

The Efficiency and Effectiveness of Secondary Schools in Namibia

*Michael Antonius Mbudje¹ & Elock Emvula Shikalepo¹ 

¹The International University of Management, Windhoek, Namibia

* Author correspondence: m.mbudje@iium.edu.na

ABSTRACT

This study analysed the operations of secondary schools in Namibia, with a specific focus on the challenges affecting the quality of teaching, learning, and overall learner performance in Namibian secondary schools. Despite the Namibian government's significant investment in the education sector, the secondary education system continues to struggle with inefficiencies that hinder its effectiveness. The study adopted a qualitative research methodology to gain an in-depth understanding from key stakeholders in the education system. The population comprised school principals, teachers and learners from selected secondary schools. The sample was selected purposively and included participants with direct experience of school operations and learner performance records. Data were collected using interviews and focus group discussions, providing rich and diverse insights in understanding the subject. The data were analysed using thematic analysis and revealed that the Namibian secondary education system was confronted with numerous challenges, including high staff turnover, impact of postgraduate diploma graduates and the normalcy of limited parental involvement. These challenges have negatively affected secondary schools' operations, resulting in reduced secondary schools' throughput. These themes provide a comprehensive understanding of the systemic and institutional barriers limiting educational quality and learner success in Namibian secondary schools. The systemic issues have implication to both educational policy and practice, necessitating the need for various reforms within Namibia's education system to prioritise effective teaching and learning in Namibian secondary schools.

Keywords: Learner performance, Parental involvement, Secondary schools, Staff turnover, Teaching quality.

1. INTRODUCTION

The history of secondary education in Namibia is deeply rooted in the country's colonial past, where educational opportunities were provided on racial and unequal basis. Before independence in 1990, access to quality secondary education for most Namibians was very limited, as the system was designed to serve the best interests of the colonial masters. Following independence

in 1990, the Namibian government prioritised education as a key driver of national development and social transformation of society. The establishment of the Ministry of Education and Culture marked a turning point, with policies introduced such as 'Towards Education for All', a policy document which aimed at promoting access, equity, democracy and quality of education for all citizens. Another significant change was the restructuring of the education system into three-tier education model, namely, primary level, junior secondary level, and senior secondary level. These levels have since been changed to the current school levels, namely, pre-primary, junior primary, senior primary, junior secondary and senior secondary level. The levels were meant at creating a coherent and progressive pathway for learners throughout the education system.

Significant progress has been made since independence in improving the accessibility and infrastructure of secondary educations in Namibia. Strategic initiatives such as the introduction of the then Education and Training Sector Improvement Programme (ETSIP) and the implementation of Vision 2030 have supported curriculum reforms, teacher training initiatives and have expanded school facilities. These efforts have led to an increase in school enrollment, addressing gender parity in education and a gradual improvement in literacy rates of both learners and parents. In addition, the teaching philosophy was also changed from teacher-centered to learner-centered philosophy, which emphasised continuous assessment and competency-based curricula, and making learning more inclusive and learner-centered. Despite these achievements, major challenges continue to undermine the education system's overall effectiveness and efficiency.

One of the challenges is that the secondary education level continues to produce low throughput rates, implying that a significant number of learners fail to complete their secondary education successfully and secure admission to tertiary institutions. Many learners struggle to meet promotion requirements due to factors such as poor teaching quality, overcrowded classrooms high teacher-learner ratio and socio-economic constraints (Likuru & Mwila, 2022). This situation raises serious questions about the efficiency of the system and the return on investment in education. The situation raises serious questions because the Namibian government allocates a substantial portion of the national budget to education, yet the outcomes remain below expectations and cannot justify the budgetary allocation. Despite heavy investment in educational infrastructure, teacher recruitment and salaries and curriculum reforms, the education sector continues to face persistent issues of inequalities, inefficiency, and poor learner performance. This mismatch between financial investment and educational output signals systemic weaknesses that require attention. This study intended to analyse the challenges facing the secondary education, whose understanding can inform strategies that can enhance efficiency and increase throughput rates at secondary school level.

The study was guided by the following key questions:

- a) What are the main challenges facing the Namibian secondary education level?
- b) How do the identified challenges influence the quality of teaching and throughput rates in Namibian secondary schools?

