
Strategies to Enhance Primary School Teachers' Participation in The Namibian National Curriculum Development

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Abstract:

The subject of this investigation was to establish the strategies that could be employed in the Namibian education system to enhance effective participation of primary school teachers in the development of the national curriculum. The research objective for this study was to establish the strategies that could be employed to ensure effective participation of primary school teachers in Onamutai circuit in the development of the national curriculum. 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. In this study, the population of interest are the (283) primary school teachers in the Onamutai Circuit, Oshana Region of Namibia. In addition to 283 primary school teachers, the population of the study is made up of 12 senior education officers from the directorate of education in Oshana Regional. The primary research instrument was semi-structured interviews. Data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis. The research findings revealed that improving communication and fostering collaboration among educational stakeholders are essential strategies for enhancing primary school teachers' participation in national curriculum development. In addition, the research findings revealed that implementing strategies that focus on professional development, fostering dialogue as well as providing incentives, the education system can better utilize teachers' expertise in shaping the national curriculum that meets the needs of the Namibian learners.

Keywords: National curriculum development, primary school teachers, strategies to enhance teachers' participation

Introduction:

Enhancing primary school teachers' participation in the Namibian national curriculum development is crucial as it create effective and practical educational programs that addresses the needs for the 21 centuries. Primary school teachers, being at the forefront of education, possess firsthand

knowledge of the challenges and needs within classrooms, making their involvement in the national curriculum indispensable (Smith, 2018). However, enhancing their participation in the national curriculum development requires deliberate strategies to overcome barriers such as

limited professional development opportunities, lack of awareness, and inadequate support from educational authorities (Smith, 2018).

The key strategy to enhance primary school teachers' participation in the national curriculum development is the provision of continuous professional development programs that focus on curriculum design and implementation. These programs should equip primary school teachers with the necessary skills and knowledge to actively contribute to curriculum development processes. Literatures reviewed suggest that when teachers are empowered through professional development, their sense of ownership and responsibility towards the curriculum increases, leading to more meaningful participation (Smith, 2018).

Creating platforms for regular dialogue between teachers and educational stakeholders is another strategy that can be adopted to enhance teachers' participation in the national curriculum development. Establishing forums where primary school teachers can voice their opinions and experiences allows for a two-way communication channel that ensures their perspectives are considered in the national curriculum decisions (Smith, 2018). According to Jones and Thompson (2020), such collaborative approaches not only enhance the quality of the national curriculum but also foster a sense of inclusivity and transparency in the national curriculum development process.

According to Moyo (2019), providing incentives and recognition for teachers who actively participate in the national curriculum development can motivate more educators to get involved. Incentives might include professional recognition, career advancement opportunities, or financial rewards. As noted by Moyo (2019), when teachers feel that their contributions are valued and rewarded, they are more likely to engage actively in curriculum-related activities.

Objective of the study:

To establish the strategies that could be employed to ensure effective participation of primary school teachers in Onamutai circuit in the development of the national curriculum.

Statement of problem:

The National Institute for Educational Development (NIED) is a directorate in the Ministry of Education, Art and Culture which is responsible for the development of the national curriculum. The national curriculum is primarily developed by policymakers and educational experts, often with limited input from primary school teachers who are directly responsible for its implementation. Despite the crucial role that primary school teachers play in the implementation of the educational curricula, their participation in the Namibian national curriculum development process has been notably limited. This lack of involvement has led to a disconnect between the curriculum design and the practical realities of the classroom, resulting in challenges in the effective delivery of education at the primary level. Literature revealed that exclusion of primary school teachers in the development of the national curriculum may lead to the development of the curriculum that may not fully address the diverse needs of learners or the constraints faced by teachers in the classroom. Furthermore, the exclusion of primary school teachers from the national curriculum development process can lead to a sense of disempowerment and a lack of ownership over the curriculum they are required to implement. It is against this background that the researcher finds it necessary to conduct a study to establish the strategies that could be employed to ensure that primary school teachers in Onamutai circuit of Oshana region effectively participant in the process of national curriculum development.

Literature review:

Theoretical framework:

A constructivist view was employed in this study. According to Coughlan (2020), constructivist is a theoretical framework that incapacitates researchers to explore social processes, as well as subject matters, and subsequently constructs theories, which oftentimes never existed before. This theoretical framework was selected as an ideal framework for this study as it includes constructing, and deducing hypotheses as well as

theories from the emerging data. This framework was also deemed necessary for this study as it often allows researchers to understand, discover social processes, and eventually formulate theories. Not just this, but it also focuses on obtaining rich detailed data to investigate a social process, and infer how people who are engaged in, deal with the situation on the ground (Coughlan, 2020).

