



Research Article

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Evaluating the Implementation of Free Secondary Education in Namibia

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Abstract: This study adopted a qualitative approach to evaluate the implementation of free secondary education in Oluno Circuit of the Oshana region in Namibia. Namibia implemented different educational reforms following its independence in 1990, to realise the Education for All [EFA] policy. To examine the challenges and opportunities during the implementation of free secondary education, the study used learners, teachers, school boards, and school principals as research participants to study how they evaluated the implementation of free secondary education in Oluno Circuit. The study findings were insufficient and untimely funding, high learners' enrolment, school dropout, and lack of teaching and learning materials. The study findings conclude 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 government should employ qualified secondary school teachers to provide quality secondary education, adequate and timely funding to schools, purchase teaching and learning materials, and provide enough infrastructure to accommodate all secondary school learners. Finally, the government should formulate a free secondary education policy framework to guide the schools on how to utilise the funds and should sensitise parents on the importance of free secondary education.

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

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INTRODUCTION

Namibia went through a period of epistemological subjugation that started with the arrival of a missionary society from Europe around 1805 (Shangula, 2020; Kandumbu, 2005;). This was followed by colonial eras spanning from the German colonialist and the South African white minority rule until March 1990 (Josua *et al.*, 2022). From independence, there were several post-independence educational reforms aimed at enhancing the quality of education (Josua *et al.*, 2022). The Namibian Constitution falls under Chapter 3, Article 20 (1) which states, "All person shall have right to education" and further states that (2) "Primary education shall be compulsory and the State shall provide reasonable facilities to render effective this right for every resident within Namibia, by establishing and maintaining State schools at which primary education will be provided free of charge (Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, 1990, p.12-13). However, the Cabinet resolved that the compulsory School Development Free (SDF) should be abolished up to the secondary education phase (Kangumbe, 2023; Balhao, 2016).

Initially, only primary education was declared free, as a result, parents, guardians, and other community members started demanding the provision of FSE to offset the burden of contributing to the SDF for their school children (UNICEF, 2016). It has been established that "FSE was characterised by a variety of challenges, namely, over enrolment of learners, high teacher-learner ratio, limited teaching materials, delayed funding, and

poor quality of education" (Mutahi, 2008, p. 47). In Namibia, FSE was received with mixed feelings as not all were in support of it (Mogane, 2016). Teachers in the Oluno Circuit, amongst others, were overwhelmed and could not provide quality teaching and learning to learners. This implied that the implementation of FSE might have not provided quality education as opposed to free education in the circuit.

The initial proposed funding for FSE was estimated at N\$ 240.00 per learner per term. For example, Andimba Toivo ya Toivo Secondary School in the Oluno Circuit with 943 learners could receive N\$ 226 320.00 per term and N\$ 678 960.00 per annum. With these funds, the school could run its programmes without much support from the regional office (Shapaka, 2019). Due to inadequate funding, a secondary school with a total number of 943 learners only qualified to get N\$100.00 per learner per term which totalled N\$282 900.00 per annum. Due to the deficiency in funding, some schools in the circuit did not meet the intended objectives of FSE. The teacher-learner ratio equally contributed to the low morale of teachers thus, affecting the quality of education. It was therefore observed that an educational programme that was meant to access FSE and quality education, had been seemingly neglected, hence, believed to have been taken from the residues of other programmes (Lewin, 2008). Parents' and guardians' demand for access to FSE created controversy as it became mandatory to provide free education.

The implementation of FSE in Namibia was a remarkable idea, given the fact that the influx of learners to FSE was tremendous. However, proper consultations were not done during the planning and implementation of FSE (Shikoha et al., 2023).

Problem statement

To provide quality secondary education the government of the Republic of Namibia through the Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture (MoEAC) pledged to improve access and retention of learners and to provide affordable secondary education to the children, there seems to be hindrances related to the implementation, which contributed to dwindling academic performance in the Oluno Circuit after the introduction of Free Secondary Education (FSE). The MoEAC (2019) reveals that the total number of teachers decreased from the year 2015 to 2016 and increased in 2017 and 2018. The total number of teachers decreased by 9.3 % for the 2019 academic year. The total number of learners and teachers kept on fluctuating after the implementation of FSE in the Oluno Circuit, which means 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 (Dwomoh *et al.*, 2022; Godda, 2018). As a result, the goal of this study was to evaluate the challenges and opportunities experienced by educational stakeholders during the implementation of FSE.

