



Play-oriented English second language learning in the Namibian junior primary phase

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Tiivistelmä – Abstract			
<p>Multiple studies on second language learning revealed significant results and benefits of integrating playful activities in children’s English second language learning classrooms by utilising a teaching approach named language play. Consequently, this study assessed whether teaching English as a second language through playful or game-oriented activities accompanied by planned focus-on-form on language semantics will improve children’s academic achievements, their learning motivation and to explain children’s and the teacher’s language play learning and teaching experiences in the Namibian junior primary phase.</p> <p>A sample of 87 participants, of whom two were teachers was voluntarily selected for this study through a convenience sampling. All the participants who volunteered to participate in the study were from one school in Oshana region.</p> <p>The study selected an embedded mixed method design since it collected both quantitative and qualitative data with priority given to quantitative data, and later brought in qualitative data to support or supplement data missing in the primary data. Children were introduced to four different learning tasks concentrating on the language semantics. Hence, quantitative data was collected through a pre-test and post-test control group design in four weeks (08 March-13 April 2018). Whereas, qualitative data was collected through an open-ended questionnaire administered to the teacher in the experiment group on the 25th of August 2018.</p> <p>Quantitative data were analysed with the help of the Statistical Package for Social Sciences by running an independent T-test for children’s academic achievements and the Mann–Whitney U test for children’s learning motivation to compare the mean differences between the groups whereas the qualitative data gathered from the study was narratively analysed.</p> <p>The results reveal that children in the experiment group outperformed those in the control group. Similarly, children in the experiment group were highly motivated to learn English contrary to children in the control group. Besides, children and the teacher in the control group demonstrated positive attitudes towards integrating playful learning activities English second language learning classroom. In conclusion, integration of language play teaching approach in children’s English second language learning classrooms enhances children’s academic achievements, motivates children to learn the language and provides children with humorous learning experiences. Additionally, language play enables teachers to teach English with ease particularly on teaching language skills to meet the English learning objectives and competencies.</p>			
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1. INTRODUCTION

Much has been written in linguistics on children's second language pedagogy. However, Cook (2000) argues that several studies have ignored and underrated the playful uses of the language and thus neglected children's linguistic environment. The argument is based on the notion that playing with the language does not end in childhood but continues throughout our lives. Hence, as children start to grow older (school aged), their forms of play changes and converts into a means of social interactions. In the social interactions processes, children then begin to direct their focus towards the semantic and pragmatic aspects of a language (Cook, 2000). This idea received support from Crystal (2001) who further argues that playing with the language is natural and thus a natural way to learn a language is through playing with it.

The arguments above drawn several second language pedagogy researchers to an instructional approach that incorporates game-based activities in second language learning termed language play (Lantz-Andersson, 2017; Bell, 2017; 2012; Sevy-Biloon, 2016; Gholami & Gholizadeh, 2015; Mubaslat, 2012; Saracho, 2013; Sigurðardóttir, 2010). Language play is broadly viewed as an interactive and playful teaching approach that enables children to actively and socially engage in a range of learning activities and learn from their peers. On an in-depth analysis, Bell (2012) regards language play as a kind of experimental teaching approach where children's independently constructed knowledge is mediated through interactions. Generally, language play teaching approach provides children with new learning opportunities which enable them to expand their comprehension and develop their English language skills and semantic skills.

Even though it is globally recognised that English serves the *lingua franca* purpose in various nations and sectors (Frydman, 2011), the English political and economic status (Crystal, 2004) caused some countries, mostly in Africa to adopt English either as their official language, second language and as a medium of instruction in schools. Popularly identified is South Africa where English as a second language became the primary medium of instruction in schools (Uys, Van Der Walt, Van Den Berg, & Botha, 2007). Such adoptions then lead to several implications and failures contributing to pedagogical challenges and hence influencing several countries' developments (Frydman, 2011) inclusive of Namibia. The noted implications similarly lead to several English language studies in most African nations to focus on bridging the gap between theory and practice mostly on how to successfully apply English language policies in their education systems to serve the citizens and countries at large.

Namibian English second language pedagogy research revealed positive and negative results. Negative results are noted as challenges attributed to the misunderstanding and application of the language policy (Simasiku, Kasanda & Smit, 2015; Frydman, 2011) and insufficient language skills from teachers and learners (!Aibeb, 2016; Namundjebo, 2016; Kisting, 2011). It is revealed that teachers use Namibian English or mother tongues in place of English to teach, hence leading to a lack of understanding and resulting in poor academic achievements among learners (Simasiku et al., 2015).

In the agreement, given two years' experience of teaching English second language to grade two children with little, poor and lack of English language exposure, it is quite challenging to meet the English curriculum objectives, competencies and conform with the language policy guidelines. For, most children lacked motivation, self-confidence and were anxious towards learning English. As a result, the process forces a teacher to use Namlish or switch to children's mother tongue to break communication barriers, because children could not express themselves in English either comprehend the language content.

Therefore, there needs a refreshing teaching approach that will enable children to learn English with comprehension to yield better academic results in the future. !Aibeb (2016) identified a need for an intervention in the junior primary phase (grades 1-3), for English challenges begin in children's early language learning years since most children are taught English in their native languages in an "English dominated curriculum" (p.7). Besides, it is admitted in the Education and Training Sector Programme that education at the foundation level directly contributes to children's success or failure in subsequent levels, primarily on their literacy rate (Ministry of Education, 2007). Hence, laying a strong foundation may produce English competent children, capable of solving problems and thinking critically to thrive in the subsequent phases.

Using language play teaching approach in the junior primary phase to teach English as a second language to children with little, poor and lack of language exposure attracted the researcher because Gray (2017) notes that play promotes learning and is commonly recognised as a form of language which children understand. It is additionally recognised in the National Curriculum for Basic Education (Ministry of Education, 2016) that language is a tool for thinking, and for communicating, henceforth children's proficiencies or competencies in the language (English) skills serves an essential pre-requisite for them to thrive academically.

1.1 English language policy and practice in Namibian schools

Namibia uses a monolingual language policy with English solely functioning as an official language in all formal fields (Frydman, 2011). Nevertheless, the Namibian Constitution (Republic of Namibia, 1990, Art 3:2) recognised the significances of mother tongues or local languages towards quality education and thus approved them to be suitably used for educational purposes to enhance understanding. Therefore, the Language Policy for Schools in Namibia - document specified that children in the junior primary phase must learn English as a subject while other subjects are being reinforced in the children's mother tongues or a leading local language within that area. However, in circumstances where parents and schools have a substantial motivation to use English as a medium of instruction, permission is only obtainable from the Namibian Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture (Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture, 2003). Usually, such situations typically occur in urban and private schools due to multilingual classrooms.

Furthermore, in the senior primary phase (grades 4 -7), grade 4 is perceived as an intermediate class where children are prepared for English as a medium of instruction in the next grades. Thus, it is common that grade four teachers frequently code-switch to help "boost children's language development" and enhance their understanding (Simasiku et al., 2015, p. 317). It must be, however, noted that these children receive educational resources, learning activities and take examinations only in English except in the language regarded as their first language. Then from grade five upwards English in the entire education system fully converts into a medium of instruction and native languages continue being taken as subjects (Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture, 2003). Deriving from an experience, English is a dominant language in Namibian schools, and several administrative policies, circulars and other educational related documents regularly come in English.

Irrespective of the clear sanctions in the Language Policy for Schools in Namibia -document, the previously revealed misinterpretations and application of the language policy within schools continue to hinder the policy's success. Hence, preventing teachers and children from learning the standard language skills. As a result, some teachers and children often struggle to express themselves in English, and such incompetencies then leads to a mixture of English with local languages to produce what is regularly called Namlish (!Aibeb, 2016; Simasiku et al., 2015). Children primarily suffer from this process because they learn scientific content in an

incompetent language and may struggle to integrate cognitively and apply new knowledge (Simasiku et al., 2015).

It is crucial to stress and replicates that English challenges in Namibia start in the junior primary phase (grades 1-3); because in 2011, the national proficiency test revealed that 52% of junior primary teachers struggle with English while 62% have English difficulties. These were worst revealed and recorded scores compared to teachers in other phases. It was, however, clarified that most senior teachers yielded these poor achievements (Kisting, 2011). The conclusion can be linked to the Namibian language history and claim that most senior teachers went through the Bantu education which was under the apartheid government and Afrikaans then served the official status (Frydman, 2011). Therefore, most senior teachers never received any training in English which might have contributed to their poor proficiencies in English.

1.2 Children as second language learners

The Namibian Language Policy for Schools -document defined the second language as a language which “learners have some knowledge and are exposed to regularly” within their environments (Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture, 2003, p.8). Whereas, the Cambridge University Press (2013) denoted a second language to a language that people speak, which, however, is not their native or inherent language. Given these definitions, Nel, Nel and Hugo (2013) explain that children learn languages through social interactions.

In support of the social interactions roles towards children’s language learning, the National Curriculum for Basic Education explains that productive and lifelong learning entails giving children planning activities, allowing them to collaboratively solve problems and giving them chances to reflect on their activities and learning process (Ministry of Education, 2016). Thus, to enable children’s social interactions in classrooms or learning environments, the Junior Primary Integrated Planning Manuals (Ministry of Education, 2014) recommends and provide literacy resources such as games, songs, rhymes and poems which English language teachers may use as playful or game-oriented learning activities to provide children with collaborative learning opportunities. However, there is currently no accessible research in Namibia to confirm if teachers integrate the recommended playful activities in their English pedagogies or to give conclusions regarding teaching children through playful or game-oriented activities in Namibia. In this study, the playful activities are under consideration.

Meanwhile, the National Policy Guide document for Junior Primary Subjects outlines that, grade two children learn English as a subject with six sessions per week. Each lesson lasts for

forty minutes making up to two hundred and forty minutes per week compared to the four hundred minutes for first languages (Ministry of Education, 2014). Bearing in mind children's exposure to the language (English) within their environments, the time is arguably insufficient for them to master the language skills and learn to express themselves well in English. It is further doubtful if children in the junior primary phase are ever prepared to cope with English as a medium of instruction in subsequent phases. That is because children in junior primary phase find themselves trying to learn the second language and at the same time learning the language content but over a short period. Accordingly, that called for an intervention into the grade two English second language teaching approaches.

The rationale for choosing this study was to measure whether teaching English as a second language through playful or game-oriented activities accompanied by planned focus-on-form on language semantics will improve children's ability towards learning English as a second language. Through, boosting children's academic achievements by enabling them to learn English in the target language and help them in learning word meanings and recall learned items better. As another aim, to similarly measure, whether language play teaching approach will reduce children's anxieties towards learning English and enhance their learning motivation and to additionally explain language play learning experiences in the Namibian junior primary phase.

2. ENGLISH LANGUAGE PLAY AS A SECOND LANGUAGE TEACHING APPROACH

2.1 The main features of language play

The idea of “play” has several meanings and roles towards language and literacy development in early childhood education. Most definitions associate play with autonomy, motivation, problem-solving, pleasure, imagination, fun and relaxation (Gray, 2017; Saracho, 2014; Wood 2013; Cook, 1997; Vygotsky, 1978). Gray (2017, p.217) defines play as an “activity that is self-directed, motivated by means more than ends, guided by mental rules and includes a strong element of imagination”. Whereas, Vygotsky (1978) explains that play is any form of an activity that enables children to solve their real-world aims in an imaginary world. Regarding these definitions, Gray (2017), Saracho (2014), Isenberg and Jalongo (1997) and Vygotsky (1978) went on to clarify that an activity is only playful: when it can fully involve children and give them control over the situation or activity. Inferring that during playing activities children must choose and direct their planned activities to solve a problem. Thus, playful activities must be provocative to attract children’s attention and motivation and enable them to fulfil their experiences or pleasure. Wood (2013) support the notion of motivation activities in children’s play and further explains that motivation activities boost children attentiveness to the process of activity than the product. Hence, when children focus on actions rather than goals, it enables them to comprehend the content and to recall items better in the future because they are actively engaged in creating their knowledge.