The following literature review prefixed the empirical investigation.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The standard of education in Namibian secondary schools has been a central focus of educational reform since independence in 1990. Several policy frameworks, such as Education and Training Sector Improvement Programme (ETSIP), Vision 2030 and National Development Plans (NDPs) have been implemented and sought to improve quality, equity and relevance of schooling. Research indicates that Namibia has made notable progress in expanding access to education,

revising curricula and integrating continuous assessment practices to promote learner-centered education and improve mastery of learning outcomes. Despite these initiatives and their implementation, disparities in educational outcomes persist between urban and rural schools, often linked to unequal resource distribution, inadequate teacher training and limited instructional materials (Zhu, 2024). As a result, the standard of education remains inconsistent over the years, with some schools performing exceptionally well while others continue to struggle with quality teaching and good learner achievement.

The challenges facing secondary education in Namibia are complex, systemic and interrelated. Studies highlighted pressing issues such as high teacher turnover, insufficient subject specialisation, and a shortage of qualified educators in science and mathematics subjects as some of the attributes for the inconsistent in secondary school performance level. Retaining experienced teachers is particularly important, as teacher turnover can disrupt the continuity of teaching and hinder the development of school culture and negatively affect learners' performance. Numerous studies have identified key factors that influence teacher retention, with job satisfaction, work-life balance, opportunities for professional development and the school's overall climate being among the most significant (Kohli, 2019). When teachers feel valued, supported and are given opportunities to grow professionally, they are more likely to stay in their roles as teachers, contributing to a positive and stable school environment. On the other hand, in schools that suffer from inadequate resources, poor leadership and limited opportunities for professional growth and development, teacher turnover rates tend to be higher (Abeysooriya et al., 2024).

Overcrowded classrooms and limited infrastructure continue to affect the learning environment, while socio-economic factors such as poverty and low parental involvement in education contribute to poor learner motivation and academic underperformance (Likuru & Mwila 2022). Bureaucratic delays within the education system also hinder timely policy implementation and school-level decision-making. Moreover, the automatic promotion practice of promoting learners who would have failed twice in a grade is another challenge affecting secondary school throughput. Even though the automatic promotion is intended to reduce dropout rates, it has advanced learners to the next grades without adequate mastery of content, thereby lowering overall academic standards.

Several areas of improvement in secondary education provision have been identified through recent reforms and research recommendations. Efforts to strengthen teacher professional development, integrate digital learning technologies and promote inclusive education have shown promise. However, further attention is needed in improving teacher retention, enhancing school leadership and aligning curricula with 21st-century skills. Greater emphasis on community engagement, monitoring systems for learning outcomes and accountability mechanisms would also help ensure consistent quality outcomes across secondary schools. To achieve sustainable improvement in secondary school throughput rates, Namibia needs to reflect on the systemic challenges facing secondary education to ensure that all learners, regardless of background, receive equitable and high-quality education that prepares them for admission into tertiary institutions.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a qualitative research methodology to analyse the challenges affecting the performance of learners in Namibian secondary schools. The qualitative methodology explores meaning and insights in a given situation (Mohajan, 2018). It was important to understand and describe the phenomena from the point of view of the participants (Fouché, 2021). The qualitative methodology allowed for an in-depth understanding of the participants' experiences, perceptions and interpretations of the factors influencing learner performance in secondary schools. The study

focused on secondary schools in the Khomas Region. The choice of the Khomas Region was necessitated by its demographic and socio-economic significance. Khomas region house Windhoek which is the main administrative and economic hub of Namibia, thus attracts a people from all regions of Namibia. Though the main aim is not to generalise the feeding, Khomas makes it a suitable site for studying the performance patterns of secondary school learners who are both representative and context based.

A purposive sampling technique was employed to select participants who were typical of the subject that was studied and were selected according to defined criteria. The sample consisted of school principals, teachers and learners from case study secondary schools in the Khomas region. The inclusion of these groups provided a comprehensive view of the issues, allowing triangulation of data from different stakeholders' perspectives. A total of six schools were selected, with six principals, twelve teachers and twenty-four learners participating in the study. Data collection was conducted through focus group discussions and interviews.

The focus group discussions were conducted with learners to encourage shared experiences and perspectives, while interviews were conducted with teachers and principals, who provided detailed insights into institutional and policy-related factors. All data collection activities adhered to ethical research principles, including informed consent, voluntary participation and confidentiality. The data were analysed using thematic analysis, following Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis framework, which entailed familiarisation with the data, generating initial codes, identifying patterns, developing themes and reporting. The themes were refined and validated through cross-checking with participant responses.

4. ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

After the data were analysed using thematic analysis, three key themes that shapes the major challenges affecting the effectiveness of secondary education in Namibia. These themes were: teacher turnover, postgraduate diploma graduates and the normalcy of limited parental control. These themes collectively constrain the quality of teaching and learning in Namibian secondary schools, as discussed in the following section.

5. DISCUSSION

The following section discussed the key themes.

5.1 Teacher turnover

The complexity of teacher retention is shaped by various factors that influence teachers' job satisfaction and career decisions (Anog et al., 2024). Teachers are essential for effective teaching and learning and their departure from schools can have profound implications, including disruptions to teaching and learning, increased workload for remaining staff and higher recruitment and training costs to the schools (Abdullayev, 2020). Several studies have shown that factors such as professional development opportunities, competitive salaries, work-life balance, and effective school leadership are key in retaining teachers (Vidal-Salazar et al., 2012; Juwanti & Octafian, 2025). These elements inform teachers' overall job satisfaction and their sense of belongingness to the school. Frequent teacher transfers from one school to another, resignations of teachers and prolonged replacements of teachers disrupt the effectiveness of teaching and the mastery of learning outcomes by learners.

Teachers who leave schools midway through the academic year due to transfer or resignation often create teaching and learning gaps that negatively affect schooling, particularly in critical subjects that forms part of the promotional criteria. This impact was felt by one school principal who stated that, *throughout the year, we are losing our best teachers to take up better-paying*

jobs, leaving learners without continuous learning and instructional guidance.” The movement of teachers between schools exacerbate hiring difficulties. Researchers agree that teacher turnover is to be expected, and some amount of turnover can be beneficial as teachers find schools or professions that are the right fit for them.

Teacher turnover often leads to low levels of motivation among remaining teachers and learners, negatively impacting the quality of teaching and learning. A lack of motivation impacts teaching negatively, increases burnout and leads to higher attrition, particularly in early career stages (Hornýák, 2025). Staff turnover is compounded by the lengthy of time taken to replace teacher transfers and resignation, further lengthening the time teaching and learning is kept on hold. When vacant position remains for extended period without being filled, learners are mostly forced to study without guidance or can be required to join other class group resulting in overcrowded classroom, all which are not conducive for effective teaching and learning.

Overcrowded classrooms significantly hinder teaching effectiveness and learner engagement. In larger classes, teachers experience increased stress and heavier workloads, making it difficult to provide personalised instruction to learners. This lack of individualised attention can lead to frustration for teachers, while learners often feel disengaged and struggle to participate meaningfully in lessons. These challenges negatively affect both teacher performance and learner achievement, creating barriers to effective teaching and learning. The absence of quality teaching and learning negatively affects learner confidence to study resulting in decreased learner performance.

5.2 Postgraduate diploma graduates

There were concerns raised regarding the quality and relevance of postgraduate diplomas pursued by teachers, in providing sufficient instructional and assessment support to learners. Participants felt that postgraduate diploma graduates fell short of the required instructional and pedagogical preparedness necessary for facilitating effective teaching and learning in their allocated subject areas. Many people are changing careers including changing to teaching for which they do not have the teaching qualifications and need to understand the art of teaching (Williams, 2010). As a result of attempting to join the teaching career, individuals will then enrol for postgraduate diploma studies in education, to qualify as a teacher. Concerns raised include the duration of studying for a postgraduate diploma not being enough to capacitate postgraduate diploma students with sufficient subject content, pedagogical and instructional techniques required to effectively teach and assess their subject content.

One participant teacher observed that *“the duration of postgraduate studies needs to be extended so that postgraduate students have enough time to master content as some programs are practical in nature such as science subjects, and the available time may not equip students with the necessary content, pedagogical and classroom management techniques”*. Another participant noted that, *“some teachers come back with advanced certificates in specific subject areas, but these teachers still struggle with practical teaching strategies.”* These mismatched between training programmes and realities in the classroom signals that teachers teaching subjects with postgraduate diplomas and advanced certificates obtained in one year, did not have enough time to master the subject content especially practical subjects, which eventually compromise the quality of teaching and learning.