Purpose of the study

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 (MoEAC, 2015). The purpose of this study was to determine the factors that influenced the implementation of FSE in the Oluno Circuit.

Significance of the study

Although the government of the Republic of Namibia through the Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture made efforts to improve the 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 circuit after the introduction of FSE (Shikoha et al., 2023). Secondary phase admission statistics for the Oluno Circuit in Oshana Region between 2015 and 2019, academic year shows a general increase in total enrolment from grade 8

to 12 from 2015 to 2019 in the Oluno Circuit (MoEAC, 2019).

The achievement in enrolment created some challenges during the execution of FSE. 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 that came with implementing FSE and, determined the factors that influenced the implementation of FSE in the Oluno Circuit (Shikoha et al., 2023).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical framework

Given the fact that this study evaluates the implementation of FSE. The study is informed by Rene Descartes' Theory of epistemological access to education. Descartes supports 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 (Akingbehin, 2021; Osarenren-Osaghae & Irabor, 2018).

The notion of setting up infrastructures for universalising basic education is one thing; universalising genuine belief in a pattern of basic education that is well-conceived in its terms, regardless of what follows. However, they focused on the "generic and philosophical" level, on what quality means, but not on how it could be operationalised as per Govinda and Bandyopadhyay (2008) cited in (Du Plooy & Zilindile, 2014). It appears the role of the teachers was ignored, and the focus was on classroom and school-based processes. Borrowing from Gamede (2005) cited in Du Plooy & Zilindile, (2014), access to education is understood to mean firstly, the means of entry and secondly, the post-enrolment access that is reflected in the academic 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. There is a 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 (Adelman & Taylor, 2018; 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 ensure 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. 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.

Alexander (2008) notes that 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. It was further noted that they focused on the "generic and philosophical" level, on what quality means, but not on how it could be operationalised (Govinda & Bandyopadhyay, 2011). It appeared that 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 (2005, 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.

Morrow (2009) stresses that epistemological access was first coined by a South African scholar who played a notable role in educational reform. The term appeared to have been constructed while Morrow grappled with real concerns pertaining to higher education policy making and practice. The philosophy of epistemological access, for Morrow, was bounded by the past and present context in South African education. Shanyanana (2014) affirms that access to high education needs to specify the type of access either formal or epistemological. Morrow (2017) illustrates the two forms of access that may offer formal access and epistemological access. Formal access emphasises expanding the university to the externally excluded by using various means, such as affirmative action and quota systems, to enable women's statistical representation. Shanyanana (2014) further expresses that epistemological access contributed to knowledge production, engagement in deliberation and decision making and policy formulation. Epistemological access led to the substantive inclusion when women, like men,

possess the skills and cognitive ability that will make their voices heard. The meaningful contributions (epistemological access) to decision making and policy formation and articulating their views on issues that might concern them by creating enabling opportunities for women to grow intellectually and contribute to knowledge, which afforded them epistemological access, are indispensable.

Morrow (2009), however, asserts that epistemological access cannot be supplied or "delivered" or "done" to the learner; nor can it be "automatically" transmitted to those who pay their fees, or even to those who collect the handouts and attend classes regularly. The reason for this is that epistemological access is learning how to be a successful participant in academic practice. Morrow acknowledges that learners come from different backgrounds and that having certain things can facilitate one's epistemological access, but it still does not guarantee it. Morrow (2009, p.79) simply states that "in the same way in which no one else can do my running for me, no one else can do my learning for me". As a result, (Shikoha et al., 2023) maintained that the implementation of free secondary education in the Oluno Circuit was based on Morrow's belief that FSE education provides learners with access to secondary schools and quality secondary education. However, epistemology was not automatic, so teachers ensured that learners have access to high-quality teaching and learning materials, while learners were expected to put in more effort to gain knowledge and improve their performance.

Mutorwa (2002,p.21) clarifies that 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. The establishment of adult literacy programs, distance, and open learning education programs for the provision of quality teaching and learning.

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. Furthermore, epistemological access and systematic learning recognised that teaching and learning at the school, cluster, regional, and national levels should be structured to develop coherent ways of understanding and engaging with various learning areas. 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 (Shikoha et al., 2023).

Overview of FSE in Africa

Education was only available to a selected few country in Africa. In many African countries, the introduction of FSE increased access to secondary education. This study chose to present an overview of FSE in several African countries, including Uganda, Tanzania, Ghana, and Sub-Saharan Africa. Namibia may benefit from learning about the opportunities and challenges that came with the implementation of FSE.