In support of the play features described above, Gray (2017) and Vygotsky (1978) explain that a playful activity must be governed by rules which are typically known by the player. The rules are internal, contextual and enable children to behave morally acceptable in their societies. Additionally, Gray (2017), Wood (2013) and Vygotsky (1978) further explain that playful activities must be imaginative since fantasy empowers children to pretend and act in different expressions and behaviours because of the characters children assign themselves in playing. In addition, imagination enables children to connect the reality of their past experiences with their present experiences to make sense of the world. However, it seems literature does not have a fixed definition of play since different scholars define play in various contexts and areas of their research. Therefore, it is substantial noting that the above interpretations considered play from a general perspective. However, Gray (2017, p. 219) recommends for a definition of play

that reflects “motives and attitudes that underlie the activities” as he notes that playful activities result from a combination of motives and attitudes.

Play contributes to children’s development and forms a basis for children’s learning in early childhood years (Isenberg & Jalongo, 1997). In the agreement, Vygotsky (1978) points out that play entirely integrates childhood developmental areas, hence making it a significant aspect contributing to children’s development. He further stressed that by playing, children recognise their zone of proximal developments which enhances their confidence and enables them to behave and act beyond their daily limits. As another explanation Gray (2017) similarly notes that through playing children get opportunities to practice several skills that empower them in becoming active and successful adults in their contexts. Then, in favour of promoting play in early years of education Saracho (2014) concludes that lack of play regularly impedes the development of children’s linguistic, social and emotional domains.

Given Piaget’s types and phases of play, Wood (2013) notes that Piaget identified games with rules as appropriate for school-aged children who are from six years upwards. Isenberg and Jalongo (1997) agree with this finding by explaining that games with rules are most effective with school-aged children due to their advancement in cognitive and social ability skills which enables them to adhere to and adapts to the goal-oriented rules and collaborate with their peers to complete activities. Isenberg and Jalongo (1997, p.58-59) further emphasise that children develop their physical coordination, improve their communication and language skills which enables them to transfer and apply knowledge in new contexts. Additionally, to increase their collaborative and competition understanding through playing goal-oriented games.

Nevertheless, regarding language learning, Gholami and Gholizadeh’s (2015) study findings confirmed the positive influences of integrating language play pedagogy in children’s second language classrooms. The results revealed that children who learned English through playful activities outperformed children who learned through non-playful activities (Gholami & Gholizadeh, 2015; Bell, 2012). Children accomplished good academic achievements because language play provides children with fun and social learning opportunities which thus forms a basis for language learning. Thus, during cooperative learning activities, children identified their learning gaps and learned from others through feedback forms. Furthermore, language play allows children to recall learned items better because it continually exposes them to the language (Bell, 2012). The exposure enhances children’s cognition ability which therefore results in improved academic achievements. In general, language play teaching approach

provides children with opportunities to learn linguistic aspects in fun learning environments and in a cooperative manner.

2.2 Language play in language learning

Language play refers to any learning activity that purposely prompts children to manipulate the language units “such as words, phrases and sentences” for fun and mainly for language learning purposes (Crystal, 2001, p.1). On a different notion, Lantz-Andersson (2018, p.709) describe language play as a “collaborative activity that” acquaints children to the structure and use of a second language and enables them to develop their socio-pragmatic proficiencies. Like other scholars, Sterling and Loewen (2015) note that language play occurs when children are logically playing with a language irrespective of the language level or form. These studies generally explained language play from different viewpoints but based on a similar conclusion that language play occurs when children play with the language units with a prime purpose of learning a language in a fun, practical and interactive manner.

Some scholars support the accounts above and further emphasise that language play integrates forms, meaning and function which enable children to interactively and practically learn a language (Al-Bulushi & Al-Issa, 2017; Saracho, 2013). For instance, children manipulate units or some language features through playing to come up with several meanings. Furthermore, Saracho (2013) comments that integrating language play pedagogy in second language learning classrooms provide children with the likelihood to learn second languages in natural contexts and to vitally focus on the language use contrary to a mere acquisition of the language skills.

There are formal and semantic forms of language play (Cook, 1997). In the formal level; children play with “sounds to produce patterns of rhymes, rhythm, repetition and play with grammatical structures” (p. 228). Whereas in the semantic level; children play with “units of meanings by joining them to form nonsense or fictions words” (p.228). Cook’s explanation links to Bell’s (2012) account of language play interpretation by referring formal level as playing *with* the language whereas semantic level matches his conception of playing *in* the language. Besides, Isenberg and Jalongo’s (1997) work present a similar account. However, they as well clarified that language play is divided into formal and semantic levels for each level differently demands children’s transitional ability to “explore the phonological, syntax and semantic rules of a language” (p.48) depending on their age level. The studies above have omitted this clarification and conclusion of diving language play into two levels.

Language play emerged from the sociocultural theory (Lantz-Andersson 2018; Wood, 2013). The argument rooted from the Vygotskian notion that language learning is social, and thus social interactions constitute learning (Bell, 2012; Davison, 2010; Onchwari, Onchwari & Keengwe, 2008; Mitchel & Myles, 2004). In particular, the sociocultural theory claims that language learning occurs in cultural contexts mediated through language or other cultural tools (Davidson, 2010; Mitchel & Myles, 2004). One fundamental idea in the sociocultural theory is mediation. In explanation, using language to systematise and structure ideas is the primary form of mediation. On a similar account, language allows for mediation by using culturally and contextualised symbolic tools or signs intended to boost our understanding or serve as tools for thinking (Vygotsky, 1978).

In second language learning, mediation occurs when children engage in private speeches to regulate their cognition. Hence, children's private speeches form a basis for language learning. For instance, children engage in private speeches as a sign of self-regulation which later turn into inner speeches as a means of using language to control their internal thoughts without any outside speech. Henceforth, private speeches give children ironic opportunities to practice and replicate new language items and thus enabling them to learn the language (Vygotsky, 1978). In agreement and emphasis of the significances of self-regulation skills in learning, Dumford, Cogswell and Miller (2016) explain that self-regulated students know how, when, where and the importance of learning which thus, enables children's ability to reflect upon, comprehend and control their learning. On the same vein, De La Harpe and Radloff's (2000) work similarly contend that self-regulation skills empower students to manage their learning by planning, monitoring, evaluating and adapting their knowledge. Therefore, self-regulation skills are pre-requests to lifelong learning. Hence, it will be significant to prepare children on how to adapt and develop their self-regulation skills from early ages, possible by using suitable pedagogical approaches such as language play.

In clarification of the relationship between language play and the sociocultural theory, Bell (2012) points out that several language play studies denoted language play to a form of private speech which enables children to practice acquired language skills. Hence, leading to children's language development, because it presents children with opportunities to repeat or manipulate second language forms and meaning. The repetitions and practices then allow children to form and grasp new second language meanings and words mediated through children's developing use and control of their intellectual tools. Hence, in language play, children usually use language tools to regulate their thinking when engaged in a range of collaborative activities. In

the process of constructing knowledge, children then learn from each other during social interactions. In the end, children internalise the newly constructed meanings and language skills into their minds activated through learning together (Mitchel & Myles, 2004). According to Lantolf (2000, p.4), children use the language to facilitate their behaviours and thus brings “language to play as a vital role in inhibiting and initiating their behaviours” which forms as a “basic feature of planning” in their language learning process.

Furthermore, language learning is firstly seen as social then later individual. Individual learning occurs when children internalise the newly built scientific concepts (Mitchel & Myles, 2004). As noted in Vygotsky’s (1978) work, internalisation is part of the central concepts in the sociocultural theory. Vygotsky used the internalisation concept in his attempt to understand and explain how children move from daily concepts to comprehending scientific concepts and distinguish children’s mental activity regarding how they think, remember and reflect on things that were no longer present. Therefore, based on internalisation, it is established that children internalise the socially constructed ideas which, make up their mind (Vygotsky, 1978). Thus, children are active constructors of their language through social interactions and learning is viewed as a change from accomplishing learning tasks through cooperative work to individual accomplishments of learning tasks (Mitchel & Myles, 2004). Alternatively, as an outcome of solving challenging and unfamiliar problems (Tracey, 2003).

Children’s social means of mediation advance at the zone of proximal development (Lantolf, 2000). Zone of proximal development is the difference between what children can accomplish on their own and when offered help from somebody else (Vygotsky, 1978). However, the help or support must be about encouraging children on how to do things through collaboration, cooperation and peer tutoring than merely transferring skills and knowledge to them (Smidt, 2009; Mitchel & Myles, 2004; Lantolf, 2000). Hence, it is the role of an educator and the expert child to help children bridge the gaps between what they can do alone and after being helped. That is to help them move from the performance level to the potential level within learning settings (Smidt, 2009) which in this study was possible through playful activities as children might notice their or others learning gaps and alternatively help each other to cross over that site.

Although the studies above have been concentrating on the implications of language play on children’s second language learning from the social and linguistic views, they have omitted children’s psychological features in language learning and commonly identified is children’s

motivation. According to Al-Bulushi and Al-Issa (2017), psychological aspects such as motivation critically influence children's ability and a degree in learning second languages and, it is thus a significant domain that any pedagogical approach must integrate for emotional features (motivation) form part of daily life and affect children's learning in different ways.

2.3 Motivational aspects of language play teaching approach

Motivation is among the enormously researched topics in second language learning. However, numerous studies explored motivation on its own and placed little emphasis on the integration of motivation with language play teaching approach. In view of the significances of motivation as an affective factor towards second language learning in recent studies, Ordem (2017) identified a gap on how to encourage children to maintain their learning motivation for a prolonged period highly within learning environments or lessons.

Motivation is generally a complex process to explain. However, Guerid (2015) and Hidi and Boscolo (2006) defined it on account of motives and self-efficacy. The former entails the aims, goals and objectives that stimulates one to perform something (Guerid, 2015). For instance, engaging in an activity based on one's needs, interests and values either to solve a problem or for enjoyment and curiosity purposes or what prompts a child to do something (Hidi & Boscolo, 2006). Whereas the latter refers to children's perception and evaluation of their strengths and weakness to solve learning tasks in classrooms (Hidi & Boscolo, 2006). In the context of this study, motivation refers to the aims of initiating and upholding second language learning and the pedagogical approach employed to support it (Guerid, 2015).

Hong and Ganapathy (2017) acknowledged the link between motivation and language learning. By explaining that motivation influences children's level of motivation towards learning a language and therefore devoted motivation to second language learning and acquisition. In the agreement, several study findings confirm that children with high learning motivation level regularly accomplish high academic scores contrary to children with low motivational levels (Ordem, 2017; Wei, 2016; Wadho, Memon & Memon, 2016; Piniel & Csizér, 2013). Besides, since motivation studies gained momentum in recent years, Ordem (2017); Lasagabaster, Doiz and Sierra (2014) regards motivation as a central aspect or domain towards children's second language learning success. Accordingly, in favour of supporting the essence of motivation in language learning Wadho (2016) asserts that lack of motivation consistently impends learning.