Strategies to enhance teachers' participation in the national curriculum development:

Engaging primary school teachers in the national curriculum development process is crucial for creating effective and relevant educational programmes in the country. Some interventional strategies that could be employed to foster teachers' involvement in the national curriculum development are discussed below.

Teachers' empowerment:

According to Gore (2019) empowerment of teachers is one of the primary, and supreme strategies to enhance the involvement of teachers in the development of the national curriculum. Based on Gore's (2019) argument, it is of essence to pinpoint the key features regarding the curriculum knowledge, and skills that an empowered teacher ought to demonstrate to handle the roles of a teacher in the national curriculum development. It is crucial to primarily elucidate the term empowerment in connection to knowledge, skills, and attitude that the teacher ought to have to make a powerful, and positive contribution to the national curriculum development (Gore, 2019).

Gore (2019) argued that empowerment implies to provide authority and allow someone to participate in the process. He postulates that empowerment incorporates a concept power as outward, power which is to be provided, which can be provided, power as prosperity. Moreover, empowerment is characterized by growth, and expansion through which a person grows, which allows him/her to undertake autonomous pronouncements, and to act freely with a view to make a relevant contribution to the development of his/her specific environment (Gore, 2019).

Empowerment is associated with the development of appropriate skills, attitudes, and information in a constructive, and independent climate. These professionals are hence viewed as specialists as they possess the capacity to make contributions to transformation through their power (Carl, 2018). Consequently, these educators are bound to cultivate, and have a variety of skills in the outcomes-based setting, and those skills incorporate, interactive skills, where educators are to intermingle with learners, and it turns out to be important to examine the curriculum development roles of teachers from that angle. One ought to remember the sermon about humanity, where all teachers, and educators are key contributors to the transformation of education in South Africa (DoE, 2014).

Enhancing teachers' comprehension of the national curriculum development perspectives:

Teachers' understanding of the national curriculum development perspectives is essential for them to align their instructional practices with national educational standards and policies. According to Posner (2004), comprehending the national curriculum framework helps teachers to ensure consistency and coherence in their teaching, fostering an equitable educational experience for all students. Posner (2004) argued that teachers must be well-versed in national curriculum guidelines to effectively plan, implement, and assess their instruction.

Professional development programs are crucial in enhancing teachers' understanding of national curriculum development process. Darling-Hammond, Hyler and Gardner (2017) emphasised that ongoing professional learning opportunities should be aligned with national standards and focused on the practical application of national curriculum frameworks. These programs should provide educators with the knowledge and skills needed to interpret and implement national curriculum guidelines effectively.

Moreover, reflective practice enables teachers to critically engage with national curriculum perspectives. Schön (1983) suggests that through

reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action, teachers can continuously evaluate and refine their instructional strategies to better align with national standards. According to Schön (1983), this reflective process encourages teachers to adapt their teaching to meet the diverse needs of their learners while adhering to national curriculum requirements.

Collaboration among educators is also vital in deepening teachers' comprehension of national curriculum development processes. Vescio, Ross, and Adams (2008) argued that participation in professional learning communities fosters a collaborative environment where teachers can share best practices, discuss challenges, and develop strategies to implement national curriculum guidelines effectively. Such collaborative efforts promote a shared understanding and consistent application of national standards across different educational contexts (Vescio et al, 2008).

Integrating technology into teachers' professional development can further enhance their understanding of national curriculum perspectives. According to Mishra and Koehler (2006), the Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPCK) framework underscores the importance of integrating technology with pedagogy and content knowledge. By leveraging technology, teachers can access a wide range of resources and tools that support the implementation of national curriculum standards in their classrooms.

Enhancing teachers' comprehension of national curriculum development perspectives involves providing targeted professional development, fostering reflective practice, promoting collaboration, and integrating technology. These strategies ensure that teachers are well-equipped to interpret and implement national curriculum guidelines, ultimately improving educational outcomes for their learners.

