

**The experiences of alumni adolescents on the contribution of
the Mondesa Youth Opportunities Programme**

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	
SUMMARY.....	
OPSOMMING.....	
PREFACE.....	
PERMISSION TO SUBMIT.....	
TITLE OF MANUSCRIPT, AUTHORS AND CONTACT DETAILS.....	
SECTION A: ORIENTATION TO THE RESEARCH.....	
INTRODUCTION.....	
Adolescent development.....	
School as a developmental context.....	
Development and learning in a community context.....	
After-school intervention programmes.....	
PROBLEM STATEMENT.....	
AIM OF THE STUDY.....	
STRUCTURE OF THE RESEARCH.....	
SECTION B: ARTICLE.....	
THE EXPERIENCES OF ALUMNI ADOLESCENTS ON THE CONTRIBUTION OF THE MONDESA YOUTH OPPORTUNITIES	
TITLE PAGE.....	
ABSTRACT.....	

INTRODUCTION.....

Adolescence as developmental phase.....

The role of schools and education.....

Aim of the study.....

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN.....

Research context.....

Data collection.....

Sampling of participants.....

Procedure.....

Data analysis.....

Ethical considerations.....

Trustworthiness.....

FINDINGS.....

DISCUSSION: SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS.....

RECOMMENDATIONS AND LIMITATIONS.....

CONCLUSIONS.....

SECTION C: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....

SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS.....

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE STUDY.....

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY.....

CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE STUDY.....

FINAL WORDS.....

REFERENCES.....

APPENDIX A

Guidelines for authors: *South African Journal of Education*.....

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SUMMARY

THE EXPERIENCES OF ALUMNI ADOLESCENTS ON THE CONTRIBUTION OF THE MONDESA YOUTH OPPORTUNITIES PROGRAMME

The adolescent developmental phase has encouraged many research studies as a result of the diversity and dynamics of this period of life. This phase is characterised by a range of challenges on an intrapersonal level, in family life, peer group settings and school settings. Various studies confirm that every aspect of adolescent development is influenced by experiences at school. Secondary school (Grades 8 to 12) is also considered to be a critical time for creating healthy and cohesive societies, since it forms the link between primary education and higher education, and the labour market. However, in low and middle income countries, such as Namibia, many adolescents grow up in conditions of poverty, which present them with fewer opportunities, experiences, resources and services that are essential for them to become healthy and productive adults. Educational opportunities are limited, while most of the learning resources or learning opportunities are unaffordable.

In Namibia, the educational system has made progress since Independence in 1990. However, there remains a lack of instructional materials, a high proportion of unqualified teachers, and a scarcity of pre-primary education programmes. In the township of Mondesa in Swakopmund, the schools are overcrowded and children reach Grade 8 with literacy and numeracy skills far below the required level. The need for interventions in improving education and alleviating constraints, such as overcrowded classes, unqualified teachers and lack of resources the system is facing is evident and this has resulted in programmes attempting to make a difference in this sector. The Mondesa Youth Opportunities (MYO) Programme is one such initiative, aiming at providing educational assistance to underprivileged students drawn from disadvantaged schools in Swakopmund. They present learners with free afternoon education with classes in English, mathematics and reading. Classes for computer skills, life skills, music and sport are also included, to provide the learners with a stimulating environment and exposure to a variety of activities to expand their life world and experience.

The board members of MYO have not yet attempted a comprehensive evaluation to judge and justify the efforts of the programme, since this would be a complex and costly endeavour. This study aimed at exploring the experiences of alumni adolescents on the contribution of the programme. The results could possibly form a basis for future more comprehensive evaluations of the programme and make the possibility of such an endeavour more feasible. This is a qualitative study and data was gathered through focus groups of adolescents who are currently in Grades 9 to 12 and who have previously attended the programme. After thematic analysis the findings of the study pointed out various contributions the programme experienced by the adolescents, pointing out themes that possibly provides a platform for starting future research on the effectiveness of the programme. The adolescents experienced various benefits as a result of attending the programme. This included enhancement of academic performance, cognitive development, provision of resources, and introduction to unfamiliar content, such as sports and music that taught them new skills, and helped them to find their own talents. The life skills classes provided them with useful knowledge for everyday life. The findings also suggest that the adolescents experienced an influence in their intrapersonal skills by gaining more confidence in their abilities, becoming more independent and learning to take responsibility. On a social level, the programme provided them with opportunities to make friends. The relationships they had with some of the teachers at MYO proved to be invaluable as a source of emotional support.

These findings have contributed to an understanding of the adolescents' experiences of the programme, and have highlighted positive experiences and various challenges adolescents faced in terms of the implementation of the programme, such as the amount of effort and time required to participate in the programme. Conclusions were made to provide MYO management with valuable feedback and suggestions for further research.

KEYWORDS: academic improvement, adolescents, after-school programme, development, extracurricular activities, life skills

OPSOMMING

LOUD-ADOLESENTE-STUDENTE SE ERVARINGS GEGROND OP DIE BYDRAE VAN DIE MONDESA YOUTH OPPORTUNITIES-PROGRAM

Die adolessente ontwikkelingsfase het reeds tot talle navorsingstudies gelei as gevolg van die diversiteit en dinamika van hierdie lewensfase. Die fase word gekenmerk deur 'n verskeidenheid uitdagings op interpersoonlike vlak, in die gesin, in portuurgroepe en in die skoolopset. Verskeie studies bevestig dat elke aspek van adolessente-ontwikkeling beïnvloed word deur ervarings by die skool. Die sekondêre skool-fase (Graad 8 tot 12) word ook as 'n kritiese tyd in die vorming van gesonde en samehangende samelewings beskou aangesien dit die skakel tussen laer en hoër onderwys en die arbeidsmark vorm. In lae- en middelinkomstelande, soos Namibië, word baie adolessente in armoedige omstandighede groot wat aan hulle minder geleenthede, ondervindings, hulpbronne en dienste bied wat noodsaaklik is vir die ontwikkeling van gesonde, produktiewe volwassenes. Onderriggeleenthede is beperk, terwyl die meeste leerhulpbronne en leergeleenthede onbekostigbaar is.

In Namibië het die onderwysstelsel heelwat gevorder sedert onafhanklikwording in 1990. Daar is egter steeds 'n gebrek aan opleidingsmateriaal, te veel ongekwalifiseerde onderwysers, en 'n skaarste aan pre-primêre opleidingsprogramme. In die township van Mondesa in Swakopmund is die skole oorvol en die geletterdheids- en gesyferdheidsvaardighede van kinders in Graad 8 is ver onder die aanvaarbare vlak. Daar is dus 'n duidelike behoefte aan intervensies om onderwys te verbeter en die stelsel se beperkings te verminder. Dit het gelei tot programme wat poog om 'n verskil in hierdie sektor te maak. Die Mondesa Jeuggeleenthede-program (Mondesa Youth Opportunities Programme, MYO) is een van hierdie inisiatiewe. MYO se doel is om gratis aanvullende onderrig en bystand te lewer aan leerlinge van skole in Mondesa. Daar word klasse in Engels, wiskunde en leesvaardighede aangebied. Die leerlinge word hier ook blootgestel aan rekenaarvaardigheid, lewensvaardighede in voorligtingsklasse, musiek klasse en sport in 'n poging om 'n stimulerende omgewing te skep en geleenthede te bied wat hul leefwêreld en ervarings sal verbreed.

Daar was nog geen amptelike pogings om 'n volledige evaluering van die impak en effektiwiteit van hierdie program te implementeer nie, aangesien dit aansienlike fondse en kompleksiteit sal behels. Die doel van hierdie studie is om die ervarings van oud-adolesente-studente van die program te bestudeer om uit te vind hoe hulle die bydraes van MYO ervaar het. Die resultate behoort te dien as 'n platform vir toekomstige studies, en die moontlikheid daarvan te realiseer. Dit is 'n kwalitatiewe studie en data is dus ingevorder deur middel van fokusgroepe met adolessente wat tans in Graad 9 tot 12 is en wat voorheen aan die program deelgeneem het.

