



CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF FREE SECONDARY EDUCATION (FSE) IN OLUNO CIRCUIT, OSHANA REGION, NAMIBIA

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Abstract: Namibia implemented different educational reforms following its independence in 1990, to provide education for all [EFA]. To examine the challenges and opportunities during the implementation of FSE the study used learners, teachers, school boards and school principals as research participants to study how teachers and other research participants evaluated challenges and opportunities during the implementation of free secondary education in Oluno Circuit. This study applied a qualitative approach to evaluate the implementation of free secondary education in Oluno Circuit of Oshana region. To collect data for the study, document analysis and a semi-structured interviews were used as research instruments. Purposeful sampling was employed to select four secondary schools, 16 Grade 12 learners' Representative Council [LRC] 4 teachers, 4 Heads of Departments [HODs] and 4 chairpersons of school boards based on their leadership abilities. The study used content analysis to analyse the data. The study findings were insufficient and untimely funding, high learners' enrolment, school dropout, lack of teaching and learning materials. The study findings concludes that a lack of parental sensitisation, as well as the government's failure to cover all educational expenses were major challenges. Therefore, the study recommended that the MoEAC should employ qualified secondary school teachers to provide quality FSE and adequate and timely funding to schools, purchase teaching and learning materials, and provide enough infrastructure to accommodate all secondary school learners. Finally, the study recommended that the MoEAC should formulate free secondary education policy framework to guide the schools on how to address challenges emanated from the implementation of FSE and directives how to utilise the funds and, MoEAC should sensitise parents on the importance of free secondary education.

Keywords: Free secondary education, evaluation, implementation, Oluno Circuit, Namibia

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INTRODUCTION

To provide quality secondary education the government of the Republic of Namibia through the Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture made endeavours to improve access and retention of learners and to provide affordable secondary education to the children, there seem to be hindrances related to the implementation, which contributed to dwindling academic performance in the Oluno Circuit after the introduction of FSE. The MoEAC (2019) reveals that the total number of teachers decreased from the year 2015 to 2016 and increased in 2017 and 2019. The total number of teachers decreased by 9.3 % for the 2019 academic year. The total number of learners and teachers kept on fluctuating due to the achievement in enrolments of FSE (MoEAC, 2019). These mean teachers may not play their roles during critical times. It was noted that FSE was associated with challenges such as poor-quality education, monitoring and evaluation and a lack of FSE policy framework. As a result, the goal of this study was to evaluate the challenges and opportunities alike during implementing FSE.

Namibia took several educational reforms aimed at providing education for all [EFA]. To achieve the goals of EFA, the new education system has been striving to advance the accessibility of Free Secondary Education [FSE] (Ministry of Education [MoE], 1993). Most notable of the developments was the implementation of circular ED.07/2015, which directed the introduction of FSE.

The emergency of FSE followed a Cabinet resolution of 9th 17.06.14/001 that abolished compulsory payment of the School Development Fund [SDF] and called for the implementation of FSE by 2016 (Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture (MoEAC, 2015). The objectives of the study were to explore the challenges and opportunities in the implementation of Free Secondary Education in the Oluno Circuit. What are the factors that influenced the implementation of FSE in the Oluno Circuit? How does FSE promote access to quality education in the Oluno Circuit and how do schools mitigate challenges faced by FSE in the Oluno Circuit?

The information collected would be useful to parents in determining the necessary contributions they

sought to make, they could in turn be aware of the extent of the government's support towards FSE and equally be willing to do their part. Leaders, teachers, and other stakeholders in secondary schools could utilise information from these studies to appraise the position of FSE, address appropriate bottlenecks or recommend alike.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Framework

The study is informed by Rene Descartes' Theory of epistemological access to education. Descartes supports the basic knowledge and practice in a manner that respects learners' dignity. The term, access to education emanated during the reformation movement, when compulsory mass schooling became part of the legal framework in the nation-state building process by the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights, the right to free basic education became part of the policy framework of most developing countries (Gamede, 2006; Chandani, Balan, Smith, Donahue, 2007; Alexander, 2008).

