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Author's Email:smunenda@gmail.com

FACTORS LEADING TO POOR IMPLEMENTATION OF THE LIFE SKILLS CURRICULUM AT SELECTED COMBINED SCHOOLS IN MUKWE CIRCUIT OF KAVANGO EAST REGION, NAMIBIA.

Sebastian Muronga Munenda

School of Education, International University of Management, Nkurenkuru, Namibia

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The effective implementation of the Life Skills curriculum is vital for developing learners' knowledge, values, and competencies for personal and social growth. This study investigated factors contributing to the poor implementation of the Life Skills curriculum in selected combined schools in the Mukwe Circuit of the Kavango East Region, Namibia. A qualitative research approach, guided by a case study design, was employed to explore the experiences and perspectives of teachers and school leaders regarding curriculum implementation. Three combined schools were purposively selected for the study. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and open-ended questionnaires administered to teachers, Life Skills teachers, Heads of Department, and head teachers. Interviews were reserved for HODs/head teachers and Life Skills teachers, while questionnaires were used more broadly across participants. A total of 25 participants were drawn from a target population of 70. The study examined four key areas: in-service teacher training, availability of teaching and learning resources, teachers' perceptions of the curriculum, and supervisory support. Data were analysed thematically to identify recurring patterns and themes. The findings indicated that inadequate in-service training, insufficient teaching and learning resources, and limited supervisory support negatively affected curriculum implementation. Although these challenges existed, participants generally viewed the curriculum positively and recognised its importance in promoting learners' holistic development. The study recommends strengthening professional development, improving resource provision, and enhancing supervision to support effective curriculum implementation.

Keywords: Life Skills curriculum, curriculum implementation, teacher training, teaching and learning resources, supervision, combined schools, Namibia.

INTRODUCTION

The study was undertaken to find out the factors leading to poor implementation of the life skills curriculum at selected combined schools in Mukwe circuit of Kavango East region. Studies have shown that this problem is encountered in every part of the world, being developed countries, developing countries and Namibia is no exception. The challenges of successfully implementing the curriculum are mostly felt by developing countries as the economy of the country plays a role throughout the entire process of the curriculum. However, developed countries also do face other challenges in the successful implementation of the Life skills curriculum despite having all the resources.

Life Skills education originates from the 1986 Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion, which stated, under the rubric of personal skills should support personal and social development by providing information, advantage for health and enhancing of life skills (Global Evaluation, 2012). According to WHO (1997), the implementation of life skills curriculum requires the input from the school, education authority for teachers training and development of teaching and learning materials. Errecart, Walberg, Ross, Gold, Fielder and Kolbe (1991) insist that teaching life skills could form a base of life skills education for the promotion of mental well-being and healthy interaction and behavior.

Different countries of the world have different reasons why the Life Skills curriculums should be taught in schools. According to United Nations Population Fund (2002), in the United Kingdom, an important Life Skills initiative was set up to contribute to child abuse prevention. In U.S.A, there are numerous Life Skills programmes for the prevention of substance abuse and violence, while in Mexico it was the prevention of adolescent pregnancy. United Nations Population Fund (2002) asserts that in Zimbabwe and Thailand the impetus for initiating Life skills education was the prevention of HIV and AIDS. In South Africa and Colombia an important stimulus for Life Skills education has been the desire to create a curriculum for education for Life called "Life orientation" education in South Africa and "Integral Education" in Colombia (UNPF, 2002).

The Ministry of Education (2008) divides life skills into three categories: Skills of knowing and living with oneself, skills

of knowing and living with others and skills of making effective decisions. The Ministry of Education (2010) notes that Life Skills education is necessary in Namibia as it helps learners, particularly those with diverse backgrounds and abilities to be able to use their health, knowledge to practice healthy habits and avoid unhealthy ones. According to Ornstein & Hunkins (2009), in the implementation of life skills curriculum, teachers need to get deep understanding of the curriculum because they are the ones who disseminate the life skills curriculum. Ornstein points out that, teachers need more than one or two days training workshop so that they make sense of life skills and to gain competence in the new instructional practices that will engage the learners since life skills is learner-centered. According to Sharon & Susanne (2008), teachers in the United States of America are given in-service courses before the implementation of life skills curriculum, where workshops are organized for two days. Life skills implementation also needs teaching and learning resources because they are important for teachers to help them plan lessons and provide work for the learners.