The conclusion above received support from Lasagabaster et al. (2014) who additionally clarified that motivated children gain ownership of their language learning. Hence, children's

ownership in second language learning significantly impacts their cognitive process and performance and therefore enhances learning. As a result, Sener and Erol (2017) recommend motivation at the forefront of language learning. However, children do not often and steadily keep their learning motivation during lessons, which is either influenced by the learning content, learning environment and social context (Ordem, 2017). Therefore, there needs a better pedagogical approach that will help children to uphold their learning motivation during language learning lessons.

Given that explanation, teachers are anticipated to use varied and contextualised pedagogical approaches (learner-centred) based on theoretical points and scientific trending demands on second language learning. In addition, teachers need to provide ample learning resources, social and interactive learning situations and emphasis or create awareness of the significances of learning English (Ordem, 2017; Hong & Ganapathy, 2017; Wadho et al., 2016; Wei, 2016; Guerid, 2015; Piniel & Csizér, 2013). Furthermore, teachers must be able to identify difficulties during learning situations and resolve them (Guerid, 2015). In that way, children might be interested in learning English and have positive attitudes to learn the language with sustained motivation.

However, regardless of how several studies recognised and emphasised the role of motivation as a contributing affective factor towards children's English second language learning success, some studies noted challenges related to motivation regarded as paradoxes between theory and practice. For instance, sometimes pedagogical approaches might fail to arouse children's motivation to learn the language because the room for motivation in most curriculums does not adequately accommodate the complex feature of motivation (Ordem, 2017).

Furthermore, little or lack of motivation integration in children's learning curriculums regularly results in demanding academic learning and leaves little time for teachers to prepare and use imaginative learning resources (Wei, 2016). Henceforth, teachers concentrate more on formal assessment learning tasks to collect children's learning progress and report to appropriate educational divisions when requested. In addition, overcrowded classes might result in some children not participating in learning activities or group discussions which leads to a lack of or poor social interactions and learning motivation (Wei, 2016). In the context of this study, the accounts above are under consideration; that the room for motivation in the learning curriculum might have some implications on the roles of language play towards children's learning motivation and in general their language learning.

Despite that, language play teaching approach fulfils some affective domains during language learning such by enhancing children's intrinsic motivation (Sterling & Loewen, 2015). In the light of that view, language play teaching approach arouses children's intrinsic motivation during playful activities because children provide each other with feedbacks which thus give them some sense of accomplishment (Saracho, 2014). Intrinsic motivation further empowers children to overcome their fears and anxieties in classrooms (Wei, 2015; Sterling & Loewen, 2015; Peniel & Csizér, 2013). Therefore, based on the notion that children have short attention span when learning second languages, language play teaching approach can be employed as an instructive tool to enhance and help maintain children's intrinsic motivation towards learning English (Ordem, 2017; Wei, 2016).

Other studies that considered intrinsic motivation on second language learning concludes that intrinsically motivated children became eager and prepared to learn the language in the motive of gratification or achieving learning tasks (Guerid, 2015), which then sustain their motivation and alternatively their attention span during learning activities. However, children's learning motivation is only sustainable when both their intrinsic and extrinsic motivation are combined (Ordem, 2017).

Intrinsic motivation is a natural or inherent stimulus or drives from within which forces one to interestingly act spontaneously to solve a problem or achieve a task (Schreiber, 2016; Guerid, 2015). Whereas extrinsic motivation refers to one's tendency and desire to accomplish a task driven by an identifiable external reward, like grades, sweets, money etcetera (Guerid, 2015; Ryan & Deci, 2000). Henceforth, one cannot endure extrinsic motivation once the reward is detached. Sustained or the amount of intrinsic motivation empowers children with a positive mental ability to achieve the anticipated learning objectives (Cave, Evans, Dewey & Hartshorn, 2017). Therefore, intrinsic motivation forms a basis for quality learning and usually result in high academic achievements (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Hence, teachers are liable for arousing and enhancing children's intrinsic motivation in learning environments through making learning experiences fun (Piniel & Csizér, 2013) by teaching through hands-on activities and interactive teaching approaches (Guerid, 2015). That is because practical oriented pedagogical approaches help eliminate children anxieties and thus increase their self-efficacy (Piniel & Csizér, 2013).

In a range of applied linguistic studies, some scholars looked at the concept of self-efficacy on it is correlation to anxiety, self-confidence and motivation. Based on Bandura's (1986; 1995) self-efficacy description and revised account, self-efficacy refers to a one's cognitive construct

comprised of their opinions on how to organise and accomplish desired outcomes. According to Bandura (1986), self-efficacy forms a basis for high cognitive skills. In line with this, several studies confirmed and note that there is a relation between motivation and self-efficacy (Cave et al., 2017; Sener & Erol, 2017; Saeid & Eslaminejad, 2016; Piniel & Csizér, 2013).

In the agreement, children with high self-efficacy accomplish learning tasks compared to those with low self-efficacy attributed to the fact that high self-efficacy boosts children's motivation and so their learning success (Sener & Erol, 2017; Cave at al., 2017). Thus, teachers are argued to ensure that children have high self-efficacy in second language learning settings since it reduces their anxiety levels (Piniel & Csizér, 2013). High self-efficacy and learning motivation lead to self-regulation or learning autonomy which facilitates and enhances their learning (Saeid & Eslaminejad, 2016; Schwarzer & Luszczynska, 2005), which associate to the roles of language play in second language learning. For Isenberg and Jalongo (1997) note that children find it fun to play with the language because it gives them a sense of autonomy or self-regulation to accomplish tasks or solve challenges.

2.4 The significance of language play teaching approach in second language learning

There are several and varied revealed values of integrating language play teaching approach in language learning classrooms. Such that language play is connected to the social and cognitive processes which are substantial for children's language and literacy development. For instance, children with poor skills in second language classes often initiate for playful interactions to explore specific language forms and meanings (Bell, 2017). Thus, making language play as an appropriate instructional approach for teaching English as a second language to children with insufficient language (English) skills. Some important, noted results and benefits of integrating language play in second language pedagogy are such that, through playing, children learn the language in an integrated manner (Saracho, 2013). Moreover, language play teaching approach provides children with opportunities to collaboratively work together which enables them to direct their attention to form-meaning associations. In playing with these word associations children then start to learn word meanings (Bell, 2012).

Based on in-depth literature analysis, multiple studies confirmed language play as a significant contributing tool or pedagogical approach to children's language and literacy development. That is because, in language play children seek to solve cognitively challenging tasks by experimenting with words, syllabus, sounds and grammatical language forms to understand or comprehend the discovered solutions (Isenberg & Jalongo, 1997). The experimentation idea in

language play connects to Dewey's experiential learning theory, for during experimentations children get opportunities to learn the language in sensual and in-context learning experiences which thus plays a role in their reasoning and analysis skills in language learning (Kolb, 2014).

In addition, language play teaching approach provides fun, authentic and pleasing learning environments, which contributes to children's increased learning motivation (Sevy-Biloon, 2016; Gholami & Gholizadeh, 2015; Mubaslat, 2012). The approach further arouses children's motivation level due to its competitive nature. Thus, children eagerly complete tasks to win (Sevy-Biloon, 2016). In a repetition of Sevy-Biloon's account, Mubaslat (2012) additionally describes competition as a factor that promotes learning, because in playing children encounter challenges that will require their thinking and reasoning skills to accomplish learning tasks.

Language play teaching approach correspondingly gives children autonomy, boosts their self-confidence and enables them to actively and independently engage in their learning tasks and process (Mubaslat, 2012). In addition, language play provides children with opportunities to participate in a range of shared or group activities, such as visual and mental based tasks which in turn makes games adaptive in learning (Sigurðardóttir, 2010). The adaptive nature embedded in games enables teachers to accommodate children's diverse learning needs and styles at a time to encourage learning (Sevy-Biloon, 2016; Sigurðardóttir, 2010).

Furthermore, language play teaching approach enables teachers to integrate language skills and teach them in a single lesson which increases children's speaking, reading and writing skills because they at once learn content and apply it through playing (Sevy-Biloon, 2016). Given children's cognitive aspects in language learning and relationship to language play, Gholami and Gholizadeh (2015)'s study concludes that language play teaching approach helps children to retain learned items better. That is because in playful or game-oriented activities children get opportunities to relate the learned content to their real-life experiences depending on the game's nature (Sevy-Biloon, 2016). Children internalise the learned content which thus enables them to remember things on a later phase.

On the other hand, other similar studies identified and concluded language play as a practical teaching approach that enables children to successfully learn the language grammar (Gholami and Gholizadeh, 2015; Sevy-Biloon, 2016). That is because through playing children get opportunities to practice what they have learned (Wood, 2013). For instance, teaching English second language through language play reduces children's learning anxieties and empowers

them to speak comfortably and to practice and apply the content learned (Sevy-Biloon, 2016; Gholami & Gholizadeh, 2015).

In view of the social aspects of language play teaching approach, language play enables children to interact with their peers during playful activities (Sterling & Loewen, 2015; Gholami & Gholizadeh, 2015; Bell, 2012). In these social interactions, children then identify their learning gaps and start learning from each other. As a result, children begin to form meaning associations from others feedback which are vital for determining the meaning of lexical items (Sterling & Loewen, 2015). In consideration of this study, language play provides children with shared learning experiences and create new learning opportunities for children to learn from each other (Lantz-Andersson, 2018).

Studies which considered the influence of language play learning experiences relied on adult student's feedbacks and revealed that students in playful learning situations exhibit positive attitudes towards playful activities contrary to those in non-playful classrooms (Lantz-Andersson, 2018; Al-Bulushi & Al-Issa, 2017; Gholami & Gholizadeh, 2015; Bell, Skalicky & Salsbury, 2014). The positive attitudes were confirmed based on student's revealed interests towards language play pedagogy and their gratification level during playful activities (Gholami & Gholizadeh, 2015). Other studies acknowledged student's displayed interests and enjoyment during playful activities and concluded them as the consequence of humour in playful activities (Lantz-Andersson, 2018; Bell et al., 2014; Bell, 2012).

Humour overcomes uncomfortable interactions in second language learning classrooms. In the agreement, that humorous learning activities boost children's confidence which enables them to engage and participate in a range of shared learning activities for the interactions become fun and exciting. Consequently, students would want to join and share their views and opinions on the learned content (Gholami & Gholizadeh, 2015; Bell et al., 2014). Accordingly, during language play, teaching and learning generally occur through jokes which support children's memory recall (Gholami & Gholizadeh, 2015). The jokes are viewed and explained concerning repetitions which occur as students attempt to contextually construct their content (Bell et al., 2014). Consequently, the repetitions result in humour (Lantz-Andersson, 2018).

Furthermore, humorous learning activities help children to uphold their learning motivation since they often prefer to continue playing the games even after the lesson is over (Piker, 2013). However, Al-Bulushi & Al-Issa (2017) points out that different kind of games and context can influence participants' attitudes toward language play and their perceptions of language play

implications. For instance, Al-Bulushi & Al-Issa (2017) concludes that a teacher showed a little positive attitude towards integrating games in language learning since there is little emphasis on teaching through games in their English curriculum.

The language used during playful activities is goal oriented. Therefore, the repetitions earlier presented occur as the trial and error benchmark towards the development and use of children's pragmatic skills (Lantz-Andersson, 2018; Bell et al., 2014). In particular, different playful or game-oriented learning activities arouse children's various language use and focus and repetitions are usually identified within role play and activities which allow for the free talk (Bell, 2012). Children find role-playing and free talk activities hilarious and enjoyable because they give them opportunities to use varied linguistic repertoires. Moreover, the same activities acquaint children to the language use and structure. Consequently, some children will start to learn and master certain linguistic aspects which prompts them to use the language to remark on other's mistakes, respond to the teacher or ask questions related to the subject content for clarification purposes which occurs in a language play form (Lantz-Andersson, 2018). Role-playing and free talk learning activities are under consideration in this study integrated into the developed learning materials.