Na tematiese analise, het die studie baie voordele uitgelig wat deur die adolessente ervaar is as gevolg van hul deelname aan die program. Dit sluit akademiese bevordering, kognitiewe ontwikkeling, voorsiening van hulpbronne, asook ander onbekende aktiwiteite, soos sport en musiek wat vir hulle nuwe vaardighede geleer het en wat hulle gehelp het om van hul eie talente te ontdek. Die voorligtingsklasse het aan hulle bruikbare kennis vir die alledaagse lewe gegee. Die resultate dui ook aan dat die adolessente op 'n interpersoonlike vlak verander het deur meer selfvertroue in hul eie vaardighede te ontwikkel; en daardeur meer onafhanklik te raak en te leer hoe om verantwoordelikheid te aanvaar. Die program het aan hulle 'n verskeidenheid ervarings en geleenthede gebied wat hulle nooit gedink het moontlik sou wees nie aangesien hulle nie die finansiële vermoëns het om dit te bekostig nie. Op 'n sosiale vlak het die program hulle die geleentheid gebied om nuwe vriende te maak. Die verhouding wat hulle met sommige van die onderwysers by MYO gehad het, het onskatbare waarde in die vorm van emosionele ondersteuning gebied.

Die bevindinge het gehelp om 'n beter begrip te kry van die adolessente se ervarings en het positiewe ervarings uitgelig. Dit dui egter ook aan dat die adolessente dit soms uitdagend gevind het om aan die hoë verwagtinge van die program te voldoen. Die hoeveelheid tyd wat vereis is en die intensiteit van die program het hul soms uitgeput. Gevolgtrekkings is gemaak om waardevolle terugvoer aan die MYO bestuur te gee, asook voorstelle vir verdere navorsing te maak.

SLEUTELWOORDE: akademiese verbetering, adolessente, naskoolse program, ontwikkeling, buitemuurse aktiwiteite, lewensvaardighede

PREFACE

- This dissertation is presented in article format as indicated in Rule A.13.7 in North-West University's Potchefstroom Campus Yearbook.
- The article comprising this thesis is intended for submission to the *South African Journal of Education*.
- The referencing style and editorial approach for this thesis is in line with the prescription of the Publication Manual (6th edition) of the American Psychological Association (APA), except in the instances where the journal guidelines indicated otherwise.
- For examination purposes, the page numbering is consecutive from the title page.
- The study supervisor and assistant supervisor of this article, Dr L Wilson and Dr Alida W Nienaber, have submitted a letter consenting that the article may be submitted for examination purposes for the degree Magister Artium in Psychology.

LETTER OF PERMISSION

PERMISSION TO SUBMIT THIS ARTICLE FOR EXAMINATION PURPOSES

We, the supervisor and co-supervisor, hereby declare that the input and effort of Mrs L Gouws in writing this manuscript reflects research done by her on this topic. We hereby grant permission that she may submit this article for examination in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree Magister Artium in Psychology.

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The experiences of alumni adolescents on the contribution of the
Mondesa Youth Opportunities Programme

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SECTION A
ORIENTATION TO THE RESEARCH

INTRODUCTION

Adolescence is regarded as the transition period from childhood to adulthood, involving change within the self, family dynamics, peer groups and school settings (Lerner & Galambos, 1998:414). As a result of the intensity of these changes, the adolescent developmental phase is often described as a period of dramatic challenge (Lerner & Galambos, 1998:414) and heightened vulnerability (Theron & Dalzell, 2006:398). These changes are described as developmental tasks, and are considered the standard against which adolescent well-being is measured (Mash & Wolfe, 2010:13). Should adolescents struggle to navigate through this period in a productive way, risky behaviours manifest (Naudeau, Cunningham, Lundberg & McGinnis, 2008:76). It is recognised that the mere absence of risky or negative behaviour does not equate with positive development (Mahoney & Lafferty, 2003:S3). There has thus been a shift in development research from problem prevention and fixing to equipping youth with a number of positive attributes and skills or competencies (Naudeau *et al.*, 2008:76). Whether adolescents are doing well, will depend on how well they adapt to their environment (Mash & Wolfe, 2010:12) and to physical, cognitive and emotional changes evident of this developmental period (Sadock & Sadock, 2007:36). Hence, sound knowledge of the adolescent developmental tasks forms an important foundation for understanding their level of adaptation and well-being.

Adolescent development

The adolescent developmental stage includes a range of challenges involving physical, cognitive, social and emotional changes (Elmore, 2009:195; Louw, 2005:505; Murry, Berkel, Gaylord-Harden, Copeland-Linder & Nation, 2011:114). The physical changes are regarded as dramatic and may also influence their behaviour and thoughts (Wigfield, Eccles & Pintrich, 1996:150). Sadock and Sadock (2007:36) describe adolescents as “work in progress”. Adolescents acquire the ability to master more complex challenges or tasks in academic, interpersonal and emotional areas while they also search for new interests, talents and social identities (Sadock & Sadock, 2007:36). There is a change in their cognitive ability and their thinking, which implicates not only learning, but also self-concepts, thoughts about the future and understanding of others (Wigfield *et al.*, 1996:151). They begin to think more abstractly, consider the hypothetical and real, consider multiple dimensions of a problem at once and reflect on themselves and on

complicated problems. As they are presented with more choices and options, such as school subjects, the beliefs they have of their competence and efficacy for activities, as well as their valuing and goals for activities may change (Wigfield *et al.*, 1996:151). Crucial aspects in terms of adolescent development are self, social and motivational aspects, which may influence success at school. During early and middle adolescence children make many choices, including whether to stay in school and what career or occupation to strive for. Also, children have experiences that may direct the course they take when leaving school (Wigfield *et al.*, 1996:148). Therefore, the adolescent developmental phase has implications for healthy adaptation and transition into adulthood and the well-being of individuals and also society as a whole (Call, Riedel, Hein, McLoyd, Petersen & Kipke, 2002:69; Gutman & Midgley, 2000:224; Lerner & Steinberg, 2004:9).

School as a developmental context

School is the place where adolescents spend more time than in any other setting, and when time spent learning is included, it represents almost the majority of an adolescent's life (Bassi, Steca & Fave, 2011:27; Elmore, 2009:193). At school, they are exposed to knowledge, social endeavours and extracurricular activities that influence their identity development and preparation for the future (Eccles & Roeser, 2011:225). Several studies (Eccles & Roeser, 2011:236; Elmore, 2009:195; Gutman & Midgley, 2000:224-225; Irvin, Meece, Byun, Farmer & Hutchins, 2011:1236) confirm that every aspect of adolescent development is influenced by experiences at school, such as cognitive aspects, psychological well-being and peer relations. Secondary education is also globally recognised as a critical period for creating healthy and cohesive societies (UNESCO, 2011:7), as it forms the link between initial education and higher education. More than that, it connects the school system to the labour market (Republic of Namibia, 2004:11; UNESCO, 2011:7). It can provide young people with access to further and higher levels of training as well as better job prospects (Republic of Namibia, 2004:11). Thus, the secondary school phase provides adolescents with an opportunity to acquire qualities, skills and strengths on a cognitive, psychological and social level to assist them in reaching their full potential and making a contribution to society.

Development and learning in a community context

Development is not a cognitive process occurring in isolation or separate from the external world in which an individual lives (Vygotsky, 1986:38). Ochsner and Lieberman (2001:28) agree that learning takes place in a context and that it is a social process. Learners are grounded in their own socio-cultural contexts, bringing their own “lived” experiences to the learning process. Vygotsky advocates the role of social processes as a mechanism for learning (Palinscar, 1998:351). For Vygotsky, individual and social processes in learning and development are interdependent, and this is evident in the following quote: “Learning awakens a variety of internal developmental processes that are able to operate only when the child is interacting with people in his environment and with his peers” (Vygotsky quoted in Palinscar, 1998:352).

The learning and developmental context for adolescents living in townships or poor communities may present its own unique challenges. Reviews of neighbourhood studies suggest that living in poor communities affect individual growth and adjustment (Brooks-Gunn, Duncan, Klebanov & Sealand, 1993:385; Leventhal & Brooks-Gunn, 2000:317). These adolescents may be faced with more challenges in terms of their development and school success due to the conditions of the schools they attend and the circumstances in which they live. In these communities they may be presented with fewer opportunities, experiences, resources and services that are essential for them to thrive and grow into healthy, productive adults (Murry *et al.*, 2011:114). Unemployment and related economic loss put a strain on family relationships, which may negatively impact the success of children at school. Dysfunctional families do not provide the substance, nurturance, support and intimacy that are important to the development of children (Thabane, 2008:1). Parents who are economically disadvantaged have been found to be more pessimistic about their adolescent’s academic future, which may reduce their motivation to actively participate in adolescents schooling and ensuring that they successfully complete school (Crosnoe, Mistry & Elder, 2002:700). A further disadvantage in poor communities is limited access to educational opportunities, since learning resources such as books or learning opportunities such as excursions or extracurricular activities cannot be afforded (Thabane, 2008:2). This is likely to increase academic difficulties, decrease the number of years of schooling, and increase school drop-out rates (Crosnoe *et al.*, 2002:692; Farmer *et al.*, 2004:56).

