

# The Attitude of Grade 12 Learners towards Schoolwork in the Zambezi Region, Namibia

C. Chata<sup>1\*</sup>, B. Kangumu<sup>2</sup>, J. Abah<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Educational Psychology and Inclusive Education, Faculty of Education, University of Namibia, Katima Mulilo Campus, Private Bag, 1096, Katima Mulilo, Namibia

<sup>2</sup>Office of the Assistant Pro-Vice Chancellor, University of Namibia, Katima Mulilo Campus, Private Bag, 1096, Katima Mulilo, Namibia

<sup>3</sup>Department of Mathematics, Science and Sport Education, Faculty of Education, University of Namibia, Katima Mulilo Campus, Private Bag, 1096, Katima Mulilo, Namibia

Email: \*cchata@unam.na

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## Abstract

The attitudes that learners hold towards schoolwork more often than not influence their intentional behaviors and commitment towards their studies. The main aim of the study was to survey and establish the attitudes that Grade 12 learners had towards schoolwork in the Zambezi region of Namibia. The study followed quantitative research design and used structured survey questionnaires to collect data on the learners' general attitudes towards their schoolwork. A sample of 750 learners from the twelfth grade made up of 420 male and 330 female learners were randomly selected from nine out of eleven senior secondary schools in the region to participate in the study. The study found that learners had diverse preferences for doing revision of schoolwork after completing the syllabi. While a high percentage prefers teachers' revisions of the completed schoolwork, others prefer to read on their own before examinations. A good number of the participants indicated that they did not jot down main points when their teachers were teaching. Instead, they listened and waited for the teachers to give notes at the end of the class. Many learners also indicated that they rarely asked or answered questions in class due to shyness. Some learners showed that they did not like to set target of performances in assignment, test or examination for themselves. It was also found that whenever the learners would be absent from school, a good number of them did not inform the class teachers. They rather informed only their friends or nobody at all. Generally, the analysis of variance of the learners' responses differed statistically ( $p < 0.05$ ). The study strongly recommends robust school guidance and counselling programs that would help learners to develop hardworking attitudes towards schoolwork in the study area.

## Keywords

Academic Performance, Learners' Attitudes, Schoolwork, Namibia

## 1. Introduction

By way of definition, an attitude may be viewed as an emotional disposition of an individual which influences his or her behavioral intention as well as the commitment towards a given phenomenon. The construct of attitude toward school was defined by Lewy (1986) as being the subject's behaviors, their feelings or expressions related to affection and judgments, favourable or unfavourable, for the school and school experiences. Mensah et al. (2013) postulate that attitudes encompass emotions, beliefs, values and behaviors and hence affect individual's way of thinking and behaving. This has a lot of implications to teaching and learning discourses. Attitudes have a strong effect on behaviors and help in understanding and predicting peoples' actions in a wide range of contexts. Although not directly observable, attitudes are inferred from observable responses and behaviours which reflect a pattern of beliefs and emotions (Langat, 2015). A person's behaviours and choices when confronted with tasks are mostly determined by his beliefs and personal experiences rather than by his knowledge of specific tasks (Philippou & Christou, 1998).

Variables such as extensive issue-relevant thinking (Petty et al., 1995; Mackie, 1987), heritable component (Tesser, 1993), as well as consistent and organized belief structures (Chaiken, 1995) have variously been reported to shape individual's attitudes and behaviours. In fact, it is now accepted that influential processes on attitudes involve complex processes and complex effects (Petty & Wegener, 1998). A wide variety of variables can influence the development of different attitudes among learners. As noted in the literature, the way learners perceive and evaluate their acquaintance with any kind of knowledge is very important in their learning process (Bloom, 1976). Learners' motivation and achievements are positively affected when they are required to learn familiar concepts or issues from their previous studies which they feel confident enough to explain (Hofstein & Mamlok-Naaman, 2011). For example, it is assumed that learners who are interested in science and understand the scientific concepts will have more positive attitudes towards science and science studies compared to those who have learning difficulties in the science disciplines (Hofstein & Mamlok-Naaman, 2011). Undoubtedly, the influence of the processes of learning and applying the knowledge to help learners perform in examinations and progress in their education may be a determining factor in positive attitude formation among learners. Research regarding the influence of processes on attitudes indicates that strong attitudes are more stable over time and have a larger impact on behaviours compared to weak attitudes (Krosnick & Petty, 1995). Thus, where such strong attitudes are on the negative side, they could seriously affect learners'

performances in their school subjects. Strong attitudes can be identified by their extremity (Abelson, 1972), accessibility (Fazio, 1995), and the confidence of the attitude-holders (Gross et al., 1995).