The notion of setting up infrastructures for universalising basic education is one thing; universalising genuine belief in a pattern of basic education which is well-conceived in its own terms, regardless of what followed. However, the focus on the "generic and philosophical" level, on what quality means, but not on how it could be operationalised (Govinda & Bandyopadhyay, 2011). It appears the role of the teachers ignored, and the focus was on classroom and school-based processes as confirmed by Alexander (2008, p.7), "pedagogy was often the missed ingredient in EFA discussions on quality". Borrowing from Gamede (2006, p.4), access to education is understood to mean "both the means of entry, which is the first step, and post-enrolment access that is reflected in the outcomes" of schooling, since this definition would encapsulate both physical access and access to quality education.

In Namibia, access to education was principally and fundamentally understood meaning bringing into the system, those learners, who had been deprived of educational opportunities. Providing education for and to all. The need to create more physical infrastructures and thereby ensure more places in schools. Initially, access concentrated more on numbers. The eradication of barriers (physical and psychological) that prevent children from going to school (Mutorwa, 2002). The establishment of adult literacy programs, distance, and open learning education programs for the provision of quality teaching and learning.

Despite Descartes theory explanations on access to education the study revealed that the implementation of FSE in the Oluno Circuit ought to provide access to physical infrastructure (classrooms) and access to quality secondary education, as well as

ensures epistemological access and systematic learning of basic skills, knowledge, values, and practices. However, epistemological access and systematic learning recognised that the role of teaching and learning at the school, cluster, regional, and national levels must be structured to develop coherent ways of understanding and engaging with various learning areas. It is evident that the MoEAC's recent transformation of the educational curriculum from Ordinal Level to Advance Subsidiary Level implied access to carefully designed learning programs and materials that enable learners to gradually develop different competencies that not only provide access to physical facilities (classrooms) but also access to quality (epistemological access) secondary education in Namibia.

Challenges And Opportunities To Free Secondary Education

After independence in 1990, the newly elected government of Namibia inherited this fragmented, stratified, and dualist society of education policies and economy. As a result, the issue of disparity, inequity and unequal educational opportunities immediately become a central challenge for the new nation. The imbalance in the level of access to quality education among its citizens was one of the most features of the country's history (MoE, 1993).

Education in Namibia as in other African countries has come to be considered a basic human right. As indicated by Iiping and Likando's (2013) studies, despite well-crafted legislation and constitutional provision on universal primary education in Namibia, schools continued to charge fees from 1990 to 2012. Although such fees were referred to in the Namibian Education Act (Act 16 of 2001) as school development funds, many learners have been denied access to primary and secondary education based on the inability to meet such fees. As per the 2011 recommendations of the National Conference on Education (NCE), the Namibian Government decided to implement universal primary education in January 2013 without paying fees from Grade 0 to 7 in all public schools. It should be noted that a decision was undertaken to implement Universal Primary Education in 2013 followed by FSE in 2016. These are the constitutional obligations that Namibia should be commended for.

The reports in the New Era on the 10th of November 2015 titled "Free Secondary Education in Namibia", The Namibian News Paper of the 13th of November 2015 titled "Mixed view on Free Secondary Education in Namibia" and, the Patriot News Paper of the 1st of April 2016 titled "Good and bad of free secondary education in Namibia", raise concerns that Namibia might fall in the same pit that other countries have fallen. Preparedness in terms of teaching and learning resources, availability of funds, quality, school enrolment and other challenges while rolling out FSE are issues that cannot be ignored. It should be noted,

however, that though free education is a fundamental human right to which every citizen is entitled, it comes with different challenges and opportunities that require a holistic approach to planning, monitoring, and evaluation. Namibia, therefore, needed to tackle the challenges that stalled the implementation of FSE in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Access To Free Secondary Education

The Ministry of Education Arts and Culture (2016) directs the implementation of universal primary education in 2013 while FSE was implemented in 2016. The Government of the Republic of Namibia has made drastic strides in promoting access to quality secondary education. Access to secondary schools, qualified teachers, schools' infrastructure development and parental support were identified as factors that promoted access to quality secondary education in Oluno Circuit.