5.3 Normalcy of limited parental control

Active parental involvement in education is a recipe for learners’ academic success while its absence breeds learners’ underachievement. Good communication between teachers and parents can significantly increase learner’s learning motivation, build self-confidence and create

synergy between home and school in supporting learners' growth (Arifin & Tumin, 2025). Establishing a trusting and collaborative relationships between parents and teachers is important for fostering meaningful parental involvement in school activities. This expectation aligns well with Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, which addresses the mesosystem that emphasise the interactions between different microsystems, such as the relationships between parents and teachers or the cooperation between families and broad community (Iruka et al., 2020; Stanley & Kuo, 2022). Education is a shared responsibility, and parents must play their role in ensuring effective teaching and learning. Despite this recognition, there is minimum parental involvement in school activities. Several studies indicate that areas with weak collaboration between schools and parents have difficulties in improving the quality of teaching and learning and tend to have lower learner performance (Wahyuni, 2021).

Many parents are disengaged from school activities and are not providing the necessary academic support to their children. Teachers are no more bothered by limited parental in school activities as parents would rarely visit schools. It was observed that *"it has become normal for parents not to attend parent meetings or visit schools to check learners' books"*. The lack of lack of parental involvement in school activities results in poor learning among learners, which may also exacerbate disciplinary problems among learners at schools and home (Lawrence, 2022).

The growing disengagement between home and school environment undermines the collective responsibility and accountability of education, ultimately negatively impacting effective teaching and learning. Normalised limited parental participation in school activities implies that the burden of learners' education is entirely placed on teachers' shoulders without parental support, a mammoth task that teachers alone may not be able to handle and manage effectively. The issue of limited parental involvement needs to be addressed to foster collaborative relationships between schools and parents ultimately leading to improvement learner performance.

6. CONCLUSION

The findings of this study have revealed several critical factors that have far-reaching implications for both policy and educational practice within Namibia's secondary school system. Addressing the issues identified is essential for improving the quality of teaching, mastery of learning outcomes and the overall efficiency and effectiveness of the education system. When teachers frequently leave schools, education systems face disruptions to normal teaching and learning which undermine the stability and continuity of effective learning. Hence, school management must prioritise retention strategies by addressing the root causes of teacher turnover. Factors such as inadequate remuneration, limited career progression, high teacher-learner ratio and poor working conditions can be attributes to high teacher turnover. There is a need to strengthen current induction practices to ensure satisfaction with work environment and commitment to work. Additionally, high turnover creates financial challenges on education budgets due to continuous hiring of new staff to replace those resigned. Hence, a need to work on retention strategies that promote a stable and motivated teaching workforce, ultimately contributing to improved school performance and learner outcomes in secondary schools.

The issue of postgraduate diploma graduates who are deficient in content pedagogy and assessment signals the need for policy reform in teacher training and professional development practices. The common one-year training duration for postgraduate diplomas or advanced certificate provides limited exposure to classroom realities and insufficient time for practical teaching experience during training. Educational policymakers and curriculum developers should consider extending the duration of the programme or restructuring the curriculum of postgraduate diploma programmes to include a more comprehensive pedagogical content knowledge and supervised teaching practice to ensure effectiveness of teaching and learning upon completion of studies and entry into the teaching career. In practice, teacher training institutions must strengthen

partnerships and collaborations with schools to ensure that newly graduated teachers are ready and competent for classroom in both subject matter, pedagogies and instructional methods.

Limited parental involvement limits the effectiveness of teaching and lowers the monitoring of learner academic progress. Teachers cannot address learners' academic or behavioural challenges effectively without parents' involvement. Limited parental involvement cannot continue to remain as a normal, as effective schooling requires adequate parental involvement in education educational policies should encourage stronger school and parent partnerships through compulsory engagement structures and activities such as parents meeting, teacher-parent associations and mandatory book checking at schools. Schools should forge open communication channels and regular parental participation in learners' academic progress, which can be made possible with the use of technologies and digital tools.

Two-way communication training for teachers and parents should be encouraged through the development of easily accessible and user-friendly digital communication platforms, which can strengthen school culture and upholds participation and collaborative between teachers and parents, which altogether encourage the creation of an inclusive and partnership-based school environment. Research confirms that efforts to improve communication competencies and shared understanding of the collaborative role between schools and families are very effective in reducing the perception gap between teachers and parents and improving the quality of teaching and learning (Fadhilah, 2023). Enhancing parental involvement through technological platforms such as WhatsApp groups and online meetings will strengthen collective responsibility, improve parental engagement and learner motivation and contribute to better school performance outcomes.