Even though previous studies found a positive relationship among learners' interest in academic subjects, their performances, classroom environment and existing knowledge on a particular subject also played major roles in learners' attitudes and study habits (Abdullah et al., 2006; Zainudin et al., 2007; Rhoda et al., 2011). In several instances, learners who have negative attitudes towards education activities are found to exhibit challenging behaviours including anti-social and off-task behaviours (Awang et al., 2013). Popham (2005) stated that learners' attitudes or interests should be enormously important to educators, because affective dispositions were powerful predictors of learners' subsequent behaviours and hence, their academic performances. Learner's academic performance occupies a very important place in education as well as in the learning process (Mendezabal, 2013).

The constant poor performance of learners in the twelfth grade in the Namibia Senior Secondary Certificate (NSSC) ordinary level examinations in the Zambezi region of Namibia has caused public concerns. Namibia as a country has fourteen educational regions which are always ranked yearly in terms of their educational prowess on the basis of Grade 12 learners' academic performances in the NSSC ordinary level examinations. Within the current decade, records of the Zambezi educational region's ranking obtained at the regional directorate of education revealed that the region received its best ranking in 2012 where it occupied the fourth position among the fourteen educational regions. From 2013 to 2017 (the most recent available data), however, the region has remained in the thirteenth (2013) and fourteenth (2014 to 2017) ranked positions. This is really worrisome. Thus, as a part of the region-wide study to establish the factors responsible for the continued poor performances of learners in NSSC ordinary level in the Zambezi region, it was therefore the objective of this study to explore the attitudes of Grade 12 learners towards schoolwork in the region. The supposition was that the findings of the study would greatly provide educators, especially school teachers, with relevant information on the learners' attitude towards schoolwork and hence enable them (educators) to develop appropriate learners' support mechanisms.

## 2. Methodology

### 2.1. Research Design

This study engaged a quantitative research design approach using structured survey questionnaires to collect data on the attitudes towards schoolwork among Grade 12 learners in the Zambezi region of Namibia. The questionnaires items comprised of wide issues related to learners' attitudes development towards schoolwork as observed from both literature and the researchers' experiences in dealing with learners.

## 2.2. Sample of the Study

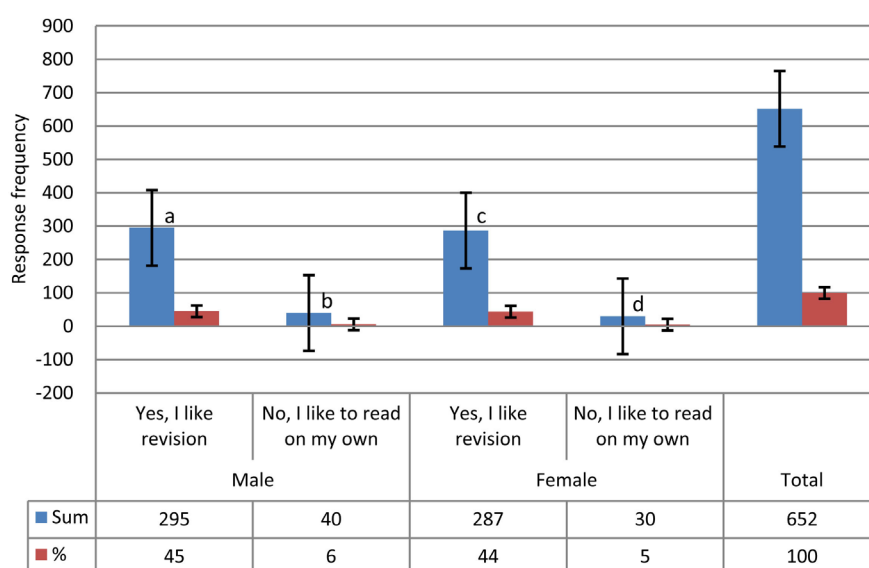
The sample consists of 750 learners who were in Grade 12 at the time of this study. The aforementioned figure was made up of 420 male and 330 female learners selected from nine out of eleven senior secondary schools in the region. A simple random sampling technique was used to select the participants. The sample size was arrived at based on the criteria of sampling two-third of all current Grade 12 learners in at least, 80% of the senior secondary schools in the study area. The wide sample coverage was intended to have a satisfactory representation based on which informed decision on the research findings could be made about the current Grade 12 learners' attitudes towards schoolwork in the study area.