According to Global Evaluation (2012) head teachers in many countries have not been given training or guidance for internal supervision in schools where life skills curriculum is being implemented. According to Ornstein and Hunkins (2009) curriculum implementation must be supervised and monitored for successful implementation. This study has not been conducted in Kavango East region; therefore, it fills the gap of the impacts of the unsuccessful implementation of the Life skills curriculum on learners in the region and the nation.

Therefore, the following objectives were used to guide the study: Objective number one was to determine the influence of teachers' in-service course in the implementation of life skills curriculum in combined schools in Mukwe circuit of Kavango East region. Second objective was to analyze ways in which the various learning and teaching resources influence implementation of life skills in combined schools in Mukwe circuit of Kavango East region. The third objective was to determine the extent of teachers' perceptions on the implementation of life skills curriculum in combined schools in Mukwe circuit of Kavango East region. Lastly, to determine the influence of supervision of HODs and head teachers on teachers and the implementation of life skills curriculum in combined schools in Mukwe circuit of Kavango East region.

On the same note, the study sought to answer the following questions to gather information: Question 1: To what extent is the influence of teachers' in-service training on the implementation of life skills curriculum in combined schools in Mukwe circuit of Kavango East region? Question 2: To what extent are the various ways in which learning and teaching resources are effective in the implementation of life skills curriculum in combined schools in Mukwe circuit of Kavango East region? Question 3: What are the teachers' perceptions on the implementation of life skills curriculum in combined schools in Mukwe circuit of Kavango East region? Lastly, question 4: To what extent is the influence of HODs and head teachers' supervision on teachers on the implementation of life skills curriculum in combined schools in Mukwe circuit of Kavango East region?

The Mukwe Circuit is a rural and marginalised educational setting that has not received substantial attention in empirical studies. Most existing Namibian research on Life Skills implementation focuses on urban or peri-urban regions, such as Khomas, Erongo, or Oshana.

Thus, by concentrating on selected combined schools in Mukwe, the study uniquely: Addresses gaps in regional educational research, highlights context-specific challenges faced by rural schools and captures realities influenced by cultural, socio-economic, and geographic factors unique to Kavango East. This specificity provides insights not available in national-level or urban-based studies.

Secondly, many studies focus on primary or secondary schools as separate categories, yet combined schools have unique structural challenges: Limited number of teachers trained in Life Skills, Teachers are overloaded with multi-grade or cross-phase responsibilities and Resource shortages typical of schools serving both junior and senior secondary learners.

The choice to study combined schools is a unique contribution because implementation challenges in these environments differ from those found in ordinary primary or secondary schools.

METHODOLOGY

In order to shed light on the problem: Factors leading to poor implementation of the life skills curriculum at selected combined schools in Mukwe Circuit of Kavango East Region, Namibia, a qualitative research approach was adopted, in which a case study design was embraced. A case study is an in-depth, detailed examination of a particular case (or cases) within a real-world context. It is characterized by a very flexible and open-ended technique of data collection and analysis (Kumar, 2011). In most cases, a case study method selects a small geographical area or a very limited number of individuals as the subjects of study. Case studies, in their true essence, explore and investigate contemporary real-life phenomenon through detailed contextual analysis of a limited number of events or conditions, and their relationships. There are several advantages in using case studies. Inter alia, the examination of the data is most often conducted within the context of its use (Yin, 2014), that is, within the situation in which the activity takes place. The research design assisted in filling the gaps within this area of study.

The sample of this study comprised of 25 participants from the purposefully selected three combined schools in Mukwe circuit. The selection of the sample of this study was guided by the following criteria: Three Heads of Department or head teachers and 22 teachers, including teacher-counselor or Life skills teacher.

Data Gathering Procedures is the process of gathering and measuring information on variables of interest, in an established systematic fashion that enables one to answer stated research questions, test hypotheses, and evaluate outcomes (Bhat, 2023). The three selected combined school and participants were selected based on the criteria of the effectiveness of the implementation of the Life Skills curriculum in schools. To gather information from schools, permission was sought from the Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture, Kavango East Regional Education Directorate to conduct

such research in the three selected combined school in the Mukwe circuit. The Director of Education in Kavango East region therefore granted permission for the study to be undertaken and a copy of this letter was presented to the circuit Inspector of education in Mukwe and the schools.