Free Secondary Education in Uganda

Uganda was the first country in Sub-Saharan Africa to introduce Universal Secondary Education. The scheme was part of Yoweri Museveni's (President of Uganda) election assurance during the 2006 elections. It was illustrated that one cannot rule out political undertones in the existence of policies. Therefore, the execution of Universal Secondary Education in the context of Uganda could best be described as a political motivation to gain votes from the electorates. The programme was run on a pilot basis before its full-scale application in 2007 (Assuman, 2018). The rollout in Uganda was motivated by several students from poor families who did not have access to secondary education, targeting mainly low-income dwellers.

To ease the challenges nurtured by the programme and increased efficiency, the Ministry of Education and Sports adopted an education curriculum that combined subjects and emphasised students' competence for a workforce and further education. The execution of Universal Secondary Education in Uganda led to an increased teacher-learner ratio, the introduction of doubled class shifts and multi-grade classrooms. Its implementation increased enrolment from 412, 367 in 2007 to 1, 194, 000 in 2010 (Jacob & Lehner, 2011).

Overview of free secondary education in Ghana

Ghana started Universal Secondary Education in 2007, whereby the Government paid tuition fees, while parents paid boarding fees and other education costs. High enrolment in universal primary education, resulted in an increase in the secondary phase from the year 1997 to 2006. Universal Secondary Education in Ghana aimed at increasing access to secondary education and increased in the quality of education, it was also meant to gear at sustaining the gains of the universal primary education (Assuman, 2018).

In anticipation of the challenges associated with the implementation of free secondary education, the Ministry of Education and Sport put in place strategies that aimed at reducing the unit cost of secondary school education, creating more spaces for the students to increase effectiveness. The strategies included

rationalisation of teachers' workloads and the number of subjects each teacher taught and decentralising the school management and curriculum planning to the schools. As a result, the programme improved access to secondary education, increased enrolment in secondary school education and access to education for students from poor families (Shikoha At all.,2023).

Overview of free secondary education in Tanzania

UNESCO (2000) reveals that many countries have invested a lot in the education sector, particularly at the primary and secondary levels. Primary education is regarded as basic education and the right that every country should guarantee its citizens. The realisation of basic education as a link to economic and social development has led several countries to provide FSE, including Tanzania.

The idea of abolishing enrolment fees and other compulsory contributions in the primary and lower secondary schools in Tanzania came from the International Education and other conventions to which the country is a signatory. The international commitments and agreements included the 1990 World Conference on Education for All (EFA) in Jomtien and the 2000 World Education Forum in Dakar which required making basic education a basic human right for every child. On the other hand, Kayombo (2011) responds that various education and developmental policies such as the Education and Training Policy of 2014 and the Tanzanian Development Vision 2025 recognised education as a goal that brings development to other sectors of the economy. Further, Tanzania has taken initiatives to guarantee all children access to FSE. As a result, the government launched its Education and Training Policy to provide 10 years of free primary and lower secondary education in 2014.

The introduction of free education in Tanzania eliminated all fees to lower secondary schools. To avoid the challenges encountered by other Sub-Saharan African countries, the government prepared an education policy that faced the challenges related to equity, quality, politics, and sustainable financing (Godha, 2018). The abolition of the SDF in Tanzania brought the government to bear the cost of education for every child. The policy included financial contributions from parents as a coping strategy, to support the government in providing access to lower secondary education in times of need (Godha, 2018). The implementation phase faced numerous challenges that hindered quality education. For example, free education in Tanzania led to high secondary enrolment which in turn led to heavy load work, teacher shortages, inadequate instructional materials, and unwillingness by the parents to make a financial contribution to the education of children.

Overview of FSE in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA)

Education in Sub-Saharan Africa needed to confront the present status of education systems in terms

of their capacity to sustain the growth and improvement of primary education. They also needed to confront their existing limitations in terms of capacity and financing to simultaneously expand and improve secondary education. There was consent in the literature that secondary education long-abandoned was now the fastest-growing segment of the education sector (UNESCO 2005; Mulkeen, 2005; World Bank, 2005; Gropello, 2006; World Bank, 2007). In many countries, a shift from seeing primary education as the last level of education towards policies that predict extensive completion of secondary education as the goal of education development is in progress but has just begun in Sub-Saharan Africa (De Ferranti, 2003; World Bank, 2005). Various obstacles in the way to intensifying secondary education are particularly and most evident in SSA.