## 2.3. Data Analysis

Descriptive statistic was used to compute the sum and percentage of learners' response frequencies and the results were presented using bar and line graphs. Furthermore, Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used to assess the significance difference ( $p < 0.05$ ) between the participants' overall responses to the questionnaire items.

## 3. Results and Discussion

The results in **Figure 1** below show the overall distribution of the learners' preferences for revision before examination. The participants' ( $n = 652$ ) responses revealed that more learners (45% male and 44% female) indicated that they like to do revision before the examinations while fewer learners (6% male and 5% female) signposted that they preferred to read on their own before examination



**Figure 1.** Overall distribution of learners' preference for class works revision before examination after completing syllabus ( $n = 652$ ). Anova of bars with different alphabets are statistically significant ( $p < 0.05$ ).

after completing the syllabus. The analysis of variance of the learners' responses differed statistically ( $p = 3.32 \times 10^{-20}$ ) at  $p < 0.05$ . Generally, it is widely acknowledged that revision of academic work done before examinations is an important step towards learners' preparedness for a successful examination. In the case of the NSSC ordinary level examinations where the questions are set by external bodies, a good class work revision will greatly guide the learners to focus on the critical components of the lessons which, with little extra efforts, could aid good academic performance.

It is argued that not all learners are ready to receive what teachers have to offer or to learn at the same pace as their classmates (Education World, 2013). The assumption is, improving educational outcomes require efforts on many fronts that include helping learners to better regulate their learning through the use of effective learning techniques (Dunlosky et al., 2013). A good class work revision by the teacher is thus considered to be one of effective learning techniques which prepare the learners better to make the best of their time investment in studies.

Figure 2 below shows the overall distribution of the learners' communication when absent from school. The participants' ( $n = 729$ ) responses depicted that more learners (34% male and 31% female) indicated to always inform their class teachers whenever they will be absent from school. The result further showed that 5% male and 4% female indicated that they only inform their friends when they will be absent from school, 10% male and 10% female indicated that they sometimes inform their teachers of their absence from school while 4% male and 2% stated that they do not inform anybody of their absence from school. The analysis of variance of the learners' responses differed statistically ( $p = 3.32 \times 10^{-20}$ ) at  $p < 0.05$ . The highly diversified responses provided here suggest that majority of the learners in the sampled schools may not attach any bad feeling towards absence from school. Such learners' attitude may impact negatively on the teacher's performance rating which could demoralize the teacher. In general, learners' absenteeism and the attendant effects on academic performance constitute a major concern for all stakeholders in education.