However, there is also evidence that a positive attitude toward school, including a sense of belonging and awareness of ability may predict higher educational achievement, despite the high poverty in which these adolescents find themselves (Irvin *et al.*, 2011:1225). This suggests that the school environment could be regarded as a protective factor for adolescents in poor communities.

After-school intervention programmes

Given the importance of school experiences in adolescent development and the protective purpose it could serve, attempts to maximize the positive experiences gained from school have become an important field for research. There is support for attempts such as extended or afternoon school programmes or extra tuition (Paviot, Heinsohn & Korkman, 2008:149). Studies of after-school hours programmes have indicated the positive impact of extended programmes or programmes presented during after-school hours in alleviating some of the negative influences of poor communities (Mahoney, Lord & Carryl, 2005:821; Posner & Vandell, 1994:455). The school is potentially an area where adolescents can be presented with opportunities and experiences that will enhance their development and learning (Elmore, 2009:195). Schools in struggling townships thus have the opportunity to guide, direct and mentor adolescents in a way that will positively influence their capacity and ability to reach their inherent potential, despite the poverty of the communities in which they live.

In Namibia, many government schools are overcrowded and underfunded (Hoadley, 2009:62; Molinuevo, Bonillo, Pardo, Doval & Torrubia, 2010:852), creating circumstances that are not conducive to learning. Mondesa is a struggling township on the outskirts of the coastal town of Swakopmund. Mondesa Youth Opportunities (MYO) is a programme presented in Mondesa, aimed at providing additional education to learners from underprivileged schools that show ability and promise. MYO provides them with free afternoon education in English, mathematics, reading, computer skills, life skills, music and sport, supplementing their education in schools in the poor communities of Swakopmund².

MYO was founded in 2003 and officially registered as a Namibian trust in 2005. The programme is financed through donations and sponsors from various companies. Its objective is to

consolidate, widen and further the abilities of learners living in Mondesa. At MYO learners have an opportunity to be exposed to activities that they are not introduced to in their government schools, such as sports, music and computer classes. Their focus on academic skills includes English, mathematics and reading, where basic skills are reinforced in an attempt to assist achievement in government schools. Life skills classes are also presented to include social and moral skills. MYO is dedicated to developing the “whole child” by providing the opportunities to gain academic skills, general knowledge and a sense of responsibility. Their primary objective is to promote a future generation of emotionally healthy, driven and forward-thinking leaders in Namibia³, by aiming to cultivate positive thinking and self-esteem in the learners.

Various schools in the Swakopmund area are approached by the organisers of MYO. Learners from Grade 3, who perform well in school and show academic potential, are invited to undergo a selection process. These students are tested on reading, mathematics and English, and a total of 24 learners are invited to join the programme. From Monday to Friday these learners come to MYO as soon as they are dismissed at their government schools. A MYO bus picks up the learners from their various schools. Upon arrival the learners receive lunch and then the lessons start. The lessons are presented by teachers appointed by the MYO management or occasional volunteers from other countries. The learners will attend this formal programme in the afternoons every school year from Grade 4 until they are in Grade 8 and active participation in the MYO programme requires time, effort and commitment on the part of the learners. They are expected to attend the programme every afternoon once they have been accepted, and acceptable reasons need to be communicated should they be unable to attend on a certain day.

The aim of the programme is to expand the learners’ knowledge and experience base by exposing them to additional resources and extra work, through using textbooks and activities other than those being used in government schools. English, Mathematics, reading skills and computer knowledge form the basic fundamental learning areas that are attended to. At the end of each term academic performance is evaluated in terms of tests being written in order for the MYO teachers to identify those students who require more help and to plan strategies². Furthermore, field trips introduce the learners to Namibia’s wildlife, tourist attractions and uranium mines, which are all major contributors to the economy. Every class at MYO are given

two outings per year. These excursions present them with information on career opportunities which may have been unknown to them and it expands their general knowledge of Namibia, their home country. MYO also presents them with opportunities to become involved in the community, such as fundraising for nature conservation or animal rescue². Various activities are arranged in this regard. During 2011 they have for example been involved with the Save the Rhino Trust in Namibia, by making posters that were distributed to create awareness (Wagner, 2012).

From Grade 9 onwards these learners do not attend the programme on a full-time basis as they form part of the alumni group. The alumni group consists of learners who currently still attend school (Grade 9 to Grade 12) and who have been part of the MYO programme from Grade 4 to Grade 8. As the workload and responsibilities in government schools take up much more of the Grade 9 to 12 learners' time than when they are in primary school. They are thus allowed to utilise the MYO facilities as and when they need to, rather than following a formal programme¹. These learners leaving the formal MYO programme now have to continue their school careers without the additional academic support presented at MYO. The hope is that the programme presented them with solid basic skills and a positive attitude toward education that will keep them invested in their own academic success.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

There have been occasional accounts from the learners on how the programme helped them and some informal discussions between MYO board members and the principal of one of the secondary schools in Swakopmund on the functioning of the MYO learners, for the purpose of feedback on the impact of the programme. However, there has not yet been a serious attempt to comprehensively evaluate the results or outcomes of the programme. The reasons for this being the costly and complicated nature of such an endeavour³. Many sponsors invest in this programme and would therefore encourage such an effort. Considering this and the many years during which the MYO programme has been running, and the number of learners involved in the programme, an attempt at formal research seems long overdue. This study however did not attempt such an evaluative study, but rather to gain descriptive data on the experiences of adolescents who have previously attended the programme.

In hindsight, the alumni adolescents, who previously attended the programme, may have some insight into what their attendance resulted into, the aspects of the programme that they experienced as beneficial and which aspects proved to be more challenging. Their insights and descriptions of their experiences may also provide a better understanding of the content and implementation of the programme, providing valuable feedback to the MYO management, sponsors and donors. Such feedback may also point out possible areas to focus on while further developing the programme, as well as starting points for further research.

AIM OF THE STUDY

The main aim of this study was to explore the experiences of alumni adolescents on the contribution of the MYO programme

The primary research question that guided the study was:

- What are the experiences of alumni adolescents on the contribution of the Mondesa Youth Opportunities Programme?

STRUCTURE OF THE RESEARCH

This section provides a brief presentation of the literature review that established the background and foundation of this study. The methodology, findings and discussion are presented in the next section in an article format. This article will be submitted to the *South African Journal of Education* for possible publication. The final section includes a summary of the conclusions made from the findings.

SECTION B

ARTICLE

**THE EXPERIENCES OF ALUMNI ADOLESCENTS ON THE CONTRIBUTION OF
THE MONDESA YOUTH OPPORTUNITIES PROGRAMME**

The experiences of alumni adolescents on the contribution of the Mondesa Youth Opportunities Programme

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Abstract

This article focuses on the experiences of alumni adolescents of the Mondesa Youth Opportunities (MYO) programme, a non-profit after-school education programme presented in Swakopmund, Namibia. A qualitative descriptive design was used. Focus groups were conducted with 32 alumni adolescents. The transcribed data was analysed by means of thematic analysis. The rich descriptions of the experiences of alumni adolescents indicated how they have experienced the programme as beneficial as well as challenging. This included academic knowledge and skills that assisted them to deal with advanced, opportunities for first-time experiences, and the provision of resources. They were able to socialise with friends and form personal relationships with teachers, serving as emotional support. The challenges they faced while attending on a full-time basis were also identified which included, the high expectations with regard to time, attendance and behaviour proved to be exhausting at times. However these challenges contributed to the balancing of the expectations of the programme with other priorities which was challenging, but they recognised the level of commitment needed to reap the benefits.

Keywords: academic improvement, adolescents, after-school programme, development, extracurricular activities, life skills

INTRODUCTION

The identification and understanding of the human developmental process has attracted increasing interest. Although adolescence as a developmental phase has encouraged many research studies, Lerner and Galambos (1998:418) argue that the breadth and depth of high-quality scientific information available in the 1990s underscored the diversity and dynamics of this period of life. Considering that the present generation of people aged 10 to 24 years is the largest in history, comprising a quarter of the world's population at 1.8 billion (Sawyer, Afifi, Bearinger, Blakemore, Dick, Ezeh & Patton, 2012:1630), extensive research into this life phase is imperative. Nearly 90% of this population lives in low-income and middle-income countries where they constitute a far greater proportion of the population than in high-income countries (Sawyer *et al.*, 2012:1630). Shaffer and Kipp (2010:xx) emphasise the effect that social contexts have on the development of children and adolescents. Due to the negative impact on children and adolescents' lives that may arise from low-income community contexts, after-school programmes offering educational and recreational opportunities have been initiated in various communities (Posner & Vandell, 1994:440).