Education was a keystone to economic growth and social development and a basic means of improving the welfare of individuals (World Bank, 1990). Illiteracy has been identified as a fact that imposed both relative and absolute burdens on the national economic well-being (World Bank, 2005). The idea of universal primary education can be traced to 1948 when the United Nations declared education a basic human right for all. This meant that education was to be extended to all notwithstanding social class, sex, colour, religion, tribe, or race (Mutathi, 1999). The 1948 declaration was further stressed at the 16th session of the United Nations General Assembly held between 1961 and 1962, which recognised illiteracy as the main barrier to the social and economic growth of the Third World Countries, Kenya inclusive (Micheni, 1993).

Secondary education was the stage of education following primary school. It is usually the finishing stage of compulsory education. However, secondary education in some countries involves a phase of compulsory and non-compulsory education. The next stage of education is usually college or university. Secondary education is characterised by a shift from the typically compulsory, complete primary education for minors to the optionally selective tertiary, "postsecondary" or "higher" education (e.g., university, vocational school) for adults. It is acknowledged that the elimination of poverty, promotion of human rights and the attainment of sustainable development are gracious goals, but which cannot be realised, without positioning education at the centre of the national development agenda (UNESCO, 2008). The Universal Declaration on Human Rights (1948), the World Conference on Education for All and the World Education Form (2000) are a demonstration of consciousness by the international community of the tactical part that education played towards the attainment of these goals.

While the Universal Declaration of Human Rights cherished education as a basic human right, the Jomtien Conference not only built consensus on what

represented EFA but also set specific EFA goals and targets. The agreement was that EFA, as a strategy for the development and provision of quality education for all, encompassed not only Universal Primary Education (UPE), which was essentially formal schooling but, also secondary education, literacy and life skill programmes and mass education (complementary learning processes that take place out of school set-up). The EFA targets, as articulated at the Jomtien Conference and reaffirmed at the World Education Forum in Dakar are a clear indication of the international community's commitment to unreservedly educate the children of this world (UNESCO, 2008).

The National Action Plan on Education for All is a culmination of the diverse but coordinated policy initiative and implementation strategy that the government of the Republic of Namibia, as a signatory to the international protocol establishing EFA, has consistently pursued in response to the Jomtien Conference of 1990. This is reflected in several National Policy documents. Following these agreements, pressure on the Namibia government to expand secondary education grew. An increasing number of learners streamed from expanded primary education and the need to improve the educational levels of the labour force to benefit from a globalising economy made it inevitable that the Namibian government turned its attention wholeheartedly in that direction.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a qualitative approach. Qualitative research focuses on phenomena that occur in natural settings and studies them in their complexity (Awasthy, 2019; Ormston *et al.*, 2014). The research study applied a case study research design to explain the alternative outcome because the analysis of the technologies focuses on experimental events.

The study's target population comprised all secondary school teachers, heads of departments, school principals, chairpersons of school boards, and Grade 8-12 LRC secondary school learners from Oluno Circuit from 2017 to 2019. Purposeful sampling was used to select secondary 4 schools and 4 chairpersons of their schools based on the richness of information to be investigated. A purposive sampling at each secondary school was applied to select 4 teachers, and 4 heads of departments, i.e., long-serving teachers and heads of departments were selected, while 16, grade 8-12 LRC learners with leadership skills and experience were also selected.

The qualitative study employed, two research instruments, a 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 the opportunity for the interviewer to explore responses further (De Jonckheere & Vaughn, 2019; Adams, 2015). The

interview guide prompts information on the participant's views, experiences, and feelings and promotes 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.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

An Ethical Clearance Certificate was obtained from the University of Namibia's Research and Publication Unit. Before the data collection, written permission was obtained from the Regional Director of Education, Arts and Culture of the Oshana Regional Council in Namibia. Lastly, all relevant ethical issues were adhered to in this study.

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

The study findings were divided into 3 main themes each to address the research questions:

Theme 1: Factors that promoted access to quality education in the Oluno Circuit

Theme 2: Factors that influenced the implementation of FSE in the Oluno Circuit

Theme 3: Strategies that mitigated the challenges experienced during the implementation of FSE in the Oluno Circuit.

Theme 1: Factors that promoted access to quality education in the Oluno Circuit

The participants of this study were asked to explain how FSE promoted 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 advantages and disadvantages. 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."*

P4 expressed that *"immediately after we were informed that learners are no longer going to pay the school fees. I started emphasising for vulnerable learners to be admitted in our schools...mhh...yes and other learners who are not mentioned in the first group and we did the awareness through parent's meetings and through medias such as radio, WhatsApp, Facebook, girl child mother."* P1, H4, D stated *"when the Minister announced the implementation of free secondary education, we started using various platforms such as meetings, announcements through local radios and social media to raise awareness of the admission process*

of learners into school and inform parents that secondary schools' education is now provided for free. The issue of free secondary education has alleviated financial burden and special commitment by parents from paying school development fees."

