner relationship is developed by including in their explanations following key words; like positive-strong bond, attitudes, appropriate language, appropriate teaching methods, motivation, engagement, and creating enabling learning atmosphere among others. These findings are aligned to the attachment theory of John Bowlby and Mary Ainsworth (1969). The results seem to suggest that the majority of teachers in this study knew how to develop positive relationships with learners in their classes.

In conclusion, the researcher found that lack of physical school resources (extra classrooms, chairs, tables and laboratories) as well as lack of text books, lack of self-made teaching and learning materials as well as teacher-centred teaching method and approach were the major contributing factors affecting the quality of teacher-learner relationships in the classroom setting in the Khomas Education region. The study findings also revealed that the teacher-learner interactions influenced the learners' academic performance positively and negatively.

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