Mutorwa (2002) indicates that the directive of the Education for all reconfirmed the broad goals of equitable access to educational and cultural services, the improvement of the internal efficiency of the education system, the expansion of quality education strengthening democratic participation in education and prompt access to quality education in Namibia. The Ministry's emphasis is specifically placed more on the enhancement of the quality of the educational outcome. Mutorwa (2002, p.35) further reveals that Nahas Angula, then a Minister of Education and Culture, wrote in the MoE Directive No: 001/016/095 said, "during the year 1995, the focus of the Ministry's efforts is on quality. Improving educational quality means that all the stakeholders and role players in education must fulfil their identified obligations, assign responsibilities, and expect roles."

Mitigation of The Challenges Faced by Free Secondary Education

The MoEAC (2016) states that as per the 2011 recommendations of the National Conference on Education (NCE), the Namibian Government decided to implement universal primary education from January 2013 without paying fees from Grade 0 to 7 in all public schools. It should be noted that Namibia took a noteworthy decision to implement universal primary education in 2013, while FSE was achieved in 2016, and these were the constitutional obligations that Namibia should be commended for. Muhindi (2012) identifies teachers staffing levels one as mitigating factors that faced the implementation of FSE.

The teacher resource was an important input in achieving the objectives of the Education Sector. The equitable distribution of teachers has remained one of the challenges in teacher management. The number of teachers remained constant over the years despite growth in enrolments and the number of educational institutions resulting in inequality in the distribution of teachers and impacted negatively quality and access to education. To mitigate the challenges that faced the implementation of

FSE in Oluno Circuit, the recruitment of teachers has in the recent past mainly been done to replace those who exited through natural attrition (UNESCO, 2010; World Bank, 2010).

UNESCO (2010) reveals that despite the abolition of tuition fees, households have been responsible for providing other mandatory costs. Unlike school fees where household contributions were reduced after the free secondary education policy, there was no change in the cost of items that parents are required to provide.

Some of the compulsory items that the parents are expected to purchase for their children include, uniforms, socks, shoes, school bag, Bible, English dictionary, Kiswahili dictionary, hymn book, mathematical table, geometrical set, atlas, spring file, t-shirt, trouser/skirt, rubber shoes, games kits, bed sheets, blankets, pillow, basin and bucket, towel, slippers, plate, spoon, mug and padlock. Since the costs associated with these items are substantial, students often shared books or used ones from fellow students who have completed secondary school. Game kits, which include standardised uniforms for sports activities, are also compulsory for all students. In addition, boarding students are required to possess items essential for boarding and to meet the travel costs. Although costs for each item vary, it can be estimated that direct costs for compulsory items for a day scholar could be prohibitive.

Another challenge was that students were sent home more frequently for school levies by school principals to use this cash to manage their various schools. Consequently, several students skipped classes, and others finally dropped out. This had a negative impact on the adoption of free secondary education on its own. However, the MoEAC (2015) guarantees that the money was supposed to be in schools in December, April, and August every year, and these are preceding months before the opening of school terms, respectively, for smooth implementation of free secondary education.

Therefore, the objectives of the study were to explore the challenges and opportunities in the implementation of Free Secondary Education in the Oluno Circuit. What are the challenges and opportunities that influenced the implementation of FSE in the Oluno Circuit? How does FSE promote opportunities access to quality education in the Oluno Circuit and how do schools mitigate challenges faced by FSE in the Oluno Circuit?

METHODOLOGY

Given the fact that this study underpours evaluates challenges and opportunities during the implementation of FSE. The study adopted a qualitative approach. Qualitative research focuses on phenomena that occur in natural settings and studying them in their complexity (Christensen & Johnson, 2008). The study

target population comprised all secondary school teachers, heads of departments, school principals, chairpersons of school boards and Grade 8-12 LRC secondary school, the total number of research participants were 32. The study employed two qualitative research instruments, semi-structured interview, and document analysis to collect the data for the study. A semi-structured interview guide combines a set of open-ended questions that prompt discussions with more opportunity for the interviewer to explore responses further (Laforest, 2009). The interview guide prompts information on the participant's views, experiences, and feelings and promoted positive rapport between interviewer and interviewee. While document analysis (Education Act 16 of 2001, Education for all and MoEAC 15 days Statistics 2015-2019) was used to address ambiguous questions that provided reliable institutional information.

