

Primary School Teachers' Participation in The National Curriculum Development in Namibia

Onesmus. A. Aloovi

Department of Technical and Vocational Education and Training Faculty of Commerce, Human Science and Education Namibia University of Science and Technology

Received 18-07-2024

Revised 19-07-2024

Accepted 09-08-2024

Published 11-08-2024



Copyright: ©2024 The Authors. Published by Publisher. This is an open access article under the CC BY-NC-ND license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>).

Abstract:

The subject of this investigation was the extent to which primary school teachers in Onamutai Circuit in Oshana region of Namibia participate in national curriculum development. The research objective for this study was to determine the roles primary school teachers in Onamutai circuit play in the development of the national curriculum as well as identify factors that inhibit their participation in the national curriculum development. The study was framed within an interpretivist research paradigm, emphasizing the subjective experiences of primary school teachers in Onamutai circuit. It adopted a qualitative research design, specifically a case study approach, to provide a detailed and contextually rich exploration of primary school teachers' participation in national curriculum development. The population included all primary school teachers in the Onamutai circuit and all 12 senior education officers in Oshana region, with a sample of 20 primary school teachers and 2 senior education officers selected through purposive sampling. The primary research instrument was semi-structured interviews. Data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis. The research findings revealed that primary school teachers in the Onamutai circuit of Oshana region have varying levels of involvement in the national curriculum development. While some primary school teachers participate directly in national curriculum committees and working groups, others feel marginalized and excluded from the process of national curriculum development. This disparity suggests a significant gap between the intentions of inclusive national curriculum development policies and their practical implementation. The study highlighted the need for more structured and inclusive approaches to ensure that all primary school teachers in Onamutai circuit of Oshana region can contribute meaningfully to national curriculum development.

Keywords: Curriculum Development, Namibia, Primary School Teachers, Teacher' Participation

Introduction:

In Namibia, as in many other African countries, education reforms were necessary after the country's independence in 1990. Educational reform was necessary in Namibia to align the new curriculum goals with those of the new government and international standards (Shikalepo, 2019). The apartheid education system and assessment

practices were no longer appropriate for the country's demand to provide universal basic education to all citizens. The objectives of curriculum reform were to have as many learners as possible progressing through the educational system to create a critical mass of an educated and skilled citizenry for a knowledge-based society (Ipinge and Kasanda, 2013).

In the Namibia context, national curriculum is developed by the Curriculum Panel which is housed at the National Institute for Educational Development (NIED), a Directorate in the Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture (MoEAC). The curriculum panel members are selected in consultation with the regional directors of education in all fourteen regions of the country.

The researcher has served the Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture for a period of 13 years as a schoolteacher as well as the Head of Department. The researcher also served as a national curriculum Panel member. During this period the researcher has never seen primary school teachers from Onamutai circuit of Oshana region invited to take part in the development of the national curriculum, despite the curriculum having been reformed four times. Thus, the researcher developed an interest to conduct a research study to determine the extent to which primary school teachers in Onamutai circuit of Oshana region participate in the national curriculum development.

Objectives of the study:

- To establish the roles primary school teachers in Onamutai circuit play in the national primary school curriculum development.
- To determine the factors that inhibit the participation of primary school teachers from Onamutai circuit in national primary school curriculum development.

Statement of problem:

The implementation of the national curriculum with fidelity is a prerequisite aspect to provide quality education. Nevertheless, most of the primary school teachers in the Onamutai circuit of the Oshana region are frequently deprived of the opportunity to engage in the process of national curriculum development. Regardless of the fact that it has been affirmed that teachers are represented in the curriculum development process, the level of representation, as well as the degree to which primary school teachers in the field are engaged in the national curriculum development process remains unclear, and not stated. To crown it all, the researcher has served the Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture for a period of 13 years as a schoolteacher as well as the Head of Department. The researcher also served as a national curriculum Panel member. During this period the researcher has never seen primary school teachers from Onamutai circuit of Oshana region invited to take part in the development of the

national curriculum, despite the curriculum having been reviewed four times. Furthermore, It is not known whether primary school teachers in Onamutai circuit of Oshana region are aware of how the teachers who participate in the national curriculum development process are selected and whether they are adequately represent them in the national curriculum development teams. Hence, it is against this background that the researcher developed an interest to conduct a research study to establish the extent to which primary school teachers in Onamutai circuit of Oshana region participate in the primary school national curriculum development process.