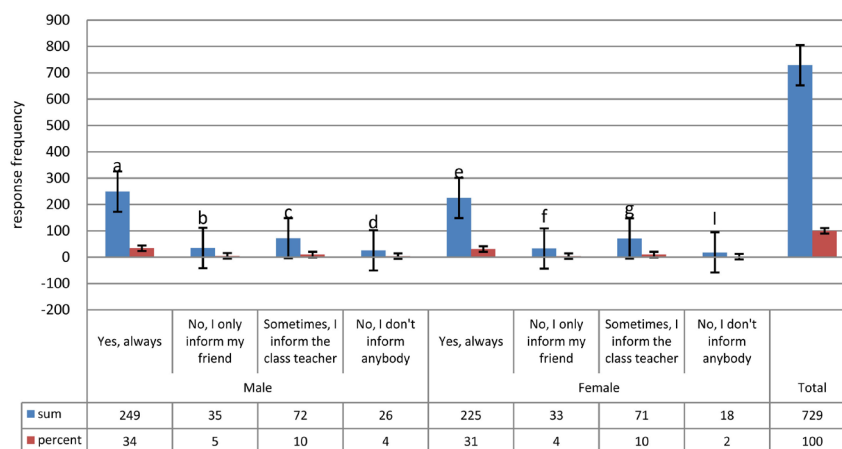
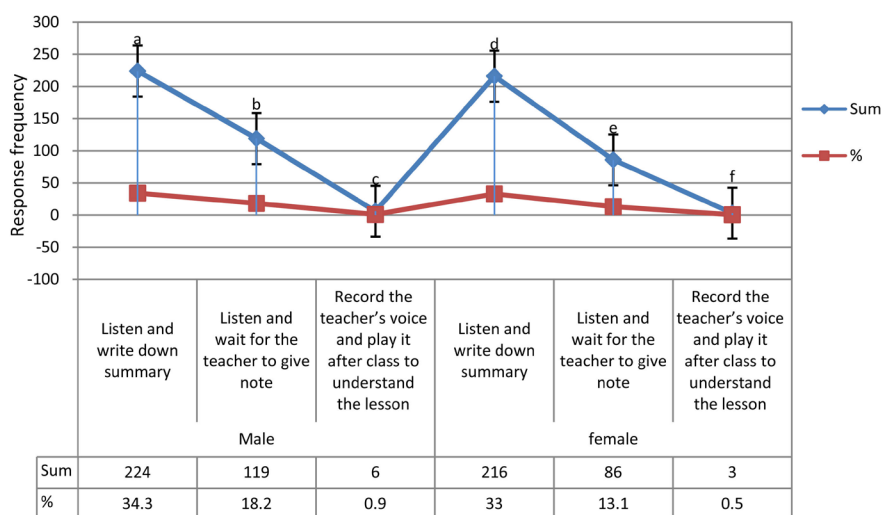


Figure 2. Overall distribution of learners' communication when absent from school ( $n = 729$ ). Anova of bars with different alphabets are statistically significant ( $p < 0.05$ ).

It is widely believed in academia that consistent class attendance is a key factor in the academic success of learners (Haque, 2012). Several authors have reported that in education, class attendance has significant impact on how the learners perform and succeed in their class and in their studies as a whole (Park & Kerr, 1990; Romer, 1993; Devadoss & Foltz, 1996; Brocato, 1989; Moore, 2005). Aden et al. (2013) noted that it would rather be very difficult (if not impossible) for teachers and learners to develop skills and make progress if large numbers of learners are frequently absent. Learners' absenteeism is really a big problem especially for teachers who have high workload and may not be able to always repeat the lessons missed in order to carry every learner along. Absenteeism becomes more problematic when it involves weak learners who need extra effort and reading time to catch up with the lesson taught.

Figure 3 below displays the overall distribution of the learners' preference for jotting down points when teachers are teaching. As reflected by the responses of the participants ( $n = 654$ ), more learners (34.3% male and 33.0% female) indicated that they listened and jotted down summaries when teachers are teaching. It was also found that many learners (18.2% males and 13.1% females) indicated that they listened and waited for teachers to give notes at the end of the class. Despite the growing need to shift from teacher-centered instruction to learner-centered instruction, and the innovations in instructional technology, note-taking remains a common and important practice for learners in the classroom (Williams & Eggert, 2002; Castello & Monereo, 1999; Brazeau, 2006). The skill of note-taking, according to Kobayashi (2005), is recognized as an effective ability to recall, comprehend, and retain the subject matter.