RESULTS OF THE FINDINGS

The table below shows how the results of this study are divided into 3 themes and 3 sub-themes each to address the research questions:

Theme 1: Challenges and opportunities that promoted access to quality education in the Oluno Circuit
Sub-theme 1: Promote access to quality education.
Sub-theme 2. Learners' enrolment.
Sub-theme 3. Finance.

Theme 2: Challenges and opportunities that influenced the implementation of FSE in the Oluno Circuit.
Sub-theme 1: Access to secondary education.
Sub-theme 2. Teaching and learning materials.
Sub-theme 3. Community participation.

Theme 3: Strategies that mitigated the challenges experienced during the implementation of FSE in the Oluno Circuit.
Sub-theme 1: Income generating activities.
Sub-theme 2. Donations
Sub-theme 3. Involvement of parents as partners

Theme 1: Challenges And Opportunities That Promoted Access to Quality Education in The Oluno Circuit.

Theme one addressed the first research question, which seeks information regarding the challenges and opportunities of access to quality secondary education.

Sub-Theme 1: Promote Access to Quality Education.

The participants of this study were asked to explain how FSE promoted opportunities to access to quality FSE in the Oluno Circuit, participants replied as follows:

P1, P2, P3, P4, T1, T2, T3, T4, H1, H2, H3, H4, C1, C2 and C3 mentioned that *"the announcement of the implementation of free secondary education arrived with*

both opportunities and challenges. Most Participants of this study explained that the implementation of free secondary education was inclusive to all the learners irrespective of their parental financial status." P1, P2, P3, P4, H1, H2, H3, H4, C1, C2 and C3 explained, *"we took the lead in advocating for free secondary education in our circuit, we emphasised the importance of quality free secondary education (FSE) especially, elementary education."*

The research findings regarding challenges and opportunities to quality free secondary education confirmed that the introduction of FSE was expected to result in increased enrolment and retention of students. This was experienced and was expected to continue over the years as more pupils benefit from UPE graduates to join secondary schools. The introduction of FSE led to the high number of influx of learners was experienced in secondary schools, the resources available overstretched.

Sub-Theme 2: Learner's Enrolment

The achievement in enrolment came with a multitude of challenges. In this regard H1, H2, H3 indicated that *"secondary schools' enrolment in Oluno circuit have increased since the implementation of FSE, parents are only contributing basic needs to the education of their children thus most of the parents send their children freely to secondary schools with no burden of paying school fees."*

Participant, C1, C2 and C3 indicated that *"the decision of MoEAC coming up with free secondary education motivated and, is keeping the learners in school full time and concentrate on their lessons and, learned the skills that will help them in their real lives"*. In addition, P1, P2, H3 and H4 affirmed that *"the enrolment of learners at secondary school has increased especially for learners from poor families. Schools have the responsibilities in providing teaching and learning materials and make them accessible to all learners at school."*

The study finding revealed that the task of the MoEAC was to sustain and secure the sustainability of FSE in Namibia, and to secure extra funds from other sources to support it now and then. The study affirmed that learners increased from 9 647 in 2015 to 10 482 in 2019 in the Oluno Circuit alone (MoEAC, 2019). Over-enrolment of learners pressured the school infrastructure and supported the implementation of FSE. This alone raised more concerns about the implementation of FSE as it implied that the more the learners are enrolled in secondary schools, the lesser the teaching and learning materials. The study affirmed that FSE overstretched teachers with daily workloads and, some of them were overwhelmed by the number of learners in a single classroom as they were unable attend to all the learners individually.