Adolescence as developmental phase

The adolescent developmental phase includes a range of challenges involving physical, cognitive, social and emotional changes (Elmore, 2009:195; Louw, 2005:505; Murry, Berkel, Gaylord-Harden, Copeland-Linder & Nation, 2011:114). Sadock and Sadock (2007:36) describe adolescents as "work in progress". Adolescents acquire the ability to master more complex challenges or tasks in academic, intrapersonal and emotional areas while they also search for new interests, talents and social identities (Sadock & Sadock, 2007:36). Adolescents are exposed to knowledge, social endeavours and extracurricular activities that influence their identity development and prepare them for the future while attending school (Eccles & Roeser, 2011:225). Many choices are made during school years, such as staying in school or choosing career or occupational direction, influencing the course taken after school (Wigfield, Eccles, & Pintrich, 1996:148). The adolescent developmental phase has implications for healthy adaptation and transition into adulthood and the well-being of individuals and also the society as a whole (Call, Riedel, Hein, McLoyd, Petersen & Kipke, 2002:69; Gutman & Midgley, 2000:224; Lerner

& Steinberg, 2004:9). Secondary education is globally recognised as a critical period for creating healthy and cohesive societies (UNESCO, 2011:7), forming the link from primary education to higher education and to the labour market (Republic of Namibia, 2004:11; UNESCO, 2011:7).

The role of schools and education

Teaching and learning is an integrated process in human development. Development is not a cognitive process occurring in isolation or separate from the external world in which an individual lives (Vygotsky, 1986:38). Ochsner and Lieberman (2001:28) agree that learning is a social process, as learners are grounded in their own socio-cultural contexts, bringing their own “lived” experiences to the learning process (Ochsner & Lieberman, 2001:28). The learning and developmental context for adolescents living in townships or poor communities may unique challenges, in terms of their development and school success, due to the lack of opportunities, experiences, resources and services that are essential for them to thrive and grow into healthy, productive adults (Murry *et al.*, 2011:114).

About 13 percent of the Namibian population 15 years and older do not have formal education, and 45.8 percent of this population are poor. Whereas the 6 percent of the population 15 years and above that have attained tertiary education have a poverty incidence of less than 1 percent (Namibia Statistics Agency, 2012:21). This suggests that education can be seen as a buffer against poverty. The National Curriculum for Basic Education of Namibia (Ministry of Education, 2010:7) regards basic education both as a means to empower learners for the development of Namibia, as well as providing a strong foundation of general education for the development of each individual learner (Ministry of Education, 2010:9). The importance of education and school experiences has led to various attempts to minimize some of the challenges adolescents in poor communities face. Extended or afternoon school programmes have been found to alleviate some of the negative influences of poor communities (Mahoney, Lord & Carryl, 2005:821; Posner & Vandell, 1994:455; Paviot, Heinsohn & Korkman, 2008:149).

MYO is a non-profit, after-school-hours education initiative presented in Mondesa, a struggling township on the outskirts of the coastal town of Swakopmund, Namibia². The programme is focused on supporting learners in government schools (Hoadley, 2009:62; Molinuevo, Bonillo,

Pardo, Doval & Torrubia, 2010:852) with additional academic work, activities for advancing their social and moral skills³, free of charge. Classes are presented by appointed teachers of occasional volunteers from other countries. These classes include English, mathematics, reading, life skills, as well as sport, music and computer classes, which are often not introduced in the government schools². Through the range of these activities and classes MYO is dedicated to promoting a future generation of emotionally healthy, driven and forward-thinking leaders in Namibia³, by aiming to cultivate positive thinking and self-esteem in the learners. The programme aims to expand the learners' knowledge and experience base by exposing them to textbooks and resources other than those being used in government schools. Other resources include field trips introducing learners to Namibia's wildlife, tourist attractions and uranium mines, which are all major contributors to the economy. Academic performance is evaluated through tests so that learners who require more help can be identified and strategies can be planned². Involvement in the community is also encouraged at MYO through fundraising for nature conservation or animal rescue².

Various schools in the Swakopmund area are approached by MYO, where learners from Grade 3 who show ability and promise, are invited to undergo a selection process. They are tested on reading, mathematics and English, and a total of 24 learners are invited to join the programme from Grade 4 to Grade 7. They are collected from the various schools every afternoon, receive lunch and attend the lessons from 14:00 until 17:00. For these children active participation in the MYO programme requires time, effort and commitment, since they are expected to attend the programme every afternoon once they have been accepted. As soon as learners reach Grade 9 to Grade 12 they form the MYO alumni group and do not attend the formal programme. As the workload and responsibilities in government schools take up much more of their time, they are given the opportunity to use the facilities of MYO as they need, rather than following the formal MYO programme¹. The hope is that the programme presented them with solid basic skills and a positive attitude toward education that will keep them invested in their own academic success.

Occasional accounts from MYO learners and some informal discussions between MYO board members and the principal of one of the secondary schools on the functioning of the MYO learners have provided some feedback on the benefits experienced by learners. However, there

has not yet been a serious attempt to comprehensively evaluate the outcomes of the programme, due to the costly and complicated nature of such research³. Many sponsors invest in this programme and would therefore encourage such an effort. Considering this and the many years during which the MYO programme has been running an attempt at formal research seems long overdue. This study however did not attempt to ensure such an evaluative study, but rather to gain descriptive data on the experiences of alumni adolescents. In hindsight these alumni adolescents, may have some insight into what their attendance resulted into. The following broad research question therefore guided this study: What are the experiences of alumni adolescents of the Mondesa Youth Opportunities Programme?

Aim of the study

The aim of this study was to, through the rich descriptions of the adolescents' experiences, provide insight into and descriptions of the benefits and challenges of the MYO programme. Their descriptions would provide a better understanding of the content and implementation of the programme. It was also aimed that the findings of this study would provide the MYO management, sponsors and donors with valuable feedback on the programme, including starting points for further research.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN

A qualitative descriptive design as described by Sandelowski (2000:335-338) was seen as most applicable for this study as it describes (Babbie & Mouton, 2001:270) the experiences of adolescents without attempting to explain them. An exploratory approach (Babbie & Mouton, 2001:79-80) furthermore provided in-depth data on how the MYO programme is experienced by the adolescents.

Research context

Namibia is a post-colonial African country that attempted, after its independence in 1990 (Garrouste, 2011:224) and much colonial influence, to completely change its education system (Angula & Lewis, 1997:248). Namibian government schools regards the secondary school phase as consisting of three years of junior secondary education (Grade 8 – 10) and two years of senior

secondary education (Grade 11 – 12). These combined five years are regarded as secondary education (Republic of Namibia, 2004:6).

General education in Namibia is experiencing inadequacies, including unqualified school teachers (Marope, 2005:29), a shortage of books and instructional material (Marope, 2005:xv) with a ratio of one textbook per three learners in primary schools and one text book per two learners in secondary schools (Nakale, 2013), and many schools are overcrowded and underfunded (Hoadley, 2009:25; Molinuevo, Bonillo, Pardo, Doval & Torrubia, 2010:852). Financial resources in terms of salaries for teachers also have an impact on the quality of education. Some teachers lack commitment due to low salaries, which is suggested to be one of the reasons for the high failure rate in schools (Sichombe, Nambira, Tjipueja & Kapenda, 2011:102).

Data collection

Focus groups were used to collect in-depth qualitative data (Greeff, 2011:341; Henning, 2004:3) on the participants' experiences (Vaughn *et al.*, 1996:131). This is a particularly useful collection method for exploratory research when little is known about the phenomenon (Vaughn *et al.*, 1996:24). Five focus groups were conducted with participants who had similar experiences (Kelly, 2006:304). The participants were adolescents who attended the formal MYO programme during different years (alumni). The focus groups provided them with an opportunity to share their personal experiences. Nieuwenhuis (2007b:118) regards this easing of inhibitions as one of the advantages of focus groups. The conversations between adolescents elicited a wide range of responses (Greeff, 2011:373) and a dynamic discussion (Liamputtong, 2011:3), while reminding each other of events and experiences (Nieuwenhuis, 2007b:118). Fieldnotes (Greeff, 2011:359) were also used as a supplementary form of data collection.