The C1, C2 and C3 explained that *"the message of free secondary education gave all the learners access to education because every child was allowed to pursue his/her studies freely".* In addition to that, T3 stated that *"the fact was the payments of school development funds, resulted into learners dropping out of school because some parents could not afford. Thus, I feel free secondary education motivated all learners to attend the school including those who dropped out really, this is a good move our children are now attending school with no compulsory payment including free entry to examinations. The school principal makes sure that all the funds and or the grants provided by the Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture are well spent on the learners' benefits."* Many participants in this research study emphasised how well free secondary education facilitated access to high-quality education in the circuit, according to (Shikoha *et al.*, 2023). It is thought that parents and students were encouraged to enrol and finish their secondary schools education. Ls1, Ls2, Ls3 and Ls4 expressed their joy by saying *"most of the learners who dropped out of secondary school were given a chance to further their secondary education and improved their performance."*

On a positive note, C2 stated that *"school camping has been introduced to give extra classes to learners that's why many schools in the circuit produced good learners with good Grade 12 examination results...our teachers-initiated holiday classes to impart learners with quality education. Many schools have study schedule for Secondary School [SS] learners 3 days a week"*.

P2 emphasised that *"to contribute to the quality of free secondary education teachers in the circuit go an extra mile organized secondary school classes during weekends and public holidays. Many learners access quality secondary education, which made them to obtain good results in examinations and made them to be admitted at universities, while some of them get employed."*

The study findings regarding access 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 benefited from UPE graduates joining secondary schools. It was believed that if a similar influx of learners was experienced in secondary schools, the resources available would be overstretched.

In the endeavour to analyse the evaluation of the implementation of FSE, 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 findings revealed 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. To find facts about the implementation of FSE, 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. This was also affirmed to be true by the study 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 to play their roles effectively compromising the quality of education.

Theme 2: Factors that influenced the implementation of FSE in the Oluno Circuit

The participants of this study are school principals, heads of departments, teachers, learners, and school board members and they expressed their views on the factors that influenced the implementation of free secondary education.

P1, P2, P3 and P4 mentioned that *“well, there are many factors influenced free secondary education, is more inclusive to all learners, it provided all learners with equality, equitable and access to FSE in Oluno circuit more especial learners from poor and marginalised families.”* Further, P2, P4, H2, T1 and H1 stated that *“before the introduction of FSE there was a massive drop out of learners, however, after the introduction of free education many learners returned to school which led to over crowdedness of the classrooms which also made it difficult to provide individual attention to all learners, especially those that are struggling with difficulties in learning.”*

The Ministry of Education, Arts, and Culture ought to fulfil the constitutional right as per Article 20 of the Namibian constitution that mandated compulsory education for all. Therefore, allowing learners to access secondary education has attracted many learners and encouraged parents to send their children to enrol on public schools (MoEAC, 2016). Furthermore, researcher maintained that the implementation of free secondary education in the Oluno Circuit was based on the theoretical framework that FSE education provides learners with access to secondary schools and quality secondary education. P4, T2, T3, T4 indicated that *“to facilitate access to FSE the schools conducted a meeting to emphasis 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 regarding the factors that influenced the implementation of FSE. The research revealed that The Ministry of Education, Arts, and Culture ought to fulfil the constitutional right as per Article 20 of the Namibian constitution that mandated compulsory education for all. Therefore, allowing learners to access secondary education has attracted many learners and encouraged parents to send their children to enrol in public schools (MoEAC, 2016). The study maintained that the implementation of free secondary education in the Oluno Circuit was based on Descartes’s theory that FSE education provides learners with access to secondary schools and quality secondary education.

The provision of free Education to lower secondary education has been accompanied by numerous challenges that hindered the quality of education (Lucumay & Matete, 2024; Godda, 2018, Adams, 2015). The study revealed that free education led to high secondary enrolment which in turn created heavy-load work, teacher shortages, inadequate instructional materials, and unwillingness by the parents to make a financial contribution to the education of their children.

The study further affirmed that community participation is a cornerstone in disseminating information to the community. The study revealed that community participations are associated with positive outcomes. Therefore, if communities were informed, the school could not face problems in the process of implementing FSE.