Sub-Theme 3: Finance

T3 indicated that *“free secondary education relieved parents from paying school development fund. Learners were feeling happy for inclusive education.”* Ls1, Ls2, Ls3 and Ls4 clarified that *“free secondary education motivated us to study irrespective of our parental status, we are satisfied in a way that we are included in free secondary education. On the contrary, P1, P2, P3, T1, T2, T3, T4, H1 and H4 explained that “although we are advocating for free secondary education that learners are not paying school fees, there is a portion that learners still have to contribute to teaching and learning materials...parents and learners must buy textbooks, pens, exercise books, copy papers and others items ...therefore, in terms of teaching and learning aids there is no free education, as secondary education, on the other hand, is not hundred percentage free.”*

Most of the school board members (C1, C2, C3, C4) explained that “FSE gave all the learners access to quality secondary education because every child was allowed to pursue his/her studies freely. The payments of school development funds resulted in learners dropping out of school because some parents could not afford it”.

The study affirmed that some parents failed to meet their obligations. This led to some of the students dropping out of school (Kilonzo, 2007). Contrary to this, the study revealed that FSE has alleviated the financial burden and special commitment on parents from paying school development fees.

Theme 2: Challenges And Opportunities That Influenced the Implementation of FSE in The Oluno Circuit.

The purpose of second research question was to seek information regarding the challenges and opportunities that influenced the implementation of FSE.

Sub-Theme 1: Access To Secondary Education

P4, T2, T3, T4 indicated that *“to facilitate access to FSE the schools conducted a meeting to emphasise the importance of FSE to parents and community. Schools also organised admission campaigns through churches and other communities gathering. They also do admission campaigns through other medias for example radio and WhatsApp groups.”*

H3 stated *“he encouraged learners to study very hard to pass with good examination results and become employable to improve their living standards. While P1, P3 and T4 explained “I found it a bit challenging, the changes in the curriculum are challenges to teachers as they cannot articulate the subject well, they need the training, the curriculum is packed”. The schools reached a point where they do not have power to procure the teaching and learning materials. This was due to the late financial distribution to secondary schools”.*

The study findings revealed that the implementation of free secondary education in the Oluno Circuit was based on the theoretical framework that FSE provides opportunities provide access to physical infrastructure (classrooms) and access to quality secondary education, as well as ensures epistemological access and systematic learning of basic skills, knowledge, values, and practices.

Sub-Theme 2: Teaching And Learning Materials

T1, T2 and T4 affirmed that *“it is a challenge when it comes to practical activities subjects, for example, Biology and Physical Sciences learners must do some experiments no equipment and no money to purchase equipment, unlike before whereby, we use to buy while waiting for the budget, however, the implementation of FSE depends on how schools utilised financial resources.”* The study revealed that *“the government is unable to fund secondary school education without the contributions from parents.”*

Sub-Theme 3: Community Participation

Research participants were asked to explain the challenges and opportunities that influenced the implementation of FSE in the Oluno Circuit. T1, H2 and P2 explained that *“mhh...the implementation of FSE reduced the school dropout by our children, the government assisted us to send our children to school we maintained that.”*C1, C2 and C3 expressed that *“the school organise parents’ meetings every three months whereby the principal informed us issues related to free education, tuition fees are no longer be paid, except for the school hostels. However, we have noticed that most parents do not aware what was covered by free secondary education.”* The study affirmed that community participation is a cornerstone in disseminating information to the community. Community participants are associated with learners’ performance.

Theme 3: Strategies on How Schools Mitigated The Challenges Experienced During The Implementation of FSE in The Oluno Circuit.

Sub Theme 1: Income Generating Activities.

The participants of this study were asked to explain how schools mitigated challenges experienced from FSE. P1, P2, P3, P4, C1, C2 and C3 reported that *“in their circuit, they initiated income-generating projects such as tuck shops, school gardens, renaming of school building blocks, sports including concerts and gala dinners to raise funds for the schools.”* For example, H2 stated that *“through the parents’ meetings we proposed coming up with some activities so that we could generate money. Income-generating activities are those activities, which can be undertaken by an organisation to raise income to enhance school finances”.*

The study revealed that the followings were identified as mitigating factors during the

implementation of free secondary education for example: income generating activities, donations and involvement of parents and guardians identified as ways in which schools attempted to offset the problems encountered during the implementation of FSE in Oluno circuit.

Sub-Theme 2: Donations

The participants of this study were asked to explain how schools mitigated challenges experienced from FSE. Ls1 expressed their appreciation and stated that *“we received textbooks and other stationeries from a local businessman, we are very thankful. Having a support from local people showed a positive impact towards the achievement of FSE goals of increasing enrolment and retention in secondary schools”*.