2.5 Impacts of language play teaching approach on children's academic achievements

Children's social interaction constitutes their academic achievements. In the agreement, some studies referred children's social interactions to academic talk and explained that children use academic talk in cooperative classrooms to solve academic problems and thus, bring language to use to interact with others and the teacher to construct their knowledge and understanding of subject contents. In the interaction process, children develop their communication skills and use them to regulate their cognition skills to extend their content knowledge which thus, boosting children's academic results and linguistic skills (Spies & Xu, 2018).

Consequently, teachers are recommended to pedagogically ensure that children's planned learning activities in cooperative learning classrooms have the power to expose them to several language discourses regularly. Allow for replications of ideas for repetitions benefit children's memory and writing and, to provide cooperative learning opportunities because they lay a foundation for children's critical thinking skills developed through self-or inner talk (Zwiers & Crawford, 2011). Besides, social pedagogical approaches develop children's oral language skills which allow for the academic talk (van Kleeck, 2014). It is noted that children's "oral language skills" significantly impact their "academic achievements" and thus concluded that

children with good oral language skills outperform those with weak oral language skills (Spies & Xu, 2018, p. 23). In this study, language play teaching approach forms a basis for enabling academic talk or social interactions.

Moreover, considering that children in most classrooms often come from diverse backgrounds, cooperative learning opportunities forms a basis for stimulating children's prior knowledge (Spies & Xu, 2018; Zwiers, 2017; Calderón, Slavin, & Sánchez, 2011; Snow & Katz, 2010). That is because in cooperative learning activities children attempt to solve problems. Hence children often bring in their prior knowledge to solve challenging problems. In the same process, children share their cultural experiences and thus learn from each other. Similarly, the shared learning experiences allow for the frequent use of the language which consequently enhances and develop children's oral language skills to deeply understand and comprehend academic content (Calderón, Slavin & Sánchez, 2011) which as previously concluded impact children's academic achievements.

Based on a similar view, in the academic talk, children talk about what they have learned to comprehend the content better which similarly enable them to recall learned items better (Spies & Xu, 2018). Generally, cooperative learning activities such in the present study possible through language play, provide children with learning opportunities that enable them to engage in academic talk. Consequently, children practice and contextually apply the learned content which enhances their conception level and ability to recall learned items. Hence, leading to improved and better academic achievements.

2.6 Language play and focus-on-form

Focus-on-form has long emerged as an alternative pedagogical approach for second or foreign language learning. Focus-on-form is an instructive approach that focuses on certain linguistic elements and draws children's attention to such linguistic elements in lessons by focusing on learning their meanings (Long, 1991). As another explanation Long and Robson (1998) explain focus-on-form as a form of pedagogy that focuses on linguistic forms and in response to children's identified learning challenges regarding understanding or comprehension. In a brief, focus-on-form is an instructional approach that mainly pays attention to meanings in language learning (Oosthuizen, 2005; Ellis, Basturkmen & Loewen, 2002). However, it appears that scholars only studied focus-on-form regarding language play and communicative approach and humour, because there is no accessible evidence of focus-on-form based on language play and semantics.

In a range of focus-on-form linguistic studies, Shahani (2012) states that focus-on-form is an instructional approach initiated by the teacher. It is developed to address children's identified knowledge gap in second and foreign language learning (Shamsudin & Karim 2012). In other words, focus-on-form instruction primarily aims to resolve children's recognised linguistic problems. On a similar account, Oosthuizen (2005) describe focus-on-form as a pedagogy that emphasises the challenging forms in a language which further serve as pre-requests or obstacles to effective daily communication. Accordingly, focus-on-form instruction only pays attention to meanings in a language. As another account, Shahani (2012) emphasise that focus-on-form pays attention to the semantic features of a language in contrast to the language rules. Usually, focus-on-form instruction is a significant teaching approach in second language learning for it creates ideal learning environments through integrating meaning, form and cognitive features which t draws children's attention to language learning (Sterling & Loewen, 2015).

Doughty and William (1998) identified and differentiated focus-on-form from focus-on-formS. The former is restricted to the language forms and their meaning in a language, whereas the latter focus on such forms without considering their meanings. Besides, Ellis (2001) and Ellis et al. (2002) categorised focus-on-form into planned and incidental focus-on-form. According to Ellis (2001) and Ellis et al. (2002) planned focus-on-form includes pre-planned forms in meaning-focused learning activities usually based on a known linguistic form problem which planned focus-on-forms then seek to address. On the other hand, Lapkin and Swain's (2013) study emphasis that planned focus on form is used to stimulate a specific learning concept in language learning. Whereas incidental refers to "a set of unplanned time-outs of attention to forms in meaning-based activities of the classroom" (Shamsudin & Karim, 2012). Since focus-on-form focusses on specific linguistic forms, Sterling and Loewen (2015) referred language-play to a kind of focus-on-form since it directs children' concentration to several language elements during social interactions.

In a nutshell, the literature review outline that "play" is a scientifically proved powerful tool or vehicle for learning and language development in early childhood education due to it is imaginative, competitive and problem-solving features. Generally, play integrates children's emotional, linguistic and social developmental domains which vitally enhance their degree of language learning because play is a form of language that children better understand. Thus, teaching language through language play augments children's understanding. Language play is an English instructive approach which integrates playful or game-based activities in second language learning classrooms.

Language play combines aspects of the sociocultural theory and emotional components which are fundamental in children's second language learning. Furthermore, language play provides children with social interactions which constitute language learning. Therefore, makes it an ideal second language teaching approach particularly for children with poor skills in the second language. That is because playful interactions aid children to explore specific language forms and meanings which positively impact their second language learning capacity by boosting their academic achievements attributed to the notion that language play provides children with fun, enjoyable, authentic and experimental learning opportunities. The learning experiences equally increase children's learning motivation primarily when they accomplish learning tasks by helping each other.

Furthermore, language play's humorous nature gives children opportunities to practice what they learn and apply them contextually. For instance, when children are expressing their ideas and feelings about the content through different learning activities which allow for social interactions, such as role-playing. Other researchers described social interactions concerning academic talk which is noted to advance children's verbal language skills. The oral language skills then enable children to deeply understand and comprehend academic content which similarly boosts their academic performances. Besides, research revealed that children display positive attitudes towards language play learning activities due to its entertaining nature. Consequently, children enjoy and learn second languages through fun which enhances their self-confidence and enable them to sustain and uphold their learning motivation. Additionally, teachers show positive attitudes toward language play teaching approach because it enables them to teach the language with ease.

On the other hand, some scholars considered children's cognitive aspects, bilingualism and their social settings as significant contributing factors towards children's second language learning success (Jasińska & Petitto, 2018; Li & Grant, 2016; Hu, 2016; Li, Legault & Litcofsky, 2014). Garcia Mayo and Garcia Lecumberri (2003) linked the cognitive aspects to the age factor and critical period hypothesis which explains of a natural period when a human brain can flexibly acquire or learn a language and beyond a phase when the brain become inflexible to learn a second language. In particular, children under ten years old have a benefit to naturally and proficiently learn second languages due to their brain plasticity in contrast to adults. Consequently, Hu (2016) acclaims for an introduction of second language learning to children on their schooling onset, thereby learning the language skills in a standard manner

because it enables them to learn the language naturally. Later, helping children to accomplish future academic goals.

In the same vein, bilingual children have significant benefits to learn second languages contrary to monolingual children (Jasińska & Petitto, 2018). That is because bilingual children can alternate between two languages. For instance, inputting unfamiliar words both in their first, and the second language then makes links with their previous knowledge to construct new meanings (Sheng, Bedore, Peña, & Fiestas, 2013). Given these explanations, Namibian children start to learn English second languages on their schooling onset thereby learning it as a subject from grade one, and most children are bilingual and similarly learn English in bilingual environments. Thus, one would expect them to perform exceptionally well which, however, is contrary to the academic reality. Most children continue to perform poorly in English throughout their primary education academics.

Henceforth, the overall literature lays a foundation for this study to provide empirical evidence on the influence of learning English second language through playful activities in the Namibian junior primary phase towards children's academic achievements, learning motivation and describe their learning experiences through planned focus-on-form as outlined in the provided literature. The research will inform classroom teachers, resource developers and curriculum planners about the possible enhanced way to teach English second language to children with little or no exposure to the language.

3. RESEARCH TASK AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The overall research focused on English second language learning in the Namibian junior primary phase. The study aimed to find a suitable approach to teach English to children under ten years with poor, little or lack of English language exposure. Henceforth, the researcher employed an intervention study thereby using language play as a new teaching approach to measure its impact on children's academic achievements and learning motivation toward learning English second language. In addition, to further explain language play learning and teaching experiences toward children's second language learning and explain any encountered challenges during the intervention and how the teacher overcame the encountered challenges.

The conclusion was gathered from the study results and findings to inform and help teachers, and resource developers identify and develop learning materials that motivate children and ensure improved English second language learning. Similarly, to employ a better pedagogical approach that will enable children to participate effectively and contribute to classroom learning activities to produce better academic achievements in the future by enabling children to construct their knowledge actively and know word meanings which are central in children's semantic knowledge and competencies.

The study aimed to answer the following research questions:

1. How does language play teaching approach impact children's English second language learning outcomes?
 - 1.1 What is the impact on children's academic achievements?
 - 1.2 What is the impact on children's learning motivation?
2. How does language play teaching approach influence English second language learning experiences?
 - 2.1 What are the children's experiences?
 - 2.2 What are the teacher's experiences?

The researcher answered the research questions by describing and comparing experimental and control groups' results. In the first question, the study focused on children's academic achievements mainly investigating their semantic abilities. In the second question, the study revealed the impacts of language play on children's motivation, studied from the viewpoint of evaluating whether language play teaching approach will encourage children to maintain and

uphold their learning motivation towards learning English second language. Primarily, on children intrinsic motivation since it forms a basis for quality learning. In the third question, the study focused on children's learning experiences narrated by the teacher as observed during the intervention, and the teacher's teaching experiences and perception towards language only in the experiment group.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter aims to explain the research design used in the study. Therefore, it will primarily describe the research design and strategies, research sample, data collection tools, procedures and processes. It will further explain the data analysis method and look at the aspects of validity, reliability and describe the ethical features of this study.

4.1 Research design

A research design refers to any technique researchers use to collect data and it is one of the significantly valued aspects of every research for it helps researchers to connect their research questions and theories (Vogt, Gardner & Haeffele, 2012). Accordingly, to fulfil this study's aim, a mixed method approach was employed. A mixed method approach enables researchers to simultaneously collect qualitative and quantitative data to give a detailed understanding of the research problem under study contrary to using a single method (Creswell, 2014). For instance, in the present study, the researcher collected both quantitative and qualitative data to answer the research questions. In brief, a mixed method approach augments the power which is between the quantitative and qualitative research designs (Creswell, 2008; Gay, Mills & Airasian, 2011).

Given this study's nature and relation to the Namibian context, a mixed method approach fit this study. That is because there is no accessible data on language play teaching approach in Namibia therefore; this study could be the first to provide data and evidence on language play teaching approach in Namibia. Consequently, there is a need for this research to give a detailed perspective to augment the understanding of language play teaching approach. As a result, it prompted the researcher to combine both methods in one study because the data gathered from various research tools will be crucial towards understanding the significances or nature of this study and language play teaching approach. Besides, to identify and direct the need for future research on the same topic in Namibia.