Furthermore, informed consent was obtained from participants before personal interviews were conducted/ questionnaires distributed. Central to qualitative research is an understanding of people from their own frames of references and experiencing reality as they experience it (Taylor, 2019). Therefore, the researcher empathised and identified the people who took part in the study.

Multiple methods were used to gather research data. The researcher analysed documents to provide information on the grounds of the National curriculum for basic education on Life Skills. In addition, the researcher employed the standardised open-ended interview schedule, whereby participants were asked the same questions in the same order. The standardised open-ended interview offered an opportunity to ask the prepared questions, and to probe responses of the participants about the new ideas which emerged during the interview process.

The interviews were only used for Heads of Departments (HODs) or heads teachers and teachers (Life skills teacher and any other two senior teachers). In addition, open-ended questionnaires were another tool used to collect data, and all participants were given questionnaires to answer and return them back after a specific reasonable time frame.

On the data analysis, Silverman & Manson (2015) explains data analysis as the process of systematically applying statistical and/or logical techniques to describe and illustrate, condense and recap, and evaluate data. Silverman & Manson (2015) further states that, “in qualitative research, data collection and analysis go hand in hand”. Through the in-depth interviewing process, sense was injected into the data. The study tracked emerging themes, read field notes, and developed concepts to interpret the data collected. Although, the researcher did a temporary data analysis while in the field, most of the data analysis was done after field work. Temporary analysis helps to make decisions in the data collection process and identify emerging topics and patterns (Silverman & Manson, 2015)**.** Inductive data analysis process was used as recommended by Gay, Mills and Airasian (2009). The data was inductively analysed. The researcher analyzed the data by organising them into their categories and grouping them into themes. The information was triangulated, verified and organised after it was collected from the interviews and questionnaires. Triangulation involves checking findings against other sources to increase credibility and quality (Silverman & Manson, 2015)**.**

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Data was presented under the objectives of the study which include finding out from participants the causes, effects and solution to the problem of poor implementation of the Life skills in combined schools.

Teachers’ in-service course in the implementation of life skills curriculum.

The study was to determine whether teachers’ in-service training influences implementation of Life skills curriculum in combined schools, in Mukwe circuit of the Kavango East region. To address this objective, the researcher conducted analysis of the influence of in-service training towards implementation of Life skills curriculum. Participants had their views pointed out, some believe that, teachers’ in-service training plays a vital role in the implementation of any curriculum. Teachers teaching this subjects were appointed based on their teaching experience and not their knowledge in the subject area. It is on this ground that they need to be trained in order for them to have the knowledge in the subject.

In-service training as Chirwa (2009) points out is that in South Africa teachers are provided with school based in-service training which is done through the pyramid method. They attend a three-day training workshop for life skills curriculum and the trainer visits the schools to provide support. In Nepal, life skills are incorporated in the pre-service and in-service in the teacher training colleges. The teacher should be trained on psychosocial skills both for themselves and for those they are teaching. Through training, teachers are able to raise questions about the content and the methods of teaching and learning.

From the findings presented, it emerged that there were significant differences among teachers who attended in-service training and those who did not attend training. This implies that in-service training had a great impact towards implementation of life skills curriculumIn line with the findings, Tijuana (2004) found that teacher training can positively affect attitudes towards implementation of life skill education and participatory techniques. Similarly, a research conducted by KIE (2008) established that in-service training ensured that teachers grow in their profession, boost their morale and make them take their job positively.

Learning and teaching resources and the implementation of life skills curriculum.

The second study objective was to establish whether availability of learning and teaching resources influence implementation of the life skill curriculum in combined schools in Mukwe circuit of Kavango East region. To respond to this objective, teachers and the supervisors were asked to rate the adequacy of teaching and learning materials in their respective schools. This is because inadequate provision of resources hinders the implementation of the Life skills curriculum, however, there are some teachers who may improvise and come up with teaching and learning resources. If the teachers cannot improvise, then it becomes a difficult situation. However, resources are necessary because they help the teacher to facilitate the teaching and learning.