P1 explained that *“it was utmost important to consult different organisations for the donations to supplement the little the school has.”* C1, C2 and C3 revealed that *“secondary schools requested for support from business community and corporate entities to render financial and material support for schools’ developmental programmes.”* P3 explained that *“the society was willing to assist with the little they have, they feel schools need to be supplemented, they have our learners at heart, therefore, socio-economic factors such as school income projects as well as donor funds helped many of our learners to stay in school.”*

The study findings affirmed that while the Government of Namibia has made drastic strides in areas like infrastructure development that include classrooms, and libraries other significant issues like meals, hostel fees and purchasing of school uniforms for their children while at school are still on the shoulders of parents. This alone gives a burden to some parents, while some parents were not willing making genuine contributions to the education of their children.

Sub-Theme 3: Involvement of Parents And Communities As Partner

P2 highlighted that *“during our parent’s meeting events that took place in our school, we involved parents as key notes speakers, they encouraged learners to study hard and behave in the society, they are our pillars onto which we lean”*.

P1, P2, P3 and P4 stated that *“involving parents from the beginning of the implementation of free secondary education made every process of development smooth with the positive impact on the programme implementation. Parents and community members were involved in both physical and financial support of their children’s education. Parental involvement plays an important role in learners’ success.”* In addition, T1 stated that *“parents were involved from the beginning. They suggested good ways to generate the money. Parental involvement not only enhances academic performance, but it also has a positive influence on*

learner’s attitude and behaviour in support of the statement.

The study findings reaffirmed that the implementation of FSE was also affected by poor community related participation. Some parents, community members and other stakeholders in education were not willing to meet the government halfway during the implementation of free secondary education in Oluno Circuit.

DISCUSSION OF THE RESULTS

Recommendation For Improvements

The study recommended the followings for improvements to the Ministry of Education, Arts, and Culture: to provide adequate and timely funding allocated to the schools to run their programmes, introduce learners', parents', and teachers' forums to educate them on the importance of FSE, to allocate enough funds to schools' infrastructure development to accommodate all the learners and hire enough skilled secondary school teachers to effectively administer FSE, implement regular educational programs through the Regional Education Forum and School Board Committees, educate parents and the community about the concept of quality free secondary education and its implementation and, the MoEAC should provide secondary schools with adequate teaching and learning materials for conducive teaching and learning to take place at schools.

Recommendations For Future Research

The study aimed at evaluating challenges and opportunities during the implementation of FSE in selected secondary schools in the Oluno Circuit of the Oshana Region. Whereas the implementation of FSE has been identified as a national issue, it has not been investigated in Namibia. As a result, studies should be conducted in all 14 regions of Namibia to investigate the extent to which FSE has been implemented, the challenges encountered, and the solutions thereof.

This study evaluated challenges and opportunities in the implementation of FSE in the Oluno Circuit, without involving the Directorate of Education or the legislators who were the primary custodians of FSE. Therefore, other studies are needed to find out the extent to which learners, teachers, parents, school board committee members and school principals in Namibia have been affected by the implementation of FSE.

The FSE was expected to have a positive impact on secondary school enrolments and reduce school dropout rates. Many efforts for improvement might be needed in terms of the quality of secondary education. Therefore, one possible area for future research is to examine how the Namibian government should deliver quality education under the ambit of FSE.

CONCLUSION

The study findings revealed that there were numerous challenges and opportunities the MoEAC faced in the implementation of FSE. The increased number of secondary school learners' enrolments were observed as one of the improvements. While the followings were observed as challenges, such as learning and teaching materials, overcrowded classrooms, late delivery of education materials, delayed and insufficient funding, and a high teacher-learner ratio. The study indicated that the knowledge of the implementation of FSE was only limited to teachers and school principals, while parents and community members were not well sensitised. The study concludes that some of the schools' environments in the Oluno circuit are presently under pressure from the high number of learners. The school environment might not be conducive enough to provide opportunities that promote quality education to secondary school learners.

Declaration of Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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