Methodology:

The study adopted a qualitative research approach to obtain qualitative insights into Onamutai primary school teachers' participation in the development of the national curriculum. This approach allows the researcher to gain in-depth insights into participants' perspectives, motivations, and behaviours, which are often difficult to capture through quantitative methods. This approach allows for a comprehensive understanding of the extent and nature of teachers' involvement in the development of the national primary school curriculum.

Participants:

For this study, the sample consisted of 20 primary school teachers from Onamutai circuit and 2 senior education officers from Oshana regional educational directorate. This resulted in a total of 22 respondents. The study employed purposive sampling, a non-probability sampling technique where the researcher selects participants based on specific characteristics and criteria relevant to the research objectives.

Data collection instrument:

The primary data collection instrument for this study was semi-structured interview. Semi-structured interviews are a flexible and effective method for gathering qualitative data, allowing the researcher to explore complex issues in depth while maintaining the ability to follow up on interesting responses.

Data analysis:

The data analysis procedure for this study involved a systematic approach to interpreting and making sense of the qualitative data collected through semi-structured interviews. The primary method

used for analysing the data in this study was thematic analysis, which is a widely accepted technique in qualitative research for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data.

Ethical issues:

For this study, five ethical principles were taken into cognizance. These were: obtaining permission from the Directorate of Education in Namibia to conduct a research study in four selected public primary schools in the Oshana region; obtaining informed consent from the research participants; protecting the anonymity, and confidentiality of the

participants; avoiding harm, or damage to the participants; and being honest during analysing and reporting of the research findings.

Research findings and discussion:

In this section, data constructed through semi-structured interviews are presented. The section begins by presenting the demographic information for the research participants. The section continues presenting data constructed through semi-structured interviews under different themes emerged during data analysis.

Demographic data:

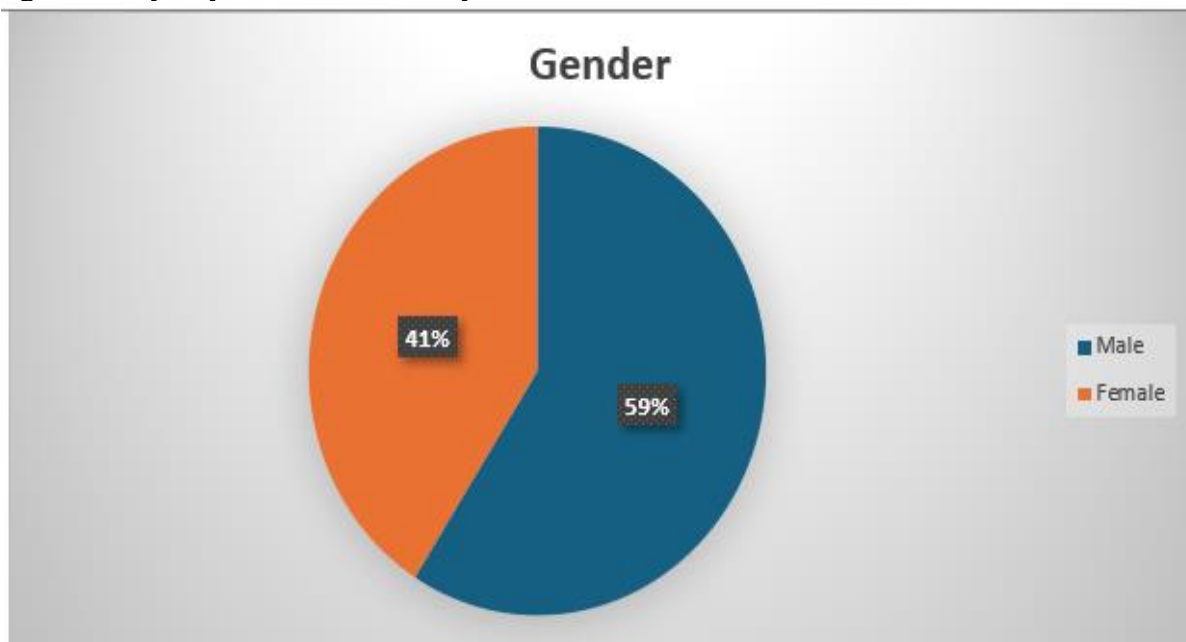


Figure 1: Respondents' gender

Data in figure 1 above shows that there were more males who participated in this study. This represents 59% of the research participants.

Information in figure 1 also reveal that there were few female respondents, representing 41% of the research respondents.

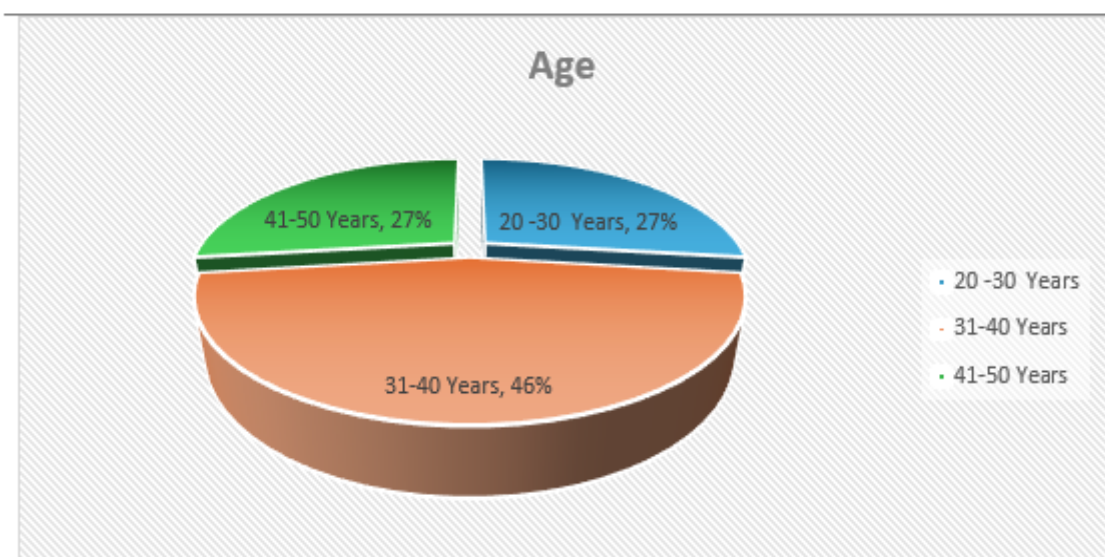


Figure 2: Age category of respondents

Information in figure 2 above shows that most respondents (10) are in the age group range between 31 to 40 years old. This represents 46% of the respondents. Data in figure 2 further indicate that there were equal number (6) of the respondents in the age group of 20 – 30 years and 41 to 50 years old. This represents 27% of the respondents per each age group (20 – 30 years and 41 to 50 years old). Finally, data from figure 2 shows that none of the research respondent was in the age group 51 + years old. Data in figure 2 reveals that Onamutai circuit has youthful primary school teachers who

can effectively contribute to the development of the national curriculum if they are effectively engaged in this very important activity.