Sampling of participants

The sample of participants for the focus groups was taken from the population by purposive non-probability sampling (Strydom, 2011:232). A total of 32 alumni adolescents participated in the study, of whom 25 were female and only 7 were male adolescents. These adolescents were in

Grades 8 to 12, and their ages ranged from 14 to 19 years, most of them being Oshiwambo speaking.

Procedure

Permission for the study was obtained from the reviewing panel of the Centre for Child, Youth and Family Studies, North-West University, the board members of MYO and the Research and Ethics Committee of the North-West University. For the sampling process, lists of learners who have previously attended the MYO programme and now formed part of the alumni group were obtained from the MYO office. The researcher then approached all these learners at their various government schools during school hours. The aim of the study was presented to them and they were invited to participate in the study. These learners received a letter addressed to their parents with the invitation to participate in the study as well as a consent form. Although ten participants were recruited for each focus group, the amount of participants in the focus groups differed between two to ten participants (Finch & Lewis, 2003:172). The focus groups were conducted during various afternoons at the MYO premises. The focus group questions were aimed at prompting descriptions on how the adolescents experienced the programme, hence a few basic questions were set, and further prompting were used on the responses given by the adolescents.

Data analysis

The goal of data analysis for this study was to identify, analyse and report the patterns (Braun & Clarke, 2006:79; Creswell, 2009:185; Nieuwenhuis, 2007a:100) found within the transcribed data of the focus groups. This was attained by means of thematic analysis for this study, which provided a rich thematic description of the entire data set, giving a sense of the predominant and important themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006:83). The six steps, as described by Braun and Clarke (2006:86-93) for conducting thematic analyses, were utilised in this study. These steps include the transcription of the focus group interviews, reading through the transcripts while making notes of ideas. Initial codes were then generated manually, thus organising the data into meaningful groups. Next, the codes were sorted into potential themes, and these themes were continuously refined and finally named. Generating the report was the final step.

Ethical considerations

Ethical guidelines as described by Strydom (2011:115-122) were taken into account. The reviewing panel of the Centre for Child, Youth and Family Studies, North-West University, and the Research and Ethics Committee of the North-West University approved the research study. Permission was also gained from the board members of MYO to conduct the research. All participants – the adolescents, parents, guardians and teachers – were fully informed about the purpose of the study. It was communicated to them that their participation was voluntary, allowing them to withdraw at any time, should they wish to do so. Written consent was obtained from the adolescents who participated and their parents, the teachers who participated, as well as the parents who attended the individual discussions. The transcriptions of the tape-recorded data did not include any names, safeguarding the identity of the participants, and thus ensuring confidentiality. The participants were also compensated financially for transportation and they received refreshments.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness criteria can be operationalised by credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Babbie & Mouton, 2001:277-278; Lincoln & Guba, 1985:180-197). According to Lincoln and Guba (1985:316), there can be no credibility without dependability. Therefore, when credibility is established it should not be necessary to also show its dependability. The researcher made use of member checks to ensure credibility and dependability. Since it was logistically difficult to have the same group attend discussions more than once, the insights and information that was gained from one group was tested with another focus group (Lincoln & Guba, 1985:193). This gave the opportunity for the participants to provide additional information and corroborate, differ from or expand on the statements made by participants from other focus groups, thus ensuring credibility. It is the responsibility of the researcher to provide the reader with thick descriptions with the widest possible range of information to enable potential appliers to make judgments of transferability (Babbie & Mouton, 2001:277; Lincoln & Guba, 1985:195). The researcher achieved this with thick descriptions clearly placed within the context of the study. Raw data (tape-recorded focus group interviews and field notes), theoretical notes such as concepts, the themes that were developed, the findings and conclusions, personal notes and

expectations (Babbie & Mouton, 2001:278) have been reviewed to establish confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985:318).

FINDINGS

In this section, the themes and subthemes (shown in Table 1) that emerged during the data analysis from the empirical data obtained from the study through the focus groups with adolescents will be discussed. The two main themes that were identified are “Benefits of attending the MYO programme” and “Challenges and negative experiences of the MYO programme”.

Table 1: Themes and subthemes that emerged from the focus groups

Themes	Subthemes
Benefits of attending the MYO programme	Enhancement of academic performance Intrapersonal attributes Life skills gained Cognitive development Introduction to unfamiliar content Resources provided by MYO Personal relationship with teachers Social interactions with peers Change in how others perceive the learners of MYO Positive feelings toward programme
Challenges of the MYO programme	High expectations of the programme Time management

Benefits of attending the MYO programme

The range of benefits alumni adolescents acquired from the MYO programme included enhancement of academic performance, intrapersonal attributes, life skills gained, cognitive

development, an introduction to unfamiliar content, resources provided by MYO, personal relationships with teachers and social interactions with peers.

Enhancement of academic performance. Academic work at MYO helped the adolescents to improve their marks at school by providing them with a better understanding of the work, while they were in the programme. The following quote provide evidence for this academic improvement:

- *“... Actually what I have learned from MYO is that it will actually improve your level in English and maths ...”*

Through the knowledge and skills acquired from quality education, schooling is considered to foster positive development, being one of the strongest protective factors in the lives of young people (Cunningham, Cohan, Naudeau & McGinnis, 2008). It is clear that the adolescents experienced some enhancement of their academic skills, which is essential for positive development. Performance in their government schools improved due to their skills being transferred from the programme to their school contexts. This is evident from these quotes:

- *“... like, everything we did in Math at MYO, like we take back to what we did at school ...”*
- *“ We learn, and we are ahead with our work that we do at school ...”*
- *“... here at school. And I’m always like ‘I know that, I know that’, and the teacher is like ‘how do you know that’, then I say ‘MYO!’ ...”*

Reading skills have been improved with a unique rating system that encouraged adolescents to read often. Every learner’s reading level is tested when they initially enter the programme, and then categorized into a level, demarcated by different colours. The books in the library are organized according to these colour codes, and the learners are encouraged to read books from their level. Once a month the learners have to hand in a summary of the books they have read. They are re-evaluated each term and as their reading improves, they may move up a level. This system contributed to the improvement in their reading and language skills, as this adolescent stated: *“They gave us extra help ... just the fact that we actually got the opportunity to read books and improve our English”.*

Most of these learners’ mother-tongue is Oshiwambo and they experienced the MYO policy that only English may be spoken as one of the ways in which the programme assisted in enhancing

their improvement. This adolescent reflects on how the programme provided assistance in this regard: “... so every time we come to MYO we know we must speak English. So by that time our English improved. I moved from a D candidate in English to a B ...”English is the official language of Namibia (Ministry of Education, 2010:11), highlighting the importance of its mastery.

Intrapersonal attributes. The adolescents acknowledged their own input needed to benefit from the programme, as shown by this quote: “*It made us better, maybe, maybe not, it depends on individuals ...*” They thus learned to commit and persevere, which is described in the National Curriculum of Basic Education (Ministry of Education, 2010:10) as personal qualities needed to pursue goals and act autonomously. The following quote suggest the sense of responsibility they learned to take on: “*I can complete my own form without anybody’s help.*” They further experienced the programme as being motivational, for example through the reading system in the library, as described in the previous section. The implementation of this system contributed to their internal motivation. This adolescent explained that “*You always want to read more, so that you can go to the next level ...*”.

Other intrapersonal attributes gained included confidence and belief in their own abilities, which may determine the attitude with which they approach tasks and problems. One adolescent girl exclaimed: “*I can become a president!*”, explaining how she learned that she was capable of much more than she had thought. They also experienced an increase in self-confidence as this quote indicates: “*For some times, somehow, it uplifted your self-confidence, you know how to talk ...*”. Self-esteem is considered an important component of psychosocial development during adolescence (Sadock & Sadock, 2007:39), which assists adolescence in managing the challenges, changes and transitions characteristic of adolescence (Birkeland, Melkevik, Holsen & Wold, 2012:43). Some of the features of self-esteem include academic achievement, athletic abilities and special talents. Positive feedback from a peer group and family members may increase self-esteem during adolescence (Sadock & Sadock, 2007:40).