Jotting down key points when the teacher is teaching does not only help learners to have personal notes of privilege information the teacher might give while teaching, but also to keep them (learners) active and concentrating throughout



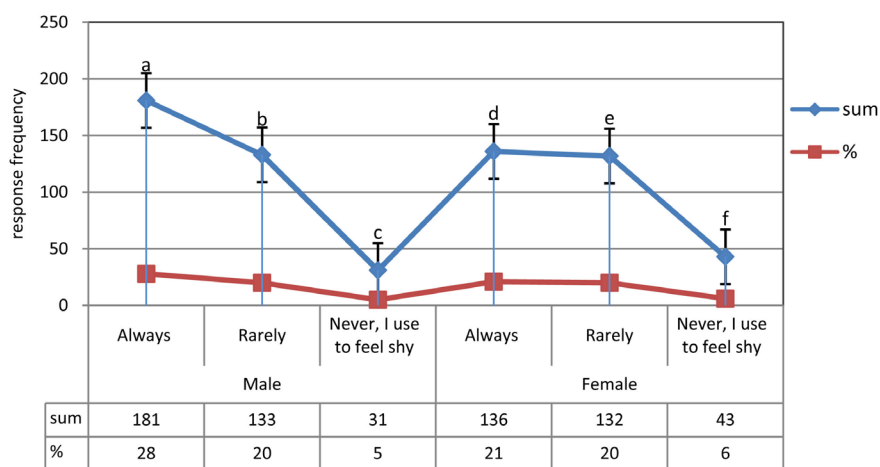
**Figure 3.** Overall distribution of the learners by preference for jotting down points when teachers are teaching ( $n = 654$ ), Anova of bars with different alphabets are statistically significant ( $p < 0.05$ ).

the lesson. It is important to note that the teacher is not a computer system that works by “garbage in garbage out (GIGO)”. Thus, it is possible that not all the information that the teacher provided while teaching that will be captured in the lesson note given to learners. Hence, a learner who jots down key points during lesson has an advantage of having additional reading material which if properly taken, is often easier to read and understand by the learner. Jotted points facilitate later revision and review to stimulate the recall of the information heard (Kiewra, 1989).

The analysis of variance of the learners’ responses in their preference for jotting down points when teachers are teaching differed statistically ( $p = 7.33 \times 10^{-16}$ ) at  $p < 0.05$ . This is probable because despite the recognized usefulness of note-taking, only few learners understand or are taught the basic note-taking skills (Piolat & Boch, 2004).

Figure 4 gives a picture of the overall distribution of the learners by frequency of asking and answering questions during class lessons. Responses by participants ( $n = 656$ ) (i.e. 28% males and 20% females) indicated that learners always asked and answered questions during lessons, 20% male and 21% female rarely asked and answered questions while 5% male and 6% female signposted that they felt shy and never asked or answered questions during lesson. The analysis of variance of the learners’ responses in their frequency of asking and answering questions in class when teachers are teaching differed statistically ( $p < 0.05$ ). The patterns of these findings suggest that there are high numbers of learners who were not active in class room lessons. This might put teachers in fix situations. Should learners become passive audience, the dynamic interactions that could provoke additional and privilege information become dead. In addition, teachers are tempted to strictly follow stereotyped lessons which do not produce critical thinkers needed for the 21<sup>st</sup> century education.

The need for classroom instruction to shift from the usual teacher-centred

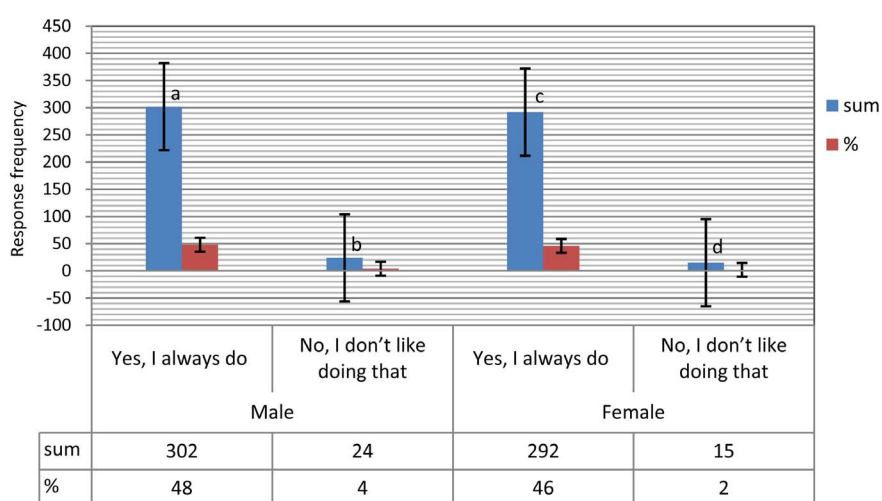


**Figure 4.** Overall distribution of the learners by frequency of asking/answering questions in class ( $n = 656$ ). Anova of bars with different alphabets are statistically significant ( $p < 0.05$ ).