Years of experience:

The study sought to determine the years of working experience of the respondents. This was meant to show the extent of the respondents' experience entailing their acquired knowledge and experience on the subject matter of this study which could yield reliable information.



Figure 3: Participants' years of teaching experience

The results in figure 3 above reveals that the majority (46%) of the respondents had over 10 years of teaching experience while those who have been in service between 6 and 10 years constituted 32% of the respondents. Data in figure 3 further

revealed that 22% of the research participants are those with teaching experience of 5 years and below. The results in figure 3 shows a well experienced sample that can provide credible data for this study.

Table 4: Participants professional qualification

Item	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Education Level	Masters' degree	3	14
	Bachelor of Education	16	72
	Diploma in Education	3	14

The results in table 4 above shows that all the participants had teaching qualifications with the majority (72%) having acquired a bachelor's degree in education whilst the remaining participants (14%) had either a Diploma in education or a master's degree in education.

The roles of primary school teachers in national curriculum development:

Teachers' participation in the development of the national curriculum emerged as a prominent theme. In this theme the researcher focused on the extent and nature of primary school teachers' participation in the initial stages of the national curriculum development. Evidence from the semi structured interviews indicate that primary school teachers' involvement in the development of the national curriculum varies widely. Some respondents reported direct participation in curriculum committees or working groups, while others expressed frustration over being excluded from these important discussions. This disparity highlights a significant gap between policy intentions and practical implementation, suggesting a need for more inclusive and structured approaches to involve primary school teachers in Onamutai circuit in national curriculum development. Previous studies (Bantwini, 2020; Wadesango, 2022) have argued that when teachers are involved in the national curriculum development, it enhances their sense of ownership and commitment, leading to better implementation and educational outcomes.

Feedback from the research participants also revealed their insights regarding the degree to which primary school teachers can be engaged at the outset of the national curriculum development. This aspect is crucial because the initial stages of the national curriculum development set the foundation for the educational content and instructional strategies that will be implemented in classrooms. The research findings revealed that primary school teachers are consulted only through occasional surveys or feedback sessions, often with limited scope and frequency. This limited engagement can lead to the development of the

national curriculum that does not fully address classroom realities. Research from Hargreaves and Fullan (2017) supports that meaningful teacher involvement in the initial stages of the national curriculum development can lead to more relevant and effective curricula.

The research findings highlighted various ways in which primary school teachers in Onamutai circuit can be integrated into national curriculum development tasks. The research respondents suggest for primary school teachers to serve on different curriculum review panels, assess curricular changes, and provide feedback based on classroom experiences. These roles leverage primary school teachers' firsthand experience, ensuring that the national primary school curriculum is not only theoretically robust but also practically relevant. Research respondents emphasized the important roles primary school teachers can play in the evaluation of the national curriculum to ensure the effectiveness and relevance of the primary school curriculum. Respondents further emphasized their roles in benchmarking standards of the national curriculum against regional and international peers to ensure the effectiveness of the national curriculum. This is consistent with the studies by Borko (2014); Darling-Hammond and Richardson (2019) indicating that such involvement ensures that the curriculum is aligned with educational goals and classroom realities.

The research findings revealed that primary school teachers' roles in the national curriculum development are crucial for creating a curriculum that meets learners' educational needs. The respondents argued that their practical insights from classroom experiences can be used to ensure the relevance and effectiveness of the national curriculum. This involvement is supported by literature from MacDonald, Barton, Baguley & Hartwig (2016) which suggests that teachers' contributions to national curriculum can significantly enhance the quality and applicability of the education system.

Factors inhibiting primary school teachers' participation in national curriculum development:

Structural barriers emerged as significant factor that inhibit primary school teachers' participation in the national curriculum development. Reference was made to systemic obstacles within the Namibian educational framework that impede primary school teachers' involvement in national curriculum development processes. The hierarchical nature of the educational system in Namibia is a primary barrier, with decisions often made at higher administrative levels with minimal input from classroom teachers. This top-down approach deprives primary school teachers' opportunities to contribute meaningfully to the development of the national curriculum. This resonates to the study by Fullan (2017) citing that the centralized nature of the curriculum development process often overlooks regional and local contexts, resulting in the national curriculum that may not fully address the specific needs and realities of most educational set ups.