Life skills gained. The adolescents experienced the life skills classes as equipping them with information and skills needed on a daily basis, as seen in the following quote: “... *her life skills ... she taught us things that you need to know in life.*” The topics that were covered during life skills

classes included teenage pregnancies, peer pressure, alcohol abuse, and safe sexual encounters, with practical demonstrations on how to use condoms properly. Theron and Dalzell (2006:397, 398) recognise adolescence as a period of heightened vulnerability, and argue that appropriate life skills could provide them with the necessary guidance and empowerment to meet the challenges they face.

Cognitive development. Their thought processes and critical thinking also changed, as seen in how they reflected on learning “... *how to use your brain ...*” and to “... *think outside of the box ...*” The programme supported them in becoming outspoken and taking on leadership roles and responsibility. Skinner and Edge (1998:358) describe development as the product of active and organised engagement in goal-directed effortful interactions with the social and physical environment. Improvements in critical thinking and learning to take responsibility can assist adolescents in engaging with their social and physical environment in an active, organised and goal-directed way, which Skinner and Edge (1998) consider to characterise a well-adjusted adolescent.

Introduction to unfamiliar content. The MYO programme provided the adolescents with a variety of experiences, never possible before due to financial implications as this adolescent explained: “... *because you don't get music elsewhere at ... I mean if you go for a drum lesson out of the programme, you would pay like a lot.*” Adolescents felt that MYO provided an opportunity to discover their own talents and interests, as this quote suggests: “*If I wasn't at MYO I don't think I will ever learn how to play the recorder. Now we also have guitar classes*”. Depending on the skills of the volunteers and teachers appointed at the programme, the type of sport and music activities varies from year to year. They were also introduced to technology, such as computers, internet and email, which they were ecstatic about as this adolescent girl exclaims: “*I EVEN got an EMAIL here, ja, I didn't have an email.*” The adolescents had the opportunity to see places they could never have imagined. This adolescent recognised this opportunity by saying: “*Ja, my mom will never take me here ... Ja, who will take me there? Who will take me to Etosha?*”.

An increase in opportunities for adolescents to participate in a range of activities is desirable (Fredericks & Eccles, 2008:712), since this allows them to demonstrate a wider range of skills

and interests that are not always available in schools. MYO filled this lack of experience for them, which could have positive developmental outcomes for them as has also been clearly noted in a review by Feldman and Matjasko (2005).

Resources provided by MYO. The use of internet and the library at MYO is one example of how these adolescents' assignments for school improved as a result of the resources that were provided, as this adolescent reflects: *"And you can even come here to do like your projects and stuff, which also increase your marks at school."* These resources may have been unavailable, like for this adolescent: *"Like, I don't know how I would have managed without MYO, because we don't like have a computer at home."* The field trips helped them to gain new knowledge also useful for projects: *"Or let's say you have maybe an essay to write about a place you have seen. At least you have something to write about."* In this regard, MYO is providing them with a unique opportunity to overcome the barrier to their achievement at school, namely a lack of resources. A study by Mampane and Bouwer (2011:123) found that adolescents had expectations of schools to provide them with resources, and experienced this as having a direct influence on reaching their goals.

The access to information and learning how to gather information on the internet, to type and to do projects on the computer improved the quality of their projects. Lubbe, Monteith and Mentz (2006:290) highlight the importance of proper keyboarding skills and the benefits these skills have on productivity while using the computer, as well as better sentence construction. The use of information and communication technology (ICT) is rapidly spreading to all areas of life, thus the National Curriculum of Basic Education (Ministry of Education, 2010:11) also considers competency in using new ICTs as one of the core skills needed for a knowledge-based society.

Personal relationship with teachers. In all the focus groups the adolescents became most excited and energized when talking about this relationship. The adolescents reminisced excitedly about the teachers of MYO, suggesting the positive relationships they had with some of the teachers: *"... this Mrs A, she was our Grade 5 teacher, like. Ja, she was very nice with us, like every time you came to MYO, it's like, run to her and then hug her or something."* They considered this relationship like a close family relationship, as stated by this adolescent: *"Like you will find this really nice teachers that you even want to call, like if they are one of your family members."*

Previous studies have found that positive student-teacher relationships are important in predicting social-emotional functioning (Decker, Dona & Christensen, 2007:103), improved academic attitudes and self-esteem (Chan, Rhodes, Howard, Lowe, Schwartz & Herrera, 2013:138) and that successfully relating to and interacting with learners may enhance their academic motivation (Allen, Pianta, Gregory, Mikami & Lun, 2011:1036). The adolescents felt comfortable to use the teachers for emotional support, evident when one adolescent reflected: *“Whenever you had a problem, and can’t talk to your parents, or the teachers at school, I actually felt more comfortable talking to the teachers at MYO, than at school. Cause, they listened more.”* Mampane and Bouwer (2011:124) emphasise the role of teachers in schools to be more than merely presenting the adolescents with knowledge and skills, as adolescents in adverse situations depend on their schools for assistance regarding their future lives.

The strength of the bonds formed with some of the teachers is also evident in the negative reaction when teachers leave the programme. In trying to cope with this loss, they blamed the programme managers for this by saying: *“The only person we were allowed to talk to was Mrs and then they took her away ...”*.

Social interactions with peers. During the adolescent developmental phase, socialisation entails the process or ability to find acceptance in peer relationships, as well as the development of more mature social cognition (Sadock & Sadock, 2007:39). Adolescents’ attempt to achieve a sense of belonging in their peer group; forming a sense of well-being through their ability to conform to the activities of that group and measuring up to their expectations (Sadock & Sadock, 2007:39). Peer relationships become increasingly important during adolescence (Gowers, 2005:8), and the programme created a platform for meeting more peers and making friends. The learners of MYO come from five different government schools, thus by being involved in activities together, new friendships are formed. This is evident from the following quotes: *“... for MYO to me it was, my, like the social life, since you come straight from school to MYO like, you never have time to make friends. The friends you have are here.”*

The connections these adolescents made with their peers and their teachers led them to regard MYO as a second home: *“MYO is like a family. Like, stick together and you must trust one another ... we thought of like MYO was our second home.”* Studies (cited in Cunningham *et al.*,

2008:18; Naudeau, Cunningham, Lundberg & McGinnis, 2008:79) have shown that a feeling of connectedness to a school setting may result in motivation and engagement in the classroom, academic performance, completion of education, lower incidence of skipping school, fighting or engagement in bullying and vandalism.

Change in how others perceive the learners of MYO. The adolescents felt they had been granted a beneficial status, through their MYO attendance, as the following quote suggests: “... *because like MYO really, writing MYO in your CV, it will make you become an executive ...*” Some adolescents also saw how the programme raised their popularity among friends as this adolescent reflected: “*It also makes you popular, because when you are here everybody is like, it’s the smart kids that go to MYO.*”

Positive feelings toward programme. When the adolescents described their experiences at MYO, they linked their memories to positive emotions. Some of their descriptive phrases and words of how they experienced the programme, included: “*When you came to MYO you were hyped about it. You know? You know, this magic, this thing ...*”; “*... everything was perfect ...*”; “*... very fun, and you don’t want to go out.*” One adolescent described how they would run to MYO in the afternoons by saying: “*I mean you would run up, just to get to MYO.*” The programme created a sense of enthusiasm and commitment. They were pleased to have somewhere to go, as is evident from this quote: “*... it was fun, you don’t have to stay at home. Like you had somewhere to go.*” Their appreciation for the programme was expressed by phrases such as “*... I give them a lot of applause ...*” and “*... so I thank them ... a lot.*” They also felt encouraged by their teachers: “*A good thing about all the teachers at MYO, okay, all the teachers at MYO is that they push you. You know, you think like that you can’t do it, but then they will be like, you have to do it. That’s the only way you know that if you can do it or not. So they always push you, try to push you harder.*”

Challenges associated with attending the MYO programme

The programme posed a few challenges, which some of the adolescents recognised as requiring their own commitment for them to reap the benefits, like this adolescent explained: “*... it depends on certain people and how you are and how you use your time.*” However, for some

adolescents it resulted in withdrawal from the programme, as they felt that they could not balance the commitment to MYO with other responsibilities at home or their government schools. Sanderson and Richards (2010:430) emphasise the importance of identifying the barriers affecting attendance of after-school programmes on a community level. Since the benefits of after-school programmes have been documented (Mahoney, Lord, & Carryl, 2005; Posner & Vandell, 1994), it is important to recognise the potential barriers to attendance (Grolnick, Farkas, Sohmer, Michaels & Valsiner, 2007:333; Weisman & Gottfredson, 2001:202) and attempt to alleviate these, so that adolescents have the opportunity to benefit from such programmes. At MYO, possible barriers that may influence attendance included the high expectations set by the programme and time management.