method to learner-centred approach is globally being acknowledged. The learners' active participation in classroom through asking and answering questions provides a very valuable assessment tool for teachers to identify the weakness and strength of learners in order to adjust the instruction accordingly. Teachers alone cannot succeed in the classroom (Meyers, 2003). Success depends upon the amount of effort learners invest in the classroom (Newmann, 1992) and this can be achieved through asking and answering questions during lessons. With the advent of technology-assisted instruction, the poor classroom participation by learners has become worse in nowadays. Thus, the need for teachers to continuously adapt to the ever-changing nature of their learners, especially in an era where learners are increasingly becoming deficient in interpersonal skills has been emphasized (Meyers, 2003).

Figure 5 illustrates the overall distribution of the learners' responses on preference for setting academic performance targets. The responses of the participants ( $n = 656$ ) revealed that some learners (i.e. 48% males and 46% females) always preferred setting targets for their performances in assignment, test and examinations. Few learners (i.e. 4% males and 2% females) however pointed out that they did not prefer setting performance targets in assignment, test and examination for themselves. The analysis of variance of the learners' responses in their preference for setting performance target differed statistically ( $p < 0.05$ ). Generally, if learners can set their performance targets and stay committed, it will motivate them to work harder towards meeting the set goal. This will eventually lead to improved performances in exit examinations such as the NSSC. However, Schunk (2009) argues that while goal setting can lead to student motivation and higher academic achievement, simply stating a goal does not automatically benefit learners. However, Dotson (2016) added that if implemented correctly, goal setting has the potential to positively impact learning. When

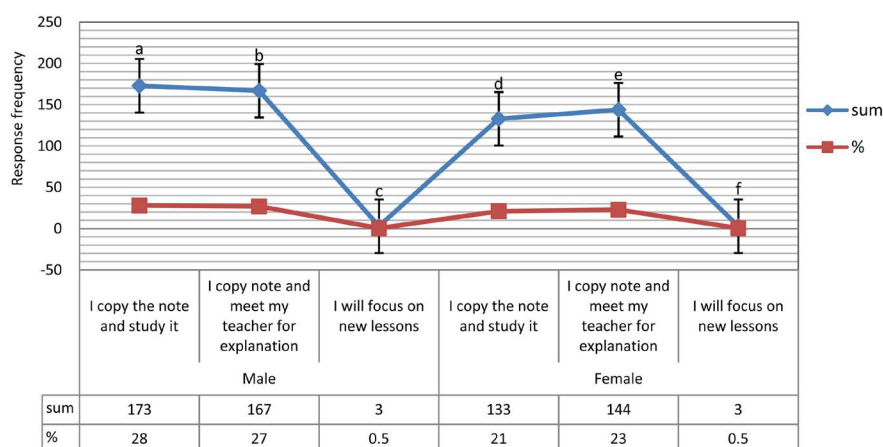


**Figure 5.** Overall distribution of the learners by preference for setting target for academic performances ( $n = 656$ ) Anova of bars with different alphabets are statistically significant ( $p < 0.05$ ).



learners set their performance targets and reflect on them, it is a good sign of taking responsibility for their studies and teachers should guide their learners towards developing this positive habit. In an effort to motivate and advance learning and learners, the Community Literacy of Ontario had emphasized that teachers can help learners to set realistic, relevant, and achievable goals that can produce academic success and promote self-efficacy. Comparing the goals of underachievers to that of achievers, [Smithson \(2012\)](#) found that underachievers had no particular goals or they had set goals beyond their reach whereas achievers set realistic, attainable goals that were related to their academics. In fact, the culture of setting performance target can effectively build intrinsic motivation in learners and this is important for self-regulation in their studies. [Dodge \(2017\)](#) asserts that learners develop an attitude that says, “*I will work even when the teacher is not looking*”, when working for intrinsic rewards. Such positive attitudes make learners to study hard for the love of it and hence, lead to autonomy and mastery in their learning with improved performances.