This can be supported by the assertion of the Ministry of Education (2008), the teaching and learning resources are sometimes very expensive and some of these maybe developed, sourced from the environment at affordable prices and with ease of convenience. Teaching and learning resources are very important when it comes to life skills because it makes life skills real, interesting and enjoyable, it helps the learners to retain what they have learnt and moreover enables the learner to utilise more than one sense.

The findings clearly indicate that, teachers' guide and audio/visual tapes were inadequate in schools. This implies that most of the schools were not adequately equipped with teaching and learning materials hence undermining implementation of life skill education in school curriculum.

This implies that availability and adequacy of teaching and learning materials positively or negatively influences realization of life skill curriculum in schools. In agreement with the findings, a study conducted by Mutegi, (2012) on school factors influencing the implementation of life skills education in public primary schools found out that inadequate learning and teaching resources negatively influences implementation of life skills education.

Teachers' perceptions on the implementation of life skills curriculum in combined schools in Mukwe circuit of Kavango East region.

Teachers have different perceptions towards the implementation of the Life Skills curriculum. It is because of their different attitudes, some of them believe that Life skill subject should be allocated one lesson per week since it is not examinable; some topics are embarrassing to teach and LSE should be integrated in other subjects. On the other hand, majority of the participants disagreed that they enjoy teaching the Life skills curriculum and they do not use LSE lesson to teach other subjects. This was a clear indication that most of the teachers had a negative attitude towards LSE. Consequently, this negatively influenced effective implementation of LSE in schools. In agreement with the findings, Mulama, (2007) indicated that the implementation of life skills curriculum or programmes failed because of teachers' negative attitudes, non-commitment as well as the understanding by the teachers that their role was to impart knowledge and not get emotionally involved with learners.

Osakwe (2000) observes that attitude is majorly affected by teachers' knowledge base and masterly of the subject knowledge and the social-cultural context. According to Aoko (2012), the teacher is associated with quality teaching and learning in the classroom. A teacher who possesses a negative attitude impairs the ability of the learners to be able to receive messages from the subjects the teacher teaches leading to wrong interpretation of concepts (Aoko 2012). This implies that a teacher's attitude towards his subjects may affect the learners' performance positively or negatively creating retention and attention to the learners.

Most of the respondents viewed Life skills curriculum as a simple subject and teachers utilize Life skills lesson for other subjects, and this instill a bad impression in the learners to never take the subject seriously. With all the findings, it can be concluded that teachers' perceptions have a huge effect on the implementation of the Life skills curriculum

Influence of supervision of HODs and head teachers on teachers and the implementation of life skills curriculum in combined schools in Mukwe circuit of Kavango East region.

Teachers and supervisors (HODs or Head teachers) were asked whether the life skills curriculum was supervised regularly. Participants believe that, to ensure close supervision on the Life skills teacher, the teacher should also be on the observation schedule, the teacher is visited just like any other teacher in the school. Through these observations, it can be clear that whether the learners are taking the subject serious or not. In addition, the supervisors normal have one-on-one engagement with the teacher to encourage them to take the subject serious.

This is in line with Ornstein and Hunkins (2009) that curriculum implementation must be supervised and monitored. The supervisor who is the head teacher provides directions and guidance and makes sure teachers carry out the change of incorporating life skills. The head teachers are to ensure that the lesson is plotted in the block time table and taught at the right time and the right content is taught. This is confirmed by Ornstein and Hunkins (2009), who state that curriculum implementation must be supervised and monitored.

Ornstein explores that curriculum implementation must be supervised and monitored the supervisor who is the head teacher provides directions and guidance and makes sure teachers carry out the change on incorporating life skills. According to (Global Evaluation, 2012) many head teachers have not been given any training or guidance for any internal supervision. The study sought to establish how supervision affected the implementation of life skills curriculum. The teachers were therefore asked to respond to items that sought to establish the same. South Africa according to Chirwa (2009) supervision is done through formal assessments which are moderated for the purpose of quality assurance.

CONCLUSION

Based on the outcomes, the study concluded that the implementation of the life skills curriculum in combined schools is influenced by various factors namely: teachers' in-service training on the implementation of life skills curriculum, learning and teaching resources, teachers' perceptions and HODs or head teachers' supervision on teachers.