High expectations of the programme. Some challenges with regard to attending MYO influenced adolescents' attitudes toward the programme, like this adolescent reflected: *"I think MYO became too demanding. Like, that is part of the reason why I left."* They experienced this pressure as challenging as the following quote indicates: *"They were putting too much pressure on us, expecting too much ..."* They felt that the teachers and managers of the programme set very high standards, and that it was difficult at times to keep up: *"There is like a certain level that they expect, and you can't go below it."*

They experienced the programme as too intense, interfering with other responsibilities, as this adolescent recalled: *"... imagine you have to go to school at 7:00 come from school at 13:00, at 14:00 you are here, uh, you go home at 17:00. You have to cook, you have to learn for tests, you have to study ... Do your home chores. It's just too much."* They found it difficult to keep up, and became exhausted as this adolescent reflected: *"... then like we will go home and like you're tired from MYO, after school you were tired, you come, you get more tired and then we go home."* They felt that this had a negative impact on their school work: *"... then we still like have to study for examination. Sometimes you are so tired, you just sleep. And then next day go fail."*

Time management. The following two quotes suggest their difficulty in balancing their time with other responsibilities and activities: *"... one didn't get enough time to study and do stuff like, like some of us at home, we cook, ja, to the household and stuff like that ..."*; *"Ja and like we didn't have time for other stuff, like just ... School, MYO, home. School, MYO, home ... If I*

was in MYO right now, I would not have choir.” The adolescents were expected to obey the time boundaries set by the programme, evident from this reflection: “... when you actually don’t pitch like for MYO at all, they kind of give you warnings and stuff.” The adolescents expressed the need for a balance between MYO activities and other activities: “And I think they should like compromise more, like, MYO life and other stuff. Like they should really balance that out, like maybe MYO on that day ...”

DISCUSSION

In exploring the experiences of the alumni adolescents on the MYO after-school education programme presented in the township of Mondesa in Swakopmund it became apparent that the programme posed certain benefits to the participants who attended the programme, while certain challenges were also identified.

The benefits included improvement in various academic skills, such as mathematics, English and reading. The English and mathematics classes provided them with additional academic resources and exercises that improved their understanding of the work and enhanced their skills. These skills were transferred to their government school context, and they were able to perform better here. The reading classes and reading system applied in the library encouraged them to read more, which further improved their English and which possibly further assist them in other academic subjects as suggested by Bharutram (2012:205). The programme provided them with many resources, such as books, the use of computers and the internet. They use this information to complete government school projects, which assisted the adolescents in improving their grades. Their cognitive skills were also developed by encouragement of critical thinking. They were also experienced activities such as the music, sport and field trips as expanding their life experiences.

Various aspects of the programme contributed to the adolescents’ intrapersonal attributes. They felt motivated by the programme, learned to commit and persevere and take responsibility. Their self-confidence increased by gaining a belief in their own abilities. All of these form an important part of their psychosocial development. The life skills classes equipped them with

knowledge that could assist them in making responsible health choices, such as practicing safe sex and abstaining from alcohol abuse.

On a social level, the findings indicate that the adolescents experienced MYO as providing an avenue for making new friends and meeting people from outside their own community. Socialisation forms an important part of the social and emotional development of adolescents (Sadock & Sadock, 2007:39). They also formed strong bonds with some of the teachers and finding emotional support and help with problem-solving within this relationship with an adult.

Apart from the many benefits they experienced, there were also some factors that challenged their commitment and attendance to the programme. They felt that very high expectations were set by the programme in terms of their involvement and level of effort put into the academic work, leaving no room for error. Furthermore they found it difficult to balance the time spent at MYO with other responsibilities at home. However, despite some of these challenges, the adolescents could still reflect on positive aspects of the programme and wanted to convey this message to others.

It is thus evident that the adolescents experienced a number of positive contributions made by the MYO programme, which are all linked to some aspects of their overall development.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND LIMITATIONS

As this exploratory study aimed to explore the experiences of alumni adolescents on the contribution of the MYO programme, the descriptions of their experiences provided insight into and descriptions on how they experienced the programme, what they regarded as beneficial and challenging.

It would therefore be recommended to the management of MYO to consider further research into how the developmental needs of their learners are met through the programme and balancing this with the distinct needs that result from these learners' specific circumstances. Hence, a detailed needs assessment could be conducted to provide valuable insight into how the programme could be further developed to assist and support these learners in the best possible way. A longitudinal

evaluation study, which includes pre-test and post-test, could also provide valid scientific evidence on the effectiveness of the programme.

Further research could also focus on the role of the teacher-learner relationship. Pianta, Stuhlman & Hamre (2002:92) have argued that adult mentors in school settings have been underused and underdeveloped. Given the considerable amount of time MYO learners spend with teachers, the positive experiences of this relationship communicated in this study and found in various other studies (Allen *et al.*, 2011; Chan *et al.*, 2013; Decker *et al.*, 2007), such research could be invaluable.

A limitation in this study was that the experiences of the participants were context-specific and the findings cannot be generalised to apply to other communities or other after-school programmes. Another limitation was controlling the size of the focus groups and the number of adolescents participating. Many arrived at groups other than those they were scheduled for, and had to be turned away to prevent the groups from having too many participants. However, these adolescents then did not return for their original scheduled group, thus reducing the total number of participants.

CONCLUSION

The alumni adolescents clearly experienced a range of benefits contributed by the MYO programme adolescents, however, it is also important to note the challenges they experienced in terms of the implementation of the programme. Considering both the positive and negative experiences of these alumni adolescents, the study has provided a possible backdrop for more detailed research. Such endeavours are recommended to the management of the programme, to ensure that there is a link between the needs of the adolescents and the goals of this intervention programme, and to give sound scientific support for the efforts that are put into this programme.

SECTION C
CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS

This study explored the experiences of alumni adolescents on the contribution of the MYO after-school education programme presented in the township of Mondesa in Swakopmund. The adolescent development phase, in which these children find themselves, is seen as a diverse and dynamic period of life (Lerner & Galambos, 1998:418). The adolescents spend numerous hours per week at school, and it is considered to have an impact on every aspect of their development. In low-income and middle-income countries adolescents constitute a far greater proportion of the population than in high-income countries (Sawyer *et al.*, 2012:1630), and it is in these countries that adolescents may be presented with fewer opportunities, resources and services that are essential for them to thrive and grow into healthy, productive adults (Murry *et al.*, 2011:114). As a lower to middle income country (Garrouste, 2011:224; Smith & Barret, 2011:25), Namibian schools are faced with challenges, such as overcrowded classes (Hoadley, 2009:62), a lack of learning materials (Marope, 2005:27) and unqualified teachers (Marope, 2005:29), rather than being opportune developmental contexts. After-school education programmes attempt to overcome some of these challenges.

The findings of the present study revealed that the MYO programme contribute to these adolescents' development and education in various ways. The fundamental learning areas, namely English, mathematics and reading skills, addressed at MYO have resulted in improved academic knowledge and skills. By having the opportunity to ask questions and being provided with additional exercises in mathematics and English, some of the adolescents' marks improved at school. Their improved skills have thus transferred to their government school setting. Since most of the adolescents' mother tongue is Oshiwambo, the increased use of the English language while attending the programme as well as the opportunity to read English books have assisted these learners in mastering Namibia's official language (Ministry of Education, 2010:11).

It is also clear from the findings that the programme not only helped them to improve their academic achievements, but also provided them with support as they progress through this developmental phase. The life skills classes and emotional support from the teachers at MYO equipped these adolescents with knowledge and skills necessary to overcome peer pressure to engage in risky behaviours. The close relationships they had with some of the teachers as well as

the friends they made have resulted in a sense of connectedness. On an intrapersonal level, the adolescents gained confidence and discovered their talents and abilities that are essential for the development of their self-esteem. The means of implementing the programme created enthusiasm and internal motivation for this educational programme. Socialisation and self-esteem form part of the necessary social and emotional development during the adolescent developmental phase. The programme created an opportunity for the adolescents to be introduced to a range of activities, which is not always available at their government schools. They were able to take part in extracurricular activities, such as learning to play musical instruments and practising various sports. The field trips and excursions organised by MYO allowed them to see the most prominent tourist attractions in Namibia, thus expanding their knowledge base and providing them with valuable information. Furthermore, the findings indicate that the adolescents learned to think critically, which is an important part in adolescent cognitive development.