In the same vein, the mixed method approach allowed the researcher to evaluate the impact of language play on children's academic achievements, their learning motivation and to get the teacher's reflection on language play learning and teaching experiences. Accordingly, to ensure that the study gained enough data to provide an in-depth understanding of the problem under investigation, the researcher gained quantitative data from children and qualitative data from the teacher in the experimental group.

Furthermore, this study employed an embedded mixed method design. An embedded mixed method design occurs when researchers concurrently collect both quantitative and qualitative data in a single study to evaluate the impacts of an intervention on the participant's outcomes and to explain participant's experiences during the intervention. Otherwise, the researcher may collect the first set of data (quantitative) then follow up with the second set of data (qualitative). At the end of the study, a researcher ends up with two sets of data and analyses them separately (Creswell, 2008). The two sets of data address different research questions, thus, one question collects quantitative data aimed to answer if the intervention had an impact on the participant's outcomes while another question gathers qualitative data to assess the participant's experiences towards the intervention (Creswell, 2008; Johnson, Onwuegbuzie & Turner, 2007).

In the embedded mixed method design, the researcher mainly prioritises the quantitative data and brings in qualitative data to support or provide supplementary information missing in the primary data or to enhance the understanding of the primary data. Accordingly, qualitative data always comes in to augment or support the quantitative data (Creswell, 2008). Regularly, an embedded mixed method design takes a shorter or longer period carried out through repeated measures or observations and often identified are longitudinal studies (Creswell, 2008; Johnson et al., 2007).

Consequently, the embedded mixed method design fit this study, because the researcher aimed to assess the impact of language play teaching approach on children's academic achievements and learning motivation. The gathered and analysed data was in the quantitative form with the results regarded as the intervention outcomes. Upon discussing quantitative data, the researcher identified a need to supplement the data to provide an expand comprehension of language play teaching approach. Hence, the researcher went on to further collect qualitative data to explain the participant's learning and teaching experiences towards learning English through language play teaching approach. Moreover, the researcher literacy collected the qualitative data after the quantitative data to reduce labour for the teacher during the experiment process because the study was carried out in four weeks. In essence, both sets of data enabled the researcher to give a broader understanding of language play teaching approach based on children's outcomes and participant's experiences towards language play teaching approach.

4.2 Sampling

A total of eighty-five (85) grade two children and their two (2) classroom teachers at a primary school in Oshana region volunteered to be participants in this experimental study. The control

group had forty-two (42) children and one (1) classroom teacher while the experimental group had forty-three (43) children and one (1) classroom teacher. In the light of sampling errors, no methodological approach or design was employed to balance the participants at the beginning of the study. Therefore, the experimental group had more children than in the control group which may cause some bias on the scores before the treatment (Huitema, 2011).

In search of getting the research participants, the researcher employed a convenience sampling to select participants who agreed to be participants from the entire study population. In the convenience sampling, the researcher selects a sample or participants that/who willingly meets the study's requirements or criteria. On a similar justification, Burton (2014) explains that researchers reduce the research population size to respondents who volunteer to participate in the study, whom the researcher can access. As another explanation, researchers use existing or formed groups who volunteer to participate in the research and meet the study's requirements (Creswell, 2003).

In conjunction with the explanations above, the sampling process was suitable for this study for the researcher selected voluntary participants on their basis of learning English as a second language. Furthermore, the researcher expected participants (children) to have poor or little exposure to English and their English teachers to be qualified. Children were additionally expected to be in grade 2, and there must be multiple classrooms of the same grade at the same school. As a result, children in this study were from an inner-city setting where they barely get exposed to standard English within their surroundings due to the socio-economic backgrounds. Hence most children had little or poor language abilities. Their teachers were both qualified, and the school consisted of more than two grade two classrooms which consequently made all participants fit for the study.

Furthermore, it was against this context that the researcher searched and identified two similar classrooms at a particular primary school in Oshana region where one class volunteered to be an experiment group and the second agreed to be the control group. Basically, no children were randomly assigned to the experiment or control group neither the classroom groups. Instead, participants (teachers) volunteered and selected their preferred participation groups.

4.3 Data collection tools and procedure

4.3.1 pre-test and post-test control group design

The pre-test and post-test control group design was selected and utilised as a tool to collect children's: 1. *academic achievements* and their, 2. *learning motivations*' primary data. Data were collected in four weeks (08 March-13 April 2018).

1. Assessment tools

The assessment tools or measures used in the pre-test and post-test control group design were set up based on the learning competencies and objectives on how to teach and assess children's English second language in grade two as outlined in the learning Curriculum. The fundamental purpose and emphasis of the assessment tools were to measure children's English language semantic abilities through focus-on-form during playful and non-playful task-based activities in every topic covered during the investigation. Below is the link to children's assessment tools https://drive.google.com/open?id=15zOF6WO51I7syhUoOiTy_G2GmZ5UfGgi.

Jing and Hongqi (2015) explain semantics as the study of word meanings and the expression of the word meanings. In addition, Nel et al. (2013) describe semantics as a process that enables children to learn how to relate a word/s to ideas or things and understand the link between words and ideas or things symbolically or subjectively. In other words, semantic competencies enable children to conclude what a word/s mean and prove it either symbolically or interpret the symbols in words. Regarding the impacts of semantic knowledge on language learning, Nel et al. (2013) note that semantic competence forms a basis for reading ability because it creates an association between decoding a word and reading comprehension which aids in learning a language.

In view of measuring children's semantic abilities, the researcher used four varied assessment tasks. Each learning task assessed a different learning topic as outlined in the Grade 2 Integrated Planning Manual and taught during the study. At the end of the investigation, each child's scores gathered from the four assessment tasks were summed to get a single total score. Each assessment task had three questions, the questioning structure and sequence regarding semantic competencies differed in each assessment task. Below are descriptions of how each assessment task measured children's semantic skills. Each assessment task was set out of 15 marks:

Assessment task 1: question 1 required children to *match* pictures to their corresponding names. In question 2, children had to look at pictures, read the picture's incomplete name and fill in

the missing letter whereas question 3 requested children to look at pictures and complete their descriptive sentences by filling in the correct action verbs at the end of every sentence.

Assessment task 2: question 1 tested children's semantic abilities based on their comprehension ability, the teacher reads the story and children were expected to complete a multiple choice by circling the correct answer based on the story (*children have been reading this story for a week*). In question 2, children had to look at transport pictures and fill in missing letters to form up their names whereas, in question 3, children were asked to look at the pictures and match them to the right action verb.

Assessment task 3: question 1 required children to look at pictures and fill in missing names picking them from a provided word box. Question 2 was based on prepositions and thus asked children to look at the pictures and match them to the right preposition. Question 3 was on creative writing led by a picture (cell phone).

Assessment task 4: question 1 requested children to match pictures to their names. In question 2, children were requested to look at the pictures and fill in a missing letter (vowel) whereas in question 3 children had to read names of items and draw pictures next to each item to represent it.

Overall, the assessment tasks measured children's semantic competencies based on their ability to distinguish, understand and recall learned items by requesting them to look at pictures and fill in missing words or letters, read object's names and draw pictures to represent them and to match words or names to their correct pictures. Besides, to assess children's semantic skills based on their comprehension ability by testing them to answer questions based on a text. Given that semantic awareness forms a basis for reading ability, the researcher additionally assessed children's writing ability (output) to identify if children can implicitly apply some learned items or content through writing guided or by looking at a picture.

2) *Children's motivation survey*

Children were further requested to complete a survey on motivation administered by their teachers before and after the study in both groups. The link to children's motivation survey <https://drive.google.com/open?id=1fUz782OFSf2yOkKb442SCQB-OuBk7Ikb>. Questions in the survey were merely structured and few to allow and accommodate children's thinking capacity and attention span. Thus, to ensure children's input and interest to complete the survey, a three Likert scale with (*smiley faces*) was utilised. According to Peer, Hakeulder and

Zyngier (2012), researchers often use Likert scales to measure participants' degrees of agreements or disagreements to statements usually measuring participants' way of thinking or feeling about something (attitudes). Henceforth, the researcher appropriately used the (*smiley faces*) in the Likert scale to help children better understand and identify where to put their response by ticking the correct smiley face as an evaluation of their motivation level towards language play teaching approach.

In the formation of children's motivation survey, the researcher used Williams' and Burden's (1997) framework of L2 motivation because; it is one of the classrooms oriented models which originated from the social-constructive viewpoint (Pigott, 2008). The model primarily focuses on the internal and external factors of motivation. Thus, in children's motivation survey the researcher focussed on children's internal motivation factors aroused by language play teaching approach and therefore created the survey based on three internal factors or components in the framework. The survey measured children's "*intrinsic interests of activities*" during playful activities assessed through language skills to assess whether (*children liked: speaking, reading and writing*). Additionally, the survey assessed children's "*attitudes to language learning in general*" by asking them (*if they think learning English is important*). The survey further measured children's language "*mastery: a feeling of competence*" by requesting children to evaluate (*how good they are in English*). The researcher assessed these motivation factors with the assumption that language play teaching approach will enhance children's motivation in every factor at the end of the study. Visit the link below for William's and Burden's motivation framework <https://drive.google.com/open?id=1Wu7xPbKlqCmutJGgWHO2LBcOJhpktBzz>

The present study suitably employed a motivation survey as an instrumental tool to measure the impact of language play teaching approach on children's English language learning motivation. Henceforth, the gathered and analysed motivation data forms part of the intervention outcomes. The researcher primarily selected a survey to collect motivation data owing to children's cognitive ability to critically respond or give detailed responses if the researcher could use other forms of data collection tools. Consequently, the researcher will rely on the gathered and analysed statistical information to provide feedback on children's internal motivation in learning English through playful learning activities.

4.3.2 Teacher's questionnaire

The researcher utilised an open-ended questionnaire to collect and gather qualitative data from the teacher in the experimental group. The questionnaire contained a series of questions which

were deliberately open-ended and structured in a simple format to encourage and aid the teacher to express (Oppenheim, 2004) his/her experiences and opinions regarding language play learning and teaching experiences based on observed and experienced learning and teaching while learning English through playful activities. Visit the link below for the teacher's questionnaire <https://drive.google.com/open?id=1sR0UgPbePvaEDrI73X5urUcqVqjFvzgb>

Consequently, the questionnaire integrated two units: in the first unit, the teacher was requested to write about children's observed learning experiences regarding language play teaching approach on their behalf, since children in the study were not competent to write critical and comprehensive feedback in English. The researcher primarily enquired about the benefits of integrating language play teaching approach in English lessons towards children's second language learning abilities, self-expression skills and language play influences on the learning atmosphere in the classroom. Whereas in the second unit, the researcher requested the teacher to generally write about his/her perceptions and opinions regarding language play teaching approach and to describe any challenges observed or encountered during the experiment and how they were solved. The researcher collected this data was on the 25th of August 2018.

The researcher identified the need for this qualitative data on an effort to interpret and discuss the analysed quantitative data. That is because there were missing data in the first quantitative data. Accordingly, the questionnaire was created based on the quantitative data results to give power, clarity and legitimacy to the ambiguous quantitative data and to generally give strength in this project, particularly on the learning motivation outcomes. Therefore, the overall gained qualitative data from the questionnaire aimed to elaborate and provide missing data in the first quantitative data set.

4.4 Data collection process

In fulfilment of this research project, the researcher agreed with the office of the participant school's principal to collaborate with two grade two teachers, responsible for English second language. After the preparations, the researcher emailed all the developed research instruments (lesson plans, learning materials, class activities, assessments tools and research instruments) to one of the participant teachers a week before the investigation started. The researcher was not at the site during the experimentation process.