Most teachers cited that they had not been given any training for the Life Skill curriculum in ages. Therefore, they do not have the knowledge and skills on ways to implement the Life skills curriculum. It is against this background that, teachers find it difficult to identify learners' needs, plan the lessons and teach the lessons effectively. This was supported by Weru (2010) who indicated that, in-service training enables teachers to reflect upon their competencies , maintain them up to

date and develop them further.

To be the most effective, in-service training should be spread over time, be collaborative, use active learning, be delivered to the groups of teachers, encourage experimentations and respond to the teacher's needs (Weru, 2010). The concept of in-service teacher training has also been supported by Bishop (1986) who noted earlier that the in-service training is a conventional way of introducing teachers to new ideas and methodologies.

Learning and teaching resources for the implementation of life skills curriculum in combined schools are inadequately supplied. Findings have shown that schools used mostly text books, which are few in number yet these resources, are to be spread as per the ministry approvals. These findings align with the assertion of KIE (2005) who asserts that, resource materials make the Life Skills activities real and interesting, enhance participants' understanding of Life Skills activities and enable the participants to retain the knowledge, life skills and attitude learnt. Resource materials enable the facilitator to prepare adequately and present Life Skills activate effectively (KIE, 2005)

The teachers' perception towards the implementation of life skills curriculum is yet another factor hindering the implementation of the Life Skills curriculum. According to Aoko (2012), the teacher is associated with quality teaching and learning in the classroom and if the teacher possesses a negative attitude, this will harm the ability of the learners to be able to receive messages from the subjects the teacher teaches leading to wrong interpretation of concepts. This implies that a teacher's attitude towards his subjects may affect the learners' performance positively or negatively creating retention and attention to the learners. Therefore, teachers need to be made to understand the importance of the Life skills curriculum, so that they become supportive to the Life Skills teachers.

Heads of Departments or Head teachers' supervision of teachers is very vital. It helps to ensure that the lessons are captured on the time table, that teachers lesson plan, make schemes of work and attend to their lessons as per time table requirements. These findings are also supported by Ornstein & Hunkins (1993), supervisors need to monitor both the manner of teaching and the content that is actually being addressed by the teacher in the classroom It is the role of supervisors to provide direction and guidance to teachers on how to implement the curriculum effectively. The supervisor checks that teachers have the required knowledge and skills by observing classrooms to identify the needs of teachers as they implement the curriculum.

Recommendations for this study, in line with the findings and conclusions, the researcher recommended the following;

Teachers in- service training, the study observed that most teachers have cited weakness due to the fact that they have not been given specific training on the implementation of the Life skills curriculum; it is recommended that such training is very vital especially to those teachers who were recently appointed. Training should be done from the schools to the University level. This training should clearly define what Life skills curriculum entails and the role of teachers implementing it in the schools.

Provision of adequate teaching and Learning Resources, the study revealed that most combined schools do not have the adequate learning and teaching materials. The Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture and other educational stakeholders should ensure that resources are equitably distributed schools. The school administration should also take good care of the learning materials offered by the Ministry to help the learners acquire the abilities to enable them adapt positive behavior.

Teachers perceptions on the implementation of life skills, the study revealed that the implementation of the Life skills curriculum has had challenges when teachers feel it is adding them burden in terms of work load and thus the time table is squeezed. Proper planning together with allocation of the Life skills implementation to the designated qualified teachers should be done especially early enough before the new term kicks off.

Regular Supervision, the study revealed that supervision is not properly done. Heads of Departments or Head teachers should clearly explain to their teachers their role in planning, scheming and teaching the life skills lessons. Supervision should be done both externally and internally. They should also impartially and objectively carry on supervision to ensure that the syllabus standards are fully met.

Recommendations for further study, the study sought to investigate the factors contributing to the poor implementation of the Life skills curriculum in combined schools in Mukwe circuit of Kavango East region or Namibia. Life skills curriculum is still a major issue in different regions across the country. The researcher recommends extension of the study to other educational circuits and regions to compare these factors and identify other challenges that may hinder the implementation of life skills curriculum in schools. The following areas were suggested for further research;

- Life skills curriculum in relation to academic performance.
- Life skills curriculum and health education.
- The impact of life skills curriculum on the retention of learners.

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