Theme 3: Strategies on how schools mitigated the challenges experienced during the implementation of FSE in the Oluno Circuit.

The study participants identified ways in which schools attempted to offset the problems encountered during the implementation of FSE through data analysis, for example; income-generating activities, donations, and involvement of parents and communities as partners.

Sub-theme 1: Income generating activities

During the implementation of free secondary education, the study revealed that the main challenge that the secondary school faced was the delay in financial distribution to secondary schools. To mitigate the difficulties encountered during the implementation of FSE, research participants 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”.

In addition, P2 suggested that *“there is a need for our schools to have additional activities which may generate income to support and to supplement the fees paid by learners”*. C3 established that *“I feel that was a great idea the activities that we proposed and are in places include school buses... hire of the hall which is being used by outsiders and other social activities for example wedding ceremonies meetings, crusades, horticulture. Some schools raised vegetables and fruits horticulture for use...this happens within and outside the school and societies.”*

Sub-theme 2: Donations

The participants of this study were asked to explain how schools mitigated challenges experienced from FSE. 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.”*

In addition, Ls1 expressed their appreciation and stated that *“we received textbooks and other stationaries 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”*.

The study findings affirmed that donation is one of the remedies to overcome challenges facing the implementation of FSE, 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. However, some parents were feeling that the government provided free education, therefore, they relaxed regarding making genuine contributions to schools (Shikoha et al., 2023).

According to Kilonzo (2007), most of the parents were not willing to make payments to schools since education was ‘free’. However, study participants C1, C2, C3 and P4 revealed that *“there are common understandings and believed that donations and other social contributions from individuals and business community assisted schools to cater for other secondary schools’ activities.”* Considerably, this observation has been found consolidating prior findings from the literature that there is no common agreement on whether parents must continue and, or not continue to support the school learners after the implementation of FSE.

Sub-theme 3: Involvement of parents and communities as partners

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”*.

In support of P1, P2, P3, P4 and T1, C1 explained that *“parent’s interest and encouragement in a child’s education affect the child’s attitude toward school, classroom conduct, self-esteem, absenteeism, and motivation... parental involvement made a positive difference at all age levels”*.

The study findings have shown, however, that the involvement of parents of middle and high school learners is equally important. 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”*.

The study suggested that parents’ encouragement can be influential, whether a child stays in school or drops out. Similarly, a child may consider going to college more seriously when parents show interest in the child’s academic achievements and talk with the child about the benefits of a college education. Reading improves greatly when parents and children read together at home. Reading aloud with a child contributed significantly to the child’s reading abilities. Schools and teachers benefit from parental involvement because it involved parents developing a greater appreciation for the challenges that teachers were faced within the classroom (Shikoha et al., 2023).

Further, the study findings also explained how schools mitigated the challenges experienced during the implementation of FSE. The research participants admitted that the implementation of FSE was also affected by factors related to community participation. This was because a family is the primary social system of the community. Rollins and Thomas (2002) further agree with the literature that high parental involvement was associated with high academic achievement.

In addition, Cassidy and Lynn (1991) further established that a less physically crowded environment, along with motivation and parental support, were associated with higher educational levels in children. Community influences have been identified as an important factor affecting school success (Lezotte, 2001).

The study findings revealed that income generating activities, donations, and involvement of parents and guardians were identified as ways in which schools attempted to offset the problems encountered during the implementation of FSE in the Oluno circuit. The study concurs with Verger *et al.* (2016), who states that well-structured Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) can diversify the sources of financial provision for secondary schools' funds. The school principals must be empowered to house the educational programs to ensure that financial resources are readily available for school expansion as such factors are obstacles to the implementation of FSE.

Shikoha *et al.* (2023) confirmed that donation is one of the remedies to overcome challenges facing the implementation of FSE. 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 hostel fees and purchasing of school uniforms for their children while at school remained the responsibility of parents that continue to be a challenge to unemployed parents. The study further revealed that some parents felt that the government provided free education, therefore, they relaxed about making genuine contributions to schools.

The study findings concluded that the implementation of FSE was also affected by factors related to community participation. This was because a family is the primary social system of the community, and high parental involvement was associated with high academic achievement.

CONCLUSION

The study findings revealed that there were numerous challenges and opportunities the MoEAC faced during the implementation of FSE. The increased number of secondary school learners' enrolments was observed as one of the improvements. While the following 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 promote quality education to secondary school learners.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The study recommended the following 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.

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