Later, the participant teachers arranged the research materials and instruments and assigned them to appropriate research groups. In the present project, children learned four topics (*building materials, public transports, communication and local business*). Each topic lasted

for a week. Therefore, games were visual, audibly and physically created based on the topic, skill and the content in which children were engaged. The researcher developed all the research materials in conformity with the official policies and documents. As a result, all the topics covered in this project were from one theme (*The Social Environment*). The assessment tools used for the pre-test and post-test were administered four times to assess each topic separately for it could be unfavourable to children to complete one assessment tool at once compiled of content from all the four different topics.

Teachers in both groups gave pre-tests each time they started a new topic then every group received different treatment and post-tested at the end of every topic. In brief, each topic or week had its pre-test that was similarly administered for the post-test at the end of the topic. The collection process was equally done for all topics. Children only completed the motivation survey at the beginning and the end of the study in both groups.

Given the accounts above, all the data collection tools, procedures and collection process fit this study. That is because, they enabled the researcher to compare the pre-test and post-test scores in both groups to evaluate the success of the intervention (Gay et al., 2011). Similarly, both quantitative and qualitative results provide empirical evidence on the impact of language play on children's academic achievements, learning motivation and explain language play learning experiences for children and teaching experiences for the teacher concerning English second language learning. Overall, the collected and analysed data enabled the researcher to make conclusions on the outcomes of language play teaching approach on children's English language learning and the explain language play learning and teaching experiences in the junior primary phase. Furthermore, to make recommendations on language play teaching approach regarding children's English second language learning.

4.5. Data analysis

Data collected from the study were quantitatively and qualitatively analysed. The quantitative data gathered through the pre-test and post-test control group design from children's assessment tasks and motivation survey were analysed with the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). However, in the control group, 9 out of 42 children's motivation post-test surveys were rejected because they were incomplete, or children chose multiple answers for a single variable. Therefore, only 33 children's motivation surveys in the control group were counted in the final analysis. Both children's assessment and motivation post-test data were

subjected to normality testing to determine the suitable data analysis test based on the normality results (Field, 2013).

Academic achievements: a visual inspection of the histogram, normal Q-Q plots and box plots showed that children's post-test achievement scores were approximately normally distributed in both groups, with skewness of $-.358$ ($SE=-.365$) and kurtosis of $.310$ ($SE=.717$) for the control group and a skewness of $-.602$ ($SE=-.361$) but kurtotic at 1.513 ($SE=.709$) which however does not differ significantly from normality for the experimental group. No violation of normality was noticed, so, the null hypothesis is rejected. Consequently, it was decided to run an independent T-test to measure the impact of language play teaching approach on children's academic achievements by comparing the group's means.

The independent T-test fit this study because the analysed results enabled the researcher to see and justify that language play teaching approach impacts children's academic achievements based on both group's mean test scores and standard deviation comparisons. Henceforth, the results were used as references to accept and prove the alternative hypothesis (Muijs, 2011). Besides, to avoid bias in the data, the researcher summed each child's scores gained from the four assessment tasks to get an overall score for all children (Creswell, 2008). Then, further computed the overall scores to get and use children's average scores in both group's pre-test and post-test.

Learning motivation: a Shapiro-Wilk's test ($P<.001$) and a visual inspection of the histogram, normal Q-Q plots and box plots showed that children's post-test learning motivation scores were not normally distributed in both groups, with skewness of -1.853 ($SE=.403$) and kurtosis of 3.616 ($SE=.788$) for the control group and a skewness of $-.751$ ($SE=.365$) and kurtosis of $-.447$ ($SE=.717$) for the experiment group. Violation of normality was noticed, so the null hypothesis was accepted. Consequently, the Mann-Whitney U test was run to analyse the data, to test whether both groups have or do not have similar mean scores. Furthermore, since the T-test assumptions were not met (Field, 2013), the researcher computed sum variable scores both for the pre-test and post-test to form one factor or a scale, to reduce bias.

Additionally, to improve the quality and accuracy of numerically gathered data, qualitative data gained from a single participant provided in-depth data missing in the statistical data. The researcher analysed qualitative data by reading the responses and underlining essential units. On the later, the researcher coded the units based on the research questions in the questionnaire and stressed views in the provided literature. The coded units were then described and classified

into themes (Creswell, 2008). Afterwards, the researcher took both the quantitative and qualitative results and separately discussed and presented them.

In the end, quantitative findings were presented in table forms whereas qualitative results were narratively interpreted and discussed on broader meanings concerning language play learning and teaching experiences. Furthermore, qualitative data was interpreted narratively by broadly summarising results from the questionnaire (Creswell, 2008). The researcher generally and in detail discussed the teacher's narrated observations and opinions regarded as children's experiences during language play and the teacher's language play teaching experiences while learning English second language through language play teaching approach.

4.6 Methodological validity and reliability of the research instruments

4.6.1 Validity

According to Kirk and Miller (1986), validity is the ability to measure and produce accurate results. In other words, validity seeks to answer whether the researcher measures what the study intends to measure (Gay et al., 2011). Similarly, validity seeks to answer research questions and produce findings that agree with the research theory (Bourke, Kirby & Doran, 2016). As a result, the researcher used a content validity aspect to demonstrate competence based on the literature review.

In the present study, content validity was connected to the issues discussed with the present literature to confirm that appropriate concepts and aspects are covered. Furthermore, internal validity was controlled through the random assignment of an intervention to one of the research groups and utilising the pre-test and post-test control group design (Gay et al., 2011), hence giving an advantage to both groups. Further, facilitating the researcher to make necessary and practical conclusions from the sample under study to the entire population (Creswell, 2002).

4.6.2 Reliability of the research instruments

Gay et al. (2011) explains reliability regarding dependability and trustworthiness and further describe reliability as the ability of the test to measure the same thing over repeated measures. Thus, to ensure the reliability of each instrument used in this study, all research instruments were moderated by the collaborating teachers for they knew their children's academic abilities and refined by the thesis supervisor. Reliability of each instrument used in this study will be separately discussed.

1) Performance scale

Regarding reliability, the assessment tools were planned and developed in collaboration with the participant teachers and based on the grade 2 ministerial document outlines on English second language learning such as the (the Integrated Manual Plan, English Second Language Syllabus and the Continuous Assessment Record Book) and refined by the thesis supervisor. That is to ensure that the assessment activities match the English language learning objectives and competencies as outlined in the frameworks and to fit children's cognitive ability. Besides, repeated measures were utilised to control external reliability. After the intervention, children's academic achievement scores were subjected to the pre-test and post-test coefficient and yielded .17 which meant that there was no reliable relationship between the pre-test and post-test scores, and thus we accept the null hypothesis (Muijs, 2011).

Nevertheless, in the present study, repeated measures mean that each child's assessment task measured a similar content at the beginning and end of each topic and therefore required similar answers. The process was done over a slightly three days period between pre-testing and post-testing to ensure for a change in the experiment group regarding learning (Muijs, 2011). Repeated measures fit this study because the pre-test mean scores were used to justify and conclude whether the differences found in the post-test mean scores genuinely resulted from language play teaching approach or it have been existing even before the experiment (Muijs, 2011).

2) Motivation scale

Since this instrument had five items on the scale, a reliability test was done to control internal consistency reliability by evaluating how questions on the scale accurately and consistently measure a single construct put as motivation. The reliability test yielded an internal consistency of .804 portraying a statistically reliable and suitable internal consistency value. Additionally, internal consistency was ensured based on the motivation framework used in constructing the survey questions. Moreover, like in the performance scale, repeated measures were utilised in both groups to control external reliability. Hence, after the intervention, children's academic achievement scores were subjected to the pre-test-post-test coefficient and yielded -.12 which meant that there was no reliable relationship between the pre-test and post-test scores, and thus we accept the null hypothesis.

4.7. Ethics of the research methods

Ethics refers to a blueprint of morals which separate the right from the wrong in conducting human research (Resnik, 2011). Accordingly, this study was conducted in consideration of respect for the participants, scientific knowledge and educational research content quality. Therefore, the researcher sought agreements voluntarily from the participants to be part of this study. Participants were informed about the nature, the purpose of the study and their research participation rights. Thus, they knew that they could withdraw from the study anytime they were willing to.

Permission to undertake the study was obtained from the participant school by writing a letter. The researcher further considered anonymity and confidentiality as the core ethical aspects of this study. On anonymity, the researcher did not ask participants to write their names on any of the documents used. Instead, they wrote either control or experiment group or pre-test and post-test. Confidentiality only reserves to protect the research participants identities. Because, Seal, Gubrium and Silverman (2004) explain that privacy is an essential responsibility that every researcher must professionally maintain to avoid any harm.

5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This chapter presents and discusses the study results and findings. The study aimed to examine whether language play has an impact on children's academic achievements, children's learning motivation and describe language play learning and teaching experiences. The interpretations will be discussed in the light or connection with the provided literature review.

5.1 Impacts of language play teaching approach on children's learning outcomes

The study measured the impact of language play teaching approach on children's learning outcomes based on their academic achievements and learning motivation. Thus, the researcher developed sub-research questions to separately measure each learning outcome.

5.1.1 The impact of language play on children's academic achievements

In this study, the first sub-research question addressed the impact of language play teaching approach with planned focus-on-form on grade two children's English language academic achievements regarding their semantic competencies. Thus, to answer this question, children were pre-tested at the beginning of the study and post-tested at the end of the study. The results are presented and discussed as follows:

Children's academic achievements in the group that did not receive the intervention ($M=7.85$, $SD= 1.46$) are lower than in the group that received the intervention ($M=9.86$, $SD=1.78$). Before the intervention, children's academic achievements in English learning in the experiment group were already higher than in the control group. After intervention the situation changed: children in the experiment group have increased academic achievements whereas children's academic achievements in the control group did not change (see table 1).

Table 1. Descriptive results of second grader's academic achievements

Group Statistics					
Intervention (Language-play)		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pre-test	Control Group	42	7.83	1.80672	.27878
	Experiment Group	43	8.88	1.56158	.23814
Post-test	Control Group	42	7.85	1.45789	.22496
	Experiment Group	43	9.86	1.78060	.27154

The mean difference between the experimental and control group concerning children's academic achievements at the end of the study was significantly higher for the experimental group than for the control group: $t(83) = -5.67$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.7$ (see table 2).

Table 2. Second graders’ academic achievements after the intervention in the control and experiment group

		F	Sig.	t	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)
post-test	Equal variances assumed	.166	.685	-5.668	83	.000
	Equal variances not assumed			-5.681	80.562	.000

The overall impact of language play on children’s academic achievements can be attributed to the notion that language play helps and boosts children’s memory recall ability by providing them with enjoyable and hilarious learning opportunities. This notion and findings generally correlate with Gholami and Gholizadeh (2015); Bell (2012)’s study findings and explanation that language play provides children with fun and social learning opportunities which hence forms a basis for children’s language learning. Correspondingly, Sevy-Biloon (2016) finds that language play enables children to retain learned items better because during playful activities children get opportunities to practice and relate the learned content to their real-life experiences depending on the nature of the game. As a result, children better internalise contextually based material and remember it better in the future.

Another support comes from Wood (2013) who argues that language play enhances children’s memory recall ability for learning activities actively engage children in constructing knowledge which improves their comprehension level and children usually remember things in which they were involved. Additionally, Lantz-Andersson (2018); Wood (2013) content that language play enables children to partake in a range of social interactions. On the same vein, Bell (2012); Davison (2010); Onchwari, Onchwari and Keengwe (2008); Mitchel and Myles, (2004) argue that language learning is social and hence children’s social interactions during playful activities constitute learning.