The accounts that the adolescents gave on their experiences of the programme indicated that they were appreciative of and grateful for the opportunities provided. The findings also suggest that the adolescents learned to commit and persevere while they pursued their goals, and that they felt encouraged by the teachers of MYO. However, they also reflected on some challenges they faced while attending the programme on a full-time basis. The intensity of the programme and time required made it difficult for them to balance their attendance at MYO with other activities and responsibilities.

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE STUDY

MYO has been providing learners with academic assistance and guidance, as well as psychosocial development opportunities since 2003. From the findings of this study there is no doubt about the positive experiences and benefits they experienced. However, the challenges the adolescents experienced should also be taken into account, as is also suggested by other studies on afternoon-school programmes (Grolnick *et al.*, 2007:333; Weisman & Gottfredson, 2001:202).

A comprehensive needs assessment is recommended to the MYO management, since this may provide valued insight into how the programme could be further developed to in a way that would assist and support their learners in the best possible way, ensuring that their developmental needs are balanced with the distinct needs arising from their specific circumstances. This may point out how any challenges may affect their participation in the programme. A detailed investigation into the field of after-school programmes by Halpern (2000:202) highlights the importance of such a balance. A longitudinal evaluation study, including a pre-test and post-test, could further provide valid scientific evidence on the effectiveness of the programme.

Another specific example of future research could be the role of the teacher-learner relationship. Pianta, Stuhlman & Hamre (2002:92) have argued that teachers and other adults in school settings are an underused and underdeveloped source of adult mentors. Such an endeavour seems indicated when considering the positive impact of this relationship on youth found in various studies (Allen *et al.*, 2011; Chan *et al.*, 2013; Decker *et al.*, 2007), the considerable amount of time learners spend at MYO and the positive experiences of this relationship the adolescents have communicated in this study.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This qualitative exploratory study provided insight into the experiences of these adolescents that previously attended the MYO programme. These experiences are context-specific, meaning that the findings cannot be generalised to apply to other communities or other after-school programmes.

Another limitation of this study was the lack of control the researcher had over the adolescents' attendance of the focus groups. These adolescents knew each other and saw each other at school during the day. They talked among each other and became aware of all the scheduled focus groups. As a result, they would decide for themselves which focus group to attend. The researcher had to advise them to come during their scheduled time slots as some of the focus groups were already full. However, these adolescents did not return for their scheduled time

slots. They were definitely interested, but it was difficult for the researcher to plan for and manage the sizes of the focus groups.

CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE STUDY

The findings give a clear indication of the many positive contributions the programme has made to the adolescents' overall development and their academic or school functioning. Similar positive contributions are also documented in research studies of other after-school intervention programmes (Mahoney *et al.*, 2005:821; Paviot *et al.*, 2008:149; Posner & Vandell, 1994:455). Hence, this study contributes to this field of research. Most of the benefits that these adolescents reflected on are skills considered in the National Curriculum for Basic Education (Ministry of Education, 2010:10) as core skills essential for every individual. This means that the skills and qualities that adolescents acquire through their attendance at MYO form part of a bigger context. The educational system strives to develop these core skills in learners in a broader quest "to empower learners for the development of Namibia for the future as a knowledge-based society" (Ministry of Education, 2010:7). The purpose of this study was not to investigate whether the goals and aims of the national curriculum have been achieved, but through the in-depth accounts of these adolescents' experiences of the programme it is evident that the contribution MYO makes is in line with aims set out by the school curriculum.

MYO is a non-profit initiative which depends on sponsors for funding. The findings and conclusions from this study also contribute to the programme by providing invaluable feedback to the sponsors on the impact the programme has on the development and well-being of the adolescents. It has also provided a backdrop for suggestions for further research. Since no such endeavour has been attempted in the 10 years of MYO's existence, this study may have provided a valuable foundation which will make further research attempts more plausible.

FINAL WORDS

The Mondesa Youth Opportunities Programme has clearly made an impact on the lives of these adolescents in terms of their academic functioning, their intrapersonal skills and qualities, and/or on a social level by providing them with emotional support. It is thus clear that this additional education programme provide benefits for the adolescents, which have provided the sponsors

and donors of this programme with worthwhile validation for their financial inputs. Despite the adolescents gratitude for these benefits, it is important to also note the challenges the adolescents experienced in terms of how the programme is implemented. These challenges should be considered by the MYO management in order to assist successful implementation. Should this programme be evaluated on a comprehensive level in terms of its effectiveness and implementation, the findings from this study have provided a constructive starting point. More detailed programme evaluation studies are necessary to ensure that there is a link between the needs of the adolescents and the goals of the intervention programme.

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APPENDIX A

GUIDELINES FOR AUTHORS: SOUTH AFRICAN JOURNAL OF EDUCATION

Editorial policy

The South African Journal of Education (SAJE) publishes original research articles reporting on research that fulfils the criteria of a generally accepted research paradigm; review articles, intended for the professional scientist and which critically evaluate the research done in a specific field in education; book reviews, i.e. concise evaluations of books that have recently appeared; and letters in which criticism is given of articles that appeared in this Journal.

Indicate the relevance of the study for education research where the education system is characterised by transformation, and/or an emerging economy/development state, and/or scarce resources.

Research articles of localised content, i.e. of interest only to specific areas or specialists and which would not appeal to the broader readership of the Journal, should preferably not be submitted for consideration by the Editorial Committee.

Ethical considerations: A brief narrative account/description of ethical issues/aspects should be included in articles that report on empirical findings.

All articles will be submitted to referees (national and/or international). The consulting editors/referees will have documented expertise in the area the article addresses. When reviews are received, an editorial decision will be reached to either accept the article, reject the article, request a revision (in some cases for further peer review), or request arbitration. As a rule not more than one article per author or co-author will be accepted per year for refereeing and possible publication.

Authors bear full responsibility for the accuracy and recency of the factual content of their contributions. A signed declaration in respect of originality must accompany each manuscript.

On submission of the manuscript, the author(s) must present a written undertaking that the article has not been published or is not being presented for publication elsewhere.

The author(s) must ensure that the language in the manuscript is suitably edited and the name and address of the language editor must be supplied.

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Preparation of manuscripts

- The manuscript, including abstract, figure captions, tables, etc. should be typed on A4-size paper and the pages numbered consecutively.
- The title should be brief (max. 15 words), followed by the author(s) name(s), affiliation(s) (Department and University), and an e-mail address for the corresponding author.
- An abstract in English (approximately 190 words) must be provided, followed by up to 10 keywords, presented alphabetically.
- The text of the article should be divided into unnumbered sections (e.g. Introduction, Method, Results, Discussion, Acknowledgements, References, Appendix, in that order). Secondary headings may be used for further subdivision. Footnotes, if any, will be changed to endnotes.
- Authors must observe publishing conventions and should not use terminology that can be construed as sexist or racist.
- **Figures** should be clear, black/white originals, on separate pages — not embedded in the text. Grey or coloured shading must NOT be used. **Tables/figures** should be numbered consecutively, with a brief descriptive heading/caption. Information should not be duplicated in text and tables. Each table/figure must be referred to in the text by number — not ‘above’ or ‘below’. They will be placed where possible after the first reference.

References

- Authors should cite at least three earlier articles in SAJE that are relevant to the subject matter of their article.
- References are cited in the text by the author(s) name(s) and the year of publication in brackets (Harvard method), separated by a comma, e.g. (Brown, 1997).
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- If reference is made to an anonymous item in a newspaper, the name of the newspaper is given in brackets, e.g. (Daily News, 1999).
- For personal communications (oral or written) identify the person and indicate in brackets that it is a personal communication, e.g. (M Smith, pers. comm.).
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Johnson DW & Johnson RT 1999. Gifted students illustrate co-operative learning. *Educational Leadership*, 50:60-61.
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Van Zyl R (ed.) 1994. *Recent advances in classroom research*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
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- **Unpublished theses or dissertations:**
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Website references: No author:

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1. The submission has not been previously published, nor is it before another journal for consideration.
2. The submission file is in Microsoft Word or RTF document file format.
3. All URL addresses in the text (e.g., <http://pkp.sfu.ca>) are activated and ready to click.

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5. The text has had the authors' names removed. If an author is cited, "Author" and year are used in the bibliography and footnotes, instead of author's name, paper title, etc. The author's name has also been removed from the document's Properties, which in Microsoft Word is found in the File menu.
6. The article is approximately 5500 words or 15 pages.
7. The text was approved by a language editor.
8. Empirical data must be checked by a statistical consultant.