Lack of clear communication channels between the Ministry of Education and primary school teachers is another structural barrier identified by the research participants. Inadequate dissemination of information regarding curriculum changes and the absence of mechanisms for primary school teachers to provide feedback and suggestions create a sense of disconnection among educators. This concurs with the study by Borg (2018) argued that the communication gap among educational stakeholders not only hinders teachers' ability to stay informed and engaged but also diminishes their motivation to participate in national curriculum development initiatives.

Resource constraints such as financial limitations, material, and human resources significantly hinder primary school teachers' ability to engage in national curriculum development processes as revealed by the study. Inadequate funding prevents schools from supporting active participation in national curriculum development, limiting opportunities for primary school teachers to attend workshops and professional development activities

that equip them with skills needed in the development of the national curriculum. In support is the study by Harris & Muijs (2015) echoing that lack of access to relevant materials and information further restricts teachers' ability to provide informed feedback on the effectiveness of the national curriculum.

Addressing resource constraints is essential for facilitating a more comprehensive and efficient national curriculum development process. This observation is supported by Penuel, Fishman, Yamaguchi & Gallagher (2017) as advising that by ensuring that teachers have access to the appropriate resources, alleviating staffing shortages, and providing sufficient funding, the education system can enable teachers to take a more proactive and knowledgeable role in the development of the national curriculum.

Communication and awareness issues were identified as additional significant factors inhibiting primary school teachers from participating in national curriculum development. Lack of effective communication from the Ministry of Education to schools prevents primary school teachers from being adequately informed about potential opportunities for them to contribute to the development of the national curriculum. This is consistent with the findings by Stoll and Louis (2007) stating that lack of timely and transparent communication results in teachers often hearing about curriculum changes only after they have been implemented, limiting their ability to provide input during the development phase.

Additionally, the study revealed that there is a significant gap in awareness among primary school teachers regarding their potential roles in curriculum development. Many primary school teachers reported being unaware of formal processes or channels through which they could provide input to the development of the national curriculum. This lack of awareness not only limits primary school teachers' participation in the development of national curriculum but also leads to a sense of exclusion and marginalization. Concurring is the study by Kennedy (2015) suggesting that improving communication and

raising awareness are crucial for fostering greater teachers' involvement in national curriculum development.

Conclusions:

The study concluded that primary school teachers in Onamutai circuit in Oshana Region have varying levels of involvement in the national curriculum development. While some primary school teachers participated directly in national curriculum committees and working groups, others feel marginalized and excluded from the process of national curriculum development. This disparity suggests a significant gap between the intentions of inclusive national curriculum development policies and their practical implementation. The study highlighted the need for more structured and inclusive approaches to ensure that all primary school teachers can contribute meaningfully to national curriculum development.

It was concluded that several structural barriers inhibit primary school teachers from participating in the national curriculum development process. The hierarchical structure of the educational system in Namibia, which centralizes decision-making at higher administrative levels, often leaves primary school teachers with limited opportunities to provide input on national curriculum development. Additionally, lack of clear and effective communication channels between the Ministry of Education and primary school teachers at regional level further exacerbates the issues of curriculum development. The study emphasized that these systemic barriers need to be addressed to facilitate greater primary school teachers' involvement in national curriculum development.

Resource constraints were also concluded to be a significant hindrance to primary school teachers' participation in national curriculum development. Inadequate funding, limited access to necessary materials, and heavy workloads associated with teaching prevent primary school teachers from engaging in additional tasks related to national curriculum development. These constraints highlight the need for better resource allocation and support mechanisms to enable primary school

teachers to effectively participate in national curriculum development processes. The research findings revealed that addressing these issues is crucial for creating a more supportive environment that allows primary school teachers involvement in the development of the national curriculum.