For instance, in the following selected lessons from each week: in week 1 “*building materials*” children played a *memory game* in groups of fives. The semantic focus was based on children’s ability to match pictures to their appropriate action verb words. Hence, children were expected to look at the pictures which were presented with their action verbs (words). Later the words were removed and reshuffled then children were given the same pictures and asked to pick the right action verb (word) that defines what is happening in the picture. In week 2 “*public transports*” the semantic focus skill was based on children’s comprehension ability to re-tell parts of a story and debate about the story by answering questions from the story or asking questions based on the story. The story was about Dog, Donkey and Goat who took a taxi to town and separately encountered challenges with the taxi driver regarding their taxi tariffs.

In week 3 “*communication*” children were expected to demonstrate and apply their semantic skills through *role-playing*. The role-play activity was based on this scenario: *The mother wants to go to town, but she cannot find a taxi. Thus, the mother requested one of her children to call a taxi to pick her up at her house.* In this scenario; children were expected to be able to call the taxi, politely introduce themselves and explain the reason for calling. On possibility, children were required to give directions to their house. The direction should be simple such as just telling the location. Whereas in week 4 “*local businesses*” the semantic focus was based on children’s ability to name items or objects. In this activity, children were presented with many pictures on a poster, and in a group of fives, children were expected to come up with a shopping list by taking and writing names of some items or objects displayed in the poster.

Unfortunately, children’s conversations during these cooperative, discursive and role-playing activities were not recorded. Therefore, there is no real evidence on how children’s language emerged and used during these learning activities. However, the nature of the activities above link to the sociocultural view that language learning occurs in cultural contexts and is mediated through language or other cultural tools (Davidson, 2010; Mitchel & Myles, 2004). For example, in the lessons provided above children used or at some points relied on pictures, physical objects like materials and models used in role-playing to signify different characters and mimic their roles as they occur in real-life experiences. Hence, the pictures and diverse learning materials and models used were regarded as cultural tools which served as tools for thinking, and children, therefore, used language to facilitate their conversations and boost their understanding (Vygotsky, 1978).

The description above similarly collaborates with Bell (2012)’s conception that during playful activities children use language tools to regulate their thinking when they partake in a range of collaborative activities. Furthermore, during collaborative learning activities such in this study memory games and discussions children get opportunities to distinguish what they can do from what they cannot do. That is discovered based on children’s ability to solve presented learning tasks. For instance, some children recognise their or others inability to solve specific problems like matching words to correct pictures, filling in correct missing letters or answering questions. Thus, in the present study, it can be argued that the expert child or teacher helped such children to achieve the desired learning outcomes because children’s academic achievements in the post-test scores have significantly improved. This finding correlates with Lantolf (2000)’s emphasis that mediation develops at children’s zone of proximal development position which is explained in Vygotsky (1978)’s work as the difference between what children can achieve

on their own and when offered help or support from their peers or teacher. This description and further received support from Smidt (2009) that the help or support offered to incompetent children must move them from the performance level to the potential level.

Moreover, it can be argued that the provided children's discursive learning activities and games enabled children to improve their language and literacy skills. This argument correlates with Spies and Xu (2018)'s explanation that playful activities such as discursive and games engage children in free talks (social interaction) similarly regarded as academic talk in which children use the language to interact with others and the teacher to construct their content knowledge and extend their subject understanding. Thus, in discursive and game-based learning activities children develop their oral language skills and use them to regulate their cognition ability and it is established that children with high oral language skills outperform children with low oral language skills (Spies & Xu, 2018). The conception received further support from Zwiers and Crawford (2011) who posits that discursive and game-based learning activities cause children to replicate or rehearse ideas which benefit children's memory and writing skills and enhances children's critical thinking abilities through self-or inner talk. On a similar vein, Bell (2012) viewed language play in the form of private speech that works as a rehearsal to enable children to develop their language. Henceforth, in the manipulation of the language forms and meanings and some children grasp the new linguistic meanings and internalise them.

Children's improved academic achievements can be further attributed to the significance of role-playing in children's language learning and claim that children equally got opportunities to contextually apply the learned content which enhanced their semantic competencies because the activities were goal-oriented. This argument links with Spies and Xu (2018)'s description that in the academic talk, children talk about and practice what they have learned to comprehend the content better. For instance, the role-play scenario above enabled children to practice and contextually apply the learned content by selecting and being able to appropriately use words to act their roles which consequently enhanced children's comprehension level and ability to recall learned items in the future. On the same vein, role-plays are associated with repetitions which make role-plays humorous and enjoyable for children (Bell, 2012). This notion received support from Lantz-Andersson (2018); Bell et al. (2014) who clarifies that children's repetitions in role-play activities occur as a trial and error benchmark towards the development of children's pragmatic skills.

For example, in the given role-play scenario children might not know certain words or how to use some words to express their ideas and feelings. Then, through language play other children or the teacher comment on such errors by suggesting appropriate words in a feedback form. Hence, in such contexts, the use of varied linguistic repertoires acquaints children to the language use and structure and some children will start to master some linguistic aspects and prompt them to semantically use the language for different purposes (Lantz-Andersson, 2018). Additionally, the fun and enjoyment embedded in role-playing enabled children to enhance their semantic ability and remember the learned content. This opinion is confirmed by Gholami and Gholizadeh (2015) who find that children better recall subject contents which are learned through humour.

5.1.2 The impact of language play on children’s learning motivation

The second sub-research question considered the impact of language play teaching approach on children’s motivation toward learning English as a second language. Similar to answering the impact of language play teaching approach on the academic achievements, children were pre-tested at the beginning of the study and post-tested at the end of the study.

Childrens’ learning motivation in the group that did not receive the intervention ($M=2.47$, $SD=.582$) is lower than in the group that received the intervention ($M=2.51$, $SD=.440$). Before the intervention, children’s motivation towards English learning was lower than in the control group, after the intervention, the situation was vice versa: children in the experimental group had better motivation than children in the control group (see table 3).

Table 3. Descriptive results of the second graders’ learning motivation

Group Statistics					
	Motivation	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pre-test	control group	42	2.5857	.41057	.06335
	Experiment group	41	2.4293	.55238	.08627
Post-test	control group	33	2.4667	.58238	.10138
	Experiment group	42	2.5143	.43983	.06787

The mean difference scores concerning children’s learning motivation was greater for the experimental group ($Mdn = 11.5$) than for the control group ($Mdn = 10.6$), $U = 685,0$ $p = .931$, $r = .10$ (see table 4).

Table 4. Second graders English learning motivation before and after the intervention in the control and experimental group

Test Statistics		
	Pre-test	Post-test
Mann-Whitney U	734.500	685.000
Wilcoxon W	1595.500	1588.000
Z	-1.169	-.087
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.242	.931
a. Grouping Variable: motivation		

The findings can be credited to the fact that language play provides children with fun, authentic and pleasing learning environments which correlate with Sevy-Biloon (2016); Gholami and Gholizadeh (2015); Mubaslat (2012)'s work and description that fun, authentic and enjoyable learning environments contribute to children's increased learning motivation. Additionally, based on children's academic achievements as discussed earlier, this study confirms Ordem (2017); Wei (2016); Wadho, Memon and Memon (2016); Piniel and Csizér (2013)'s study findings that highly motivated children accomplish high academic scores contrary to children with low motivational levels. In this study, the results showed that children in the experiment group outperformed those in the control group concerning children's academic achievements, similiary children in the experimental group were more motivated in learning English than those in the control group.

The ability of highly motivated students to attain higher academic achievements as established in the present study associates with Lasagabaster, Doiz and Sierra (2014)'s clarification that motivated children gain ownership of their language learning which therefore positively impact their cognitive process and performances and generally enhances learning. On a similar note, Cave, Evans, Dewey and Hartshorn (2017)'s study explained that sustained or the amount of intrinsic motivation empowers children with a positive cognitive state to realise the anticipated learning objectives.

Generally, the impact on language play on children's learning motivation associated with the interpretation of Guerid (2015) who argues that intrinsically motivated children became eager and prepared to learn the language in the motive of gratification or achieving learning tasks. Accordingly, children's desire to accomplish learning tasks sustains their learning motivation and alternatively their attention span. The clarification received support from Sevy-Biloon (2016) who explained that language play or playful learning activities stimulate children's motivation due to it is competitive nature. Thus, children become motivated and interested in learning the language in fulfilment of completing learning tasks to win.

5.2 Children’s language play learning experiences and the teacher’s language play teaching experiences

The third research question was concerned with the participant’s experiences during and towards language play. Hence, to answer this question the teacher in the experimental group was requested to complete an open-ended questionnaire after the intervention. In analysing the questionnaire, the researcher came up with two themes: children’s observed language play learning experiences and the teacher’s language play teaching experiences and their categories based on the questions in the questionnaire (see the table below for the results).

Table: 5. Research results of children’s observed language play learning experiences and the teacher’s language play teaching experiences

Themes	Categories
Children’s observed language play learning experiences	<p>1. Learning atmosphere</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ “children were ACTIVE” ◦ “children FOCUS more on activities” ◦ High participation in classroom ◦ Enjoyment <p>2. Self-expression</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ children were FREE to express themselves ◦ Reason based on what was learned in the classroom <p>3. Cognitive ability</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ children recalled learned items ◦ Enhanced vocabulary
Teacher’s language play teaching experiences	<p>1. Perception of language play</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ “ACTIVATES children’s LEARNING.” ◦ “FULL participation.” ◦ Teacher can “MEET basic COMPETENCIES and learning OBJECTIVES.” <p>2. Challenges</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Not inclusive ◦ Insufficient learning materials / resources at school (printing papers, cartilage) <p>3. Solution</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ SOME children played games INFRONT of the classroom while others are WATCHING

5.2.1 Children's observed language play learning experiences

The teacher observed that integrating language play in children's English learning classroom creates a positive learning atmosphere, for children became more active when playful activities were introduced. Such as by concentrating on and completing their learning activities and tasks.

It was further identified that language play increases children's participation level in the lessons which is attributed to the reason that language play provides children with enjoyable learning experiences. For instance, the teacher wrote: "*Most of the learners were active during the English lesson. The participation level was high, and everyone would want to play games*"...

The findings above on students revealed positive attitudes correlates with the conclusion in the studies of Lantz-Andersson (2018); Al-Bulushi and Al-Issa (2017); Gholami and Gholizadeh (2015); Bell, Skalicky and Salsbury (2014) that students who learned English through playful activities reveal positive attitudes towards language play. Further support came from Gholami and Gholizadeh (2015) who attributed students positive attitudes to the shown interests towards language play and their enjoyment level during playful activities.

Furthermore, children's observed active participation relates to Mubaslat (2012)'s notion that language play gives children autonomy in learning settings which boosts their self-confidence and enable them to actively and independently participate in their learning tasks and process. The association further extends to Lantz-Andersson (2018); Bell et al. (2014); Bell (2012)'s views that children's interests and enjoyment rate during playful activities result from humour which is embedded in game-oriented activities. Thus, humorous learning activities such in the present enabled through playful activities boosts children's confidence which enables them to engage and join in a range of shared learning activities (Gholami & Gholizadeh, 2015; Bell et al., 2014), which therefore help maintain their concentration level in lessons.

On top of that, the teacher observed that language play improved children's self-expression and reasoning skills for during playful activities children could freely express themselves and reason based the learned on scientific knowledge or content. For instance, the teacher wrote: "*Learners were freer to express themselves when asked the questions and they could give examples according to what they have watched...*"

In the case above, children's enhanced self-expression and reasoning skills show a relationship with Isenberg and Jalongo (1997)'s viewpoint that through playing with the language, children refine their social and language skills. It as well associates with Vygotsky (1978)'s view on the

role of imagination in playing, such that in playful activities children assign themselves varied roles. For example, in this study children got different roles during role-playing. The roles then empower children to pretend and act in different expressions and behaviours which give them freedom of expression through fantasy. Additionally, the results link with Sevy-Biloon (2016); Gholami and Gholizadeh (2015) explanation that language play reduces children's learning anxieties which consequently empowers them to speak comfortably to practice and apply the learned content. In a similar vein, Gholami and Gholizadeh (2015); Bell et al. (2014) conclude that humorous (playful) learning activities boost children's confidence and children, therefore, become excited to express themselves to share their opinions and views on the learned content or topic under discussion.