**Figure 6** demonstrates the overall distribution of the learners’ responses on the actions they take after missing a class. The responses of the participants ( $n = 623$ ) varied. About 28% males and 21% females signaled that they copy the lesson notes and study them; other 27% males and 23% females indicated that they copy the lesson notes and meet their teachers for explanations while only 0.5% each of male and female learners indicated that they will focus on a new lesson. These findings suggest that majority of the learners know the appropriate action to take any time they missed a class in order to catch up with missed lessons. Thus, it is important to encourage the learners through teachers’ support in explaining or re-teaching lessons which learners missed with genuine excuses. While it is possible that a greater percentage of learners may be available for most of the lesson schedules on the teaching timetable throughout the academic year, occasionally however, few learners may miss out, despite their best intentions.



**Figure 6.** Overall distribution of the learners by action taken after missing any class ( $n = 623$ ). Anova of bars with different alphabets are statistically significant ( $p < 0.05$ ).

Under such circumstance, teachers' intervention supports such as re-teaching, either in the whole class or for the few learners may greatly assist the learners to meet up with the missed lesson. Bellert (2015) noted that re-teaching can be any post-instructional actions or strategies initiated by teachers to support learners who did not learn content, concepts or procedures from "first" teaching and learning activities.

#### 4. Implication of the Study to Educational Practice and Future Research

The need to investigate and devise conscious strategies that could improve the academic performances of learners cannot be overemphasized. The findings of this study provided an important baseline data which avail educators, especially school teachers, with relevant information on the attitudes of Grade 12 learners towards schoolwork in the study area. This inadvertently inform the teachers, parents/guardians and other stakeholders who are dealing directly with the learners on the need to develop appropriate learners' support mechanisms aimed at improving their poor attitudes towards schoolwork. Furthermore, the poor attitudes of majority of the learners towards their schoolwork as found by the study has practical implication for the dare need to introduce academic counseling programs in order to advice and motivate the learners on their study responsibilities. The findings are also important baseline data that could prompt other researchers to carry out similar study in other regions of Namibia and elsewhere in the world with similar records of learners' continuous poor academic performances.

#### 5. Conclusion

The results of this study revealed different kinds of attitudes towards school works amongst Grade 12 learners in the Zambezi region of Namibia. While a high percentage of the participants (learners) indicated that they preferred the teachers to do revisions before examinations, a good number of them indicated that they rather preferred to read on their own after completing the syllabus. This has mixed implications for learners' good performances in examinations. There is, thus, a need for good guidance on their preference for revision of works done before examination. Under truancy from school, it was found that a good number of the learners did not inform the class teachers but either preferred to only inform their friends or did not inform anybody at all. Learners' absenteeism has negative impacts on their academic performances. A good number of the learners also indicated that when a teacher was teaching, they did not jot down main points but instead, listened and waited for the teachers to give notes at the end of the class. Sitting and listening only during lesson affect the level of learners' alertness in class. Besides, jotting down important points in learner's own words aids memory recall, comprehension, and retention of the subject matter. Many learners also indicated that they rarely asked or answered

questions in class and felt shy. Where learners become passive audience, it makes the teaching teacher-centred and not good for the 21<sup>st</sup> century education. Although the greater percentage of the learners indicated that whenever they missed a particular lesson, they copied the notes and studied it or met the subject teacher for explanation, some learners indicated that they would focus on the new lessons instead. Even some learners indicated that they did not like to set target of performances in assignment, test and examination for themselves. Based on the highly divergent attitudes towards school work found among the study participants, we strongly recommend academic counseling programs aimed at advising and motivating the learners on their study responsibilities.

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## Conflicts of Interest

The authors hereby declared that there is no any conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

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