Recommendations:

Based on the study's findings, several key recommendations have been proposed to improve Onamutai circuit primary school teachers' participation in the national curriculum development:

The research findings revealed poor communication between educational stakeholders in Namibia. It is therefore, recommended for the ministry of education to establish and maintain effective communication channels between the ministry and primary school teachers. Regular updates and transparent communication can keep primary school teachers informed about national curriculum development processes and opportunities for involvement. This can be achieved through newsletters, email updates, and dedicated online platforms where primary school teachers can access relevant information and contribute their insights.

Research findings revealed poor primary school teachers' involvement in decision making about national curriculum development. It is against this background that this study recommends the department of education in Namibia to create more inclusive and structured mechanisms for primary school teachers' involvement in national curriculum development. This includes forming national curriculum committees or working groups that include a diverse representation of primary school teachers from different schools and regions. Ensuring that primary school teachers have a voice in decision-making processes that can bridge the gap between policy and practice, leading to a national curriculum that is more reflective of classroom realities.

The research findings revealed structural barriers that inhibit primary school teachers' participation in the national curriculum development. To

overcome the hierarchical nature of the education system, it is recommended for the ministry of education in Namibia to decentralize certain aspects of curriculum development. Allowing regional education offices to have more autonomy in national curriculum-related decisions can facilitate greater primary school teachers' participation in national curriculum development. Additionally, establishing clear guidelines and procedures for teachers' input in the development of the national curriculum can help mitigate the effects of the top-down approach currently practiced in the education system.

References:

1. Bantwini, B. D. (2020). How teachers perceive the new curriculum reform: Lessons from a school district in the Eastern Cape Province, South Africa. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 30(1), 83-90.
2. Borko, H. (2014). Professional development and teacher learning: Mapping the terrain. *Educational Researcher*, 33(8), 3-15.
3. Borg, S. (2018). *Teacher research in language teaching: A critical analysis*. Cambridge University Press.
4. Darling-Hammond, L., & Richardson, N. (2019). Teacher learning: What matters? *Educational Leadership*, 66(5), 46-53.
5. Fullan, M. (2017). *The new meaning of educational change* (4th ed.). Teachers College Press.
6. Hargreaves, A., & Fullan, M. (2017). *Professional capital: Transforming teaching in every school*. Teachers College Press.
7. Harris, A., & Muijs, D. (2015). *Improving schools through teacher leadership*. Open University Press.
8. Ipinge, S. M., & Kasanda, C. D. (2013). Challenges associated with curriculum alignment, change and assessment reforms in Namibia. *Assessment in Education: Principles, Policy & Practice*, 20(4), 424-441.
9. Kennedy, M. M. (2015). *Inside teaching: How classroom life undermines reform*. Harvard University Press.
10. MacDonald, A., Barton, G., Baguley, M., & Hartwig, K. (2016). Teachers' curriculum stories: Perceptions and preparedness to enact change. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 48(13), 1336-1351.
11. Penuel, W. R., Fishman, B. J., Yamaguchi, R., & Gallagher, L. P. (2017). What makes professional development effective? Strategies that foster curriculum implementation. *American Educational Research Journal*, 44(4), 921-958.
12. Shikalepo, E. E. (2019). The constitutionality of free education in Namibia: A statutory review. *International Journal of Latest Research in Humanities and Social Science (IJLRHSS)*, 02(09), 115-121.
13. Stoll, L., & Seashore Louis, K. (2007). *Professional Learning Communities: Divergence, Depth And Dilemmas: Divergence, Depth and Dilemmas*. McGraw-Hill Education (UK).
14. Wadesango, N. (2022). Professionalisation of teaching in South Africa. *Journal of Entrepreneurship Education*, 25, 1-9.