The teacher additionally identified that language play improved children's comprehension ability and further enabled children to learn language grammar. For example, the teacher narrated:*" they always improve after playing/teaching activities. Most of them remembered what they did when they were answering the questions. They learned many words either by reading or spelling them "...*

In the agreement, children's enhanced cognitive ability can be attributed to Bell (2012)'s explanation that language play helps children to remember the learned items better because it regularly exposes children to the language. Language exposure enables children to concentrate on language use and how to apply it contextually (Saracho, 2013). Additionally, these findings links with Zwiers and Crawford (2011)'s work which posits that language play enables children to recall learned items better for they practice the learned content through the repetitions which occur during playful activities. Accordingly, children internalise several content and meanings as they emerge during the practices and repetitions which consequently aid children's memory recall on the later phases (Sevy-Biloon, 2016).

Furthermore, children's enhanced vocabulary outcomes correlate with Sevy-Biloon (2016); Gholami and Gholizadeh (2015)'s interpretation that language play enables children to learn the language grammar. That is because, language play allows children to express their ideas, emotions and feelings on several topics (Wood, 2013). Consequently, children will need to use the language to narrate their intentions and should, therefore, know some vocabularies to send out meaningful messages.

5.2.2 Teacher's language play teaching experiences

The teacher reveals a positive attitude towards language play teaching approach even though there is little integration of language play in the Namibian Grade 2 English Curriculum. Accordingly, the teacher recommends language play teaching approach to be primarily used to teach English to children opposed to the teaching approaches the teacher usually employ. That is because the teacher argued language play to benefit children's English language learning in diverse ways. For instance, it aids the teacher to cover English language learning objectives and basic competencies. The teacher responds: *"I am recommending language to be used as a second language pedagogical approach because it is an approach that activates learners learning..... since learners are learning through playing, both basic competencies and learning objectives will be met"*

The teacher's demonstrated a positive attitude towards language play teaching approach is supported in Al-Bulushi & Al-Issa (2017)'s work that teachers in the experiment group show positive attitudes towards the intervention. Even though the same literature identified that the amount of play integration in the curriculum impact the teacher's interest level towards the intervention, it is rejected in this study. Implying that, regardless of how little play is integrated into the Namibian Grade 2 English Curriculum, the teacher revealed a strong positive attitude towards language play teaching approach and thus recommend it to be used by other teachers.

Furthermore, the results revealed that language play helped the teacher to meet English learning objectives and basic competencies. This finding links with Sevy-Biloon (2016)'s viewpoint that language play enables teachers to integrate the English language skills and teach them in a single lesson. Hence, through language play, the teacher can integrate other forms of language skills in a single lesson which will make it easier to plan the learning activities and for children to learn the language in a comprehensive manner.

However, the teacher encountered some challenges during the intervention and only managed to solve one challenge. The challenges are linked with insufficient learning resources, and that the teaching approach does not adequately accommodate all children's learning needs and styles. In the present study, the teacher could only resolve or address the insufficient learning materials challenge by asking some children to demonstrate certain playful learning activities in front of the classroom while other children were watching.

The teacher wrote: *"I have encountered challenges like with learners with reading difficulties were finding it difficult to play some games because they do not know how to read... Game*

materials were not enough for each group in the class, so I have to make them play in front of the class while others are watching”.

The issue of identifying and resolving challenges encountered during lessons or in classrooms correlates with Guerid (2015)'s recommendation that teachers must be able to identify any learning difficulties or challenges during learning situations and resolve them. As a result, that was similarly applied in the present study even though the teacher did not manage to resolve all the challenges encountered during the intervention. Moreover, the teacher revealed that the playful activities did not accommodate children with learning difficulties which reject Sevy-Biloon (2016); Sigurðardóttir (2010)'s description that the adaptive nature embedded in playful activities enables teachers to accommodate children's diverse learning needs and styles at a time to encourage learning.

Furthermore, it is also revealed that the learning resources or materials were not sufficient for all children. Hence some children participated in the learning activities while some did not. The results oppose Ordem (2017); Hong and Ganapathy (2017) Wadho et al (2016); Wei (2016); Guerid (2015); Piniel and Csizér (2013)'s recommendation for teachers to provide enough learning resources in playful learning environments for they enable children to engage and create their learning in a shared or interactive manner which consequently helps children to learn English with a sustained motivation. Thus, the insufficient learning materials might have impacted children's learning motivation and their social interactions skills enhancement because children who did not participate in the learning activities do not have a real sense of how it feels to play the activities or experience the language that could have emerged during playing games together.

6. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Conclusion

Based on both sets of findings for this study, there is extensive evidence to conclude that language play teaching approach positively impact children's academic achievements and their learning motivation towards learning English second language in the Namibian junior primary phase irrespective of several missing data for children's learning motivation in the control group. The outcomes demonstrate that language play teaching approach aids second graders with incompetent English language skills to learn meanings of English words and later recall them better. Thus, language play teaching approach can be employed as a refreshing teaching approach in the junior primary phase to enable children to learn English with comprehension and achieve better academic achievements in the future. That is because, laying a strong foundation or developing children's language skills mainly oral language skills in junior primary phase will prepare children to cope with English challenges in the subsequent phases, mainly when English converts into a medium of instruction.

Furthermore, language play teaching approach can be integrated into English second language learning classrooms in Namibia for it provides children with social interaction opportunities which enable children to collaborate in varied learning activities and allow children to learn from each through feedback forms. Hence, social interactions empower children to express themselves which contributes to their content comprehension and mainly serve as a pre-request for children to learn English words by communicating with other children for different purposes. Additionally, language play teaching approach act as an essential tool of initiating children to practice and contextually apply learned content in meaningful contexts to develop their oral language skills. In essence, language play teaching approach promotes learning and children seem to learn English better and naturally through playing with different linguistic aspects.

In the same vein, language play teaching approach presents children with fun and enjoyable learning activities and environments which improves children's semantic abilities and memory recall. Besides, the study findings show that language play helps children eliminate their anxieties towards learning English, which therefore motivates children to learn the language and uphold their learning motivation during lessons. Children's enhanced learning motivation empowers them to engage and freely participate in numerous social interactions to express their ideas, feelings and emotions on the subject content. Teaching approaches which give children

opportunities to express themselves like language play are significantly needed in Namibian English second language learning classrooms to allow children to learn and practice good or standard English and prevent children from learning regularly used Namibian English.

In addition, language play is a form of a teaching approach that enables the teacher to integrate different English language skills in a lesson which thus enables the teacher to meet English basic competencies and learning objectives. Integrating language skills in one lesson is vitally needed in the Namibian context because there are usually overcrowded classrooms and it is challenging to comply with different ministerial policy sanctions that require every language skill to be directly taught. Moreover, language play teaching approach provides children with several language learning activities which radically enhances children's vocabularies through the experimentation of solving several learning tasks. In replication, language play teaching approach can be concluded as a form teaching approach that may be employed to teach English as the second language to children with incompetent skills because it activates children prior knowledge which makes it easy for learning when children start to learn from what they already know.

The study was achieved through a pre-test and post-test control group design by measuring the impacts of language play on children's academic achievements and their learning motivation outcomes. Additionally, the study sought to assess children's learning experiences towards language play, and the teacher's teaching experiences and views on teaching English through language play and this data were gathered through a teacher's questionnaire only administered in the experimental group.

6.2 Recommendations for future research

The following recommendations are made based on the conclusions above and lessons learned in conducting this research project. There is a need for future research which will integrate language play with the communicative teaching approach, and the researcher should video or audio record children's interactions as they emerge during the intervention. That is because, in the current study, the researcher focused more on the impacts of language play on children's learning outcomes and neglected to capture how children used the language in playful activities or the social interactions emerged in games, discussions and role-playing.

The researcher will recommend that the future research on the same topic or intending to use a similar research design must use more than one experimental group. To give a clearer picture on the impact of language play on children's academic achievements and learning motivation

level from different classes contrary to using a single group and generalise the results to the entire junior primary phase. In addition, the researcher should collect language learning experiences both for children and the teacher in both groups. That is because this study only concentrated on the experimental group and thus there is no evidence on how the participants in the control group experienced the intervention. There is additionally a need for the future researcher to directly collect children's language play learning experiences by using different data collection tools instead of just relying on the teacher's written observations on behalf of children.

Furthermore, a longitudinal study on the same topic is recommended especially on children's learning motivation. There is a need for future research to use scientifically proven assessment tools and motivation questionnaire. For the research instruments used in this study contained many errors identified at the end of the intervention which could impact children's intervention outcomes. Moreover, future researchers must pilot their research instruments before the intervention. That is because even though the pre-test scores were regarded as part of piloting in this study, it was difficult to change any mistake in the instruments for they needed to be similar in the pre-test and post-test phase. It is again recommended that future researchers can search for funds to prevent the shortage of learning materials or request the government to intervene and meet them halfway by providing some financial aids or learning resources.

The researcher equally recommends for a study in the same line which will measure the impact of language play on children with learning difficulties. That is because these children were not fully accommodated in the present study even though the literature highlights that language play teaching approach accommodates children's different learning needs. Henceforth, that called for another study that will prove or reject the impact of language play on children with learning difficulties' English learning outcomes. In addition, a similar study is needed to assess the impact of language play towards the development of children's syntactic skills. Because based on children's writing skills in the present study most children misspelt words which at some points gave different meanings or nonsense words.

Accordingly, a study of that nature will be significant in Namibia for syntactic competencies are essential in children's second language learning and need to be laid at the junior primary phase. That is because even if children know the meaning of words misspelling them can result in a different connotation which will have a negative impact on their academic performances in the future or subsequent phases. Henceforth, that will contribute to failure and delays in the

subsequent phases because the English status in Namibia is challenging to the extent of it being a promotional subject in senior grades and as a prerequisite to enter tertiary institutions.

6.3 Limitations of the study

Like other studies, this study had some limitations such that children's motivation missing data in the control group made it challenge for the researcher to thoroughly conclude the impact of language play teaching approach on children's learning motivation and compare the results between the two groups. Another restraint was attributed to insufficient resources at the school due to the lack of cartilage to print papers for children as planned. Consequently, all children could not participate in the playful learning activities which possibly influenced children's intervention outcomes.

Moreover, there is little room for play in the Namibian grade 2 English language Curriculum. Therefore, it was challenging for the researcher to develop all learning activities in playful forms for the learning content sound too academic and quite a lot. Accordingly, some learning activities used during the intervention were not playful at all. Additionally, the learning objectives and basic competencies in the Curriculum are more focused and directed towards collecting formal assessments which thus made some learning activities non-playful and more academic.

Furthermore, this study aimed to focus on children with little, poor or lack of English language exposure preferably in rural schools. However, due to the study requirements and arrangements for conducting this project and rural school was not utilised. So, the researcher voluntarily selected children from an inner city. Therefore, it is possible that most of these children hear English their streets or in school because the school is multilingual.

Lastly, the researcher was not present at the site during the intervention and similarly failed to record the intervention experiences. Henceforth in that context, there is no evidence of whether children's medium of instruction or local languages interfered during the intervention to boost their understanding instead of using English as the targeted language.

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