REFERENCES

- Abdullayev, A. (2020). System of information and communication technologies in the education, *Science and World International Scientific Journal*, Query date: 5(81), 18-75 http://en.scienceph.ru/f/science_and_world_no_5_81_may_vol_ii.pdf#page=19
- Abeysooriya, D., Tham, J., & Khatibi, A. (2024). Teacher-student Interaction, non-academic staff support, and their impact on student retention: The mediating role of institutional factors in foreign degree-awarding institutions in Sri Lanka. *Educational Administration: Theory and Practice*, 30(9), 38:40. <https://doi.org/10.53555/kuey.v30i9.7437>
- Anog, M., Vera, J. de, & Peteros, E. (2024). Examining teacher retention through the lens of job satisfaction and commitment in a Philippine private school. *Journal of Learning, Teaching and Educational Research*, 29(9), 38:40. <http://ijlter.net/index.php/ijlter/article/view/2063>
- Arifin, R. Z., & Tumin, T. (2025). The role of collaboration between educators and parents in creating effective learning administration. *Cetta Jurnal Ilmu Pendidikan*, 8(4):79-87. <https://doi.org/10.37329/cetta.v8i4.4280>
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
- Fadhilah, N. (2023). Strategi Kolaborasi Pendidikan: Mengelola Perbedaan Persepsi dan Ekspektasi antara Sekolah dan Orang Tua. *Jurnal Manajemen Pendidikan*, 11(1), 55- 68.
- Fouché, C. B. (2021). Introduction to the research process. In C. B. Fouché & H. Strydom, & W. J. H. Roestenburg (Eds.), *Research at grass roots: For the social sciences and human services professions* (pp. 37–52). Van Schaik Publishers.

- Hornyák, A., (2025). Teacher motivation and its impact on the quality of education especially in disadvantaged areas: Challenges and opportunities for education policy. *Edelweiss Applied Science and Technology*, 9(6), 1931-1941. <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7980-5439>
- Iruka, I. U., DeKraai, M., Walther, J., Sheridan, S. M., & Abdel-Monem, T. (2020). Examining how rural ecological contexts influence children's early learning opportunities. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 52: 15-29. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.ecresq.2019.09.005>
- Juwarti & Ray Octafian, R. (2025). Understanding teacher retention challenges: A quality analysis of human resource strategies. *Journal of Business Management and Economic Development*, 3 (1) 264- 278. <https://doi.org/10.59653/jbmed.v3i01.1358>
- Kohli, R. (2019). Lessons for teacher education: The role of critical professional development in teacher of colour retention. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 7(1), 38:40. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022487118767645>
- Lawrence, A. R. (2022). *Basic educational reform and provision of quality education in South Africa (1994-2018): A tentative exploration of policy in the making* [Unpublished Doctoral dissertation] Stellenbosch University.
- Likuru, A., & Mwila, C. (2022) Overcrowded classrooms: Effect on teaching and learning process in public secondary schools in Ilemela Municipality, Tanzania. *AJESS*, 30(2), 75-87. <https://doi.org/10.9734/ajess/2022/v30i230744>.
- Mohajan, H. (2018). Qualitative research methodology in social sciences and related subjects. *Journal of Economic Development, Environment and People*, 7(1), 23–48. <https://doi.org/10.26458/jedep.v7i1.571>
- Stanley, K., & Kuo, N. C. (2022). "It takes a village": Approaching the development of school-family-community partnerships through Bronfenbrenner's Socio-Ecological Perspectives. *Journal of Human Sciences and Extension*, 10(1), 13. <http://dx.doi.org/10.54718/CQBW6379>
- Vidal-Salazar, M. D., Córdón-Pozo, E., & Ferrón-Vilchez, V. (2012). Human resource management and developing proactive environmental strategies: The influence of environmental training and organizational learning. *Human Resource Management*, 51(6), 905–934. <https://doi.org/10.1002/hrm.21507>
- Wahyuni, E. (2021). Dampak Kolaborasi antara Pendidik dan Wali Murid terhadap Kualitas Pendidikan di Daerah Terpencil. *Jurnal Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan*, 18(3), 100-112
- Williams, J. 2010. "Constructing a New Professional Identity: Career Change into Teaching." *Teaching & Teacher Education*, 26(3): 639–647. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2009.09.016>.
- Zhu, W. (2024). A study of the relationships between inequality in urban and rural educational resources and social class solidification. *Journal of Education Humanities and Social Sciences*, 42:649-653. <https://doi.org/10.54097/ytytm148>