Methodology:

The study adopted a qualitative research approach to obtain qualitative insights into strategies that can enhance Onamutai primary school teachers'

participation in the national curriculum development. 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 4 senior education officers from the directorate of education in Oshana regional. This resulted in a total of 24 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:

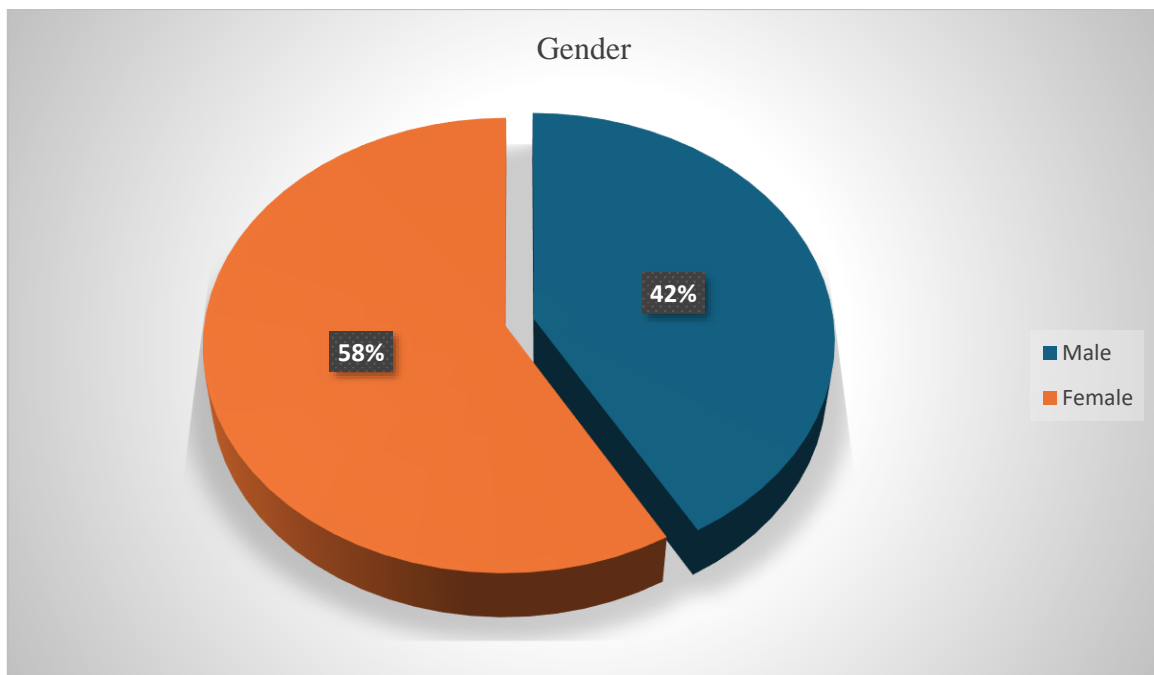
For this study, five ethical principles were taken into cognizance. These were: obtaining permission from the Directorate of Education in Namibia to conduct a research study in four selected public primary schools in the Oshana region; obtaining

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.

Demographic data:

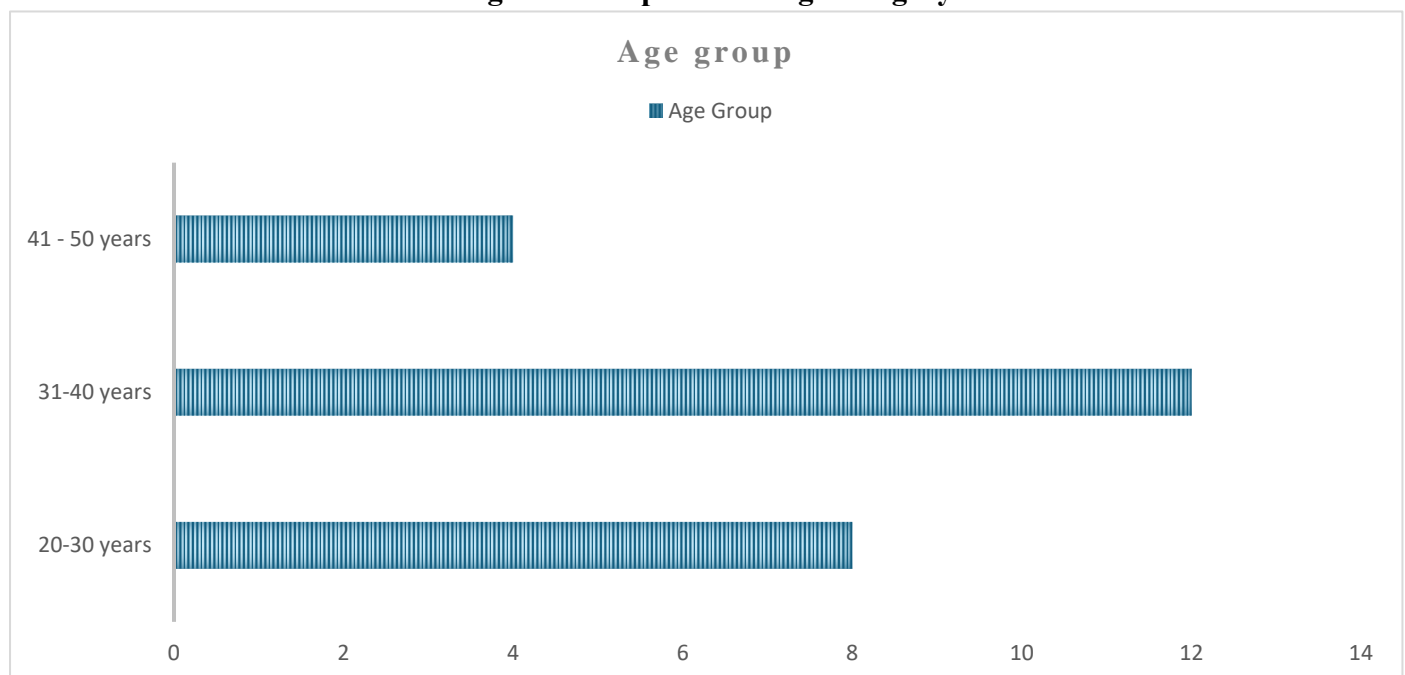
Figure 1: Respondents' gender



Data in figure 1 above shows that there were more females who participated in this study. This represents 58% of the research participants.

Information in figure 1 also reveal that there were few males' respondents, representing 42% of the research respondents.

Figure 2: Respondents' age category



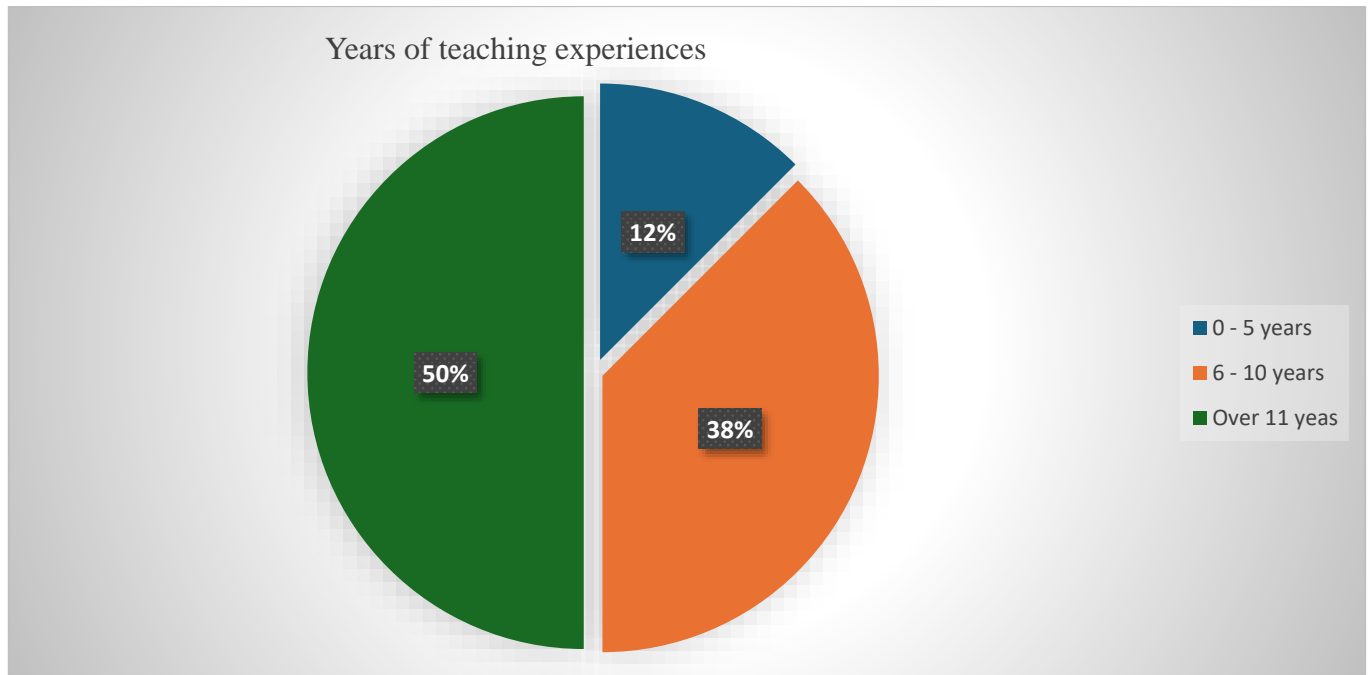
Information in figure 2 above shows that most respondents (12) are in the age group range between 31 to 40 years old. This represents 50% of the respondents. Data in figure 2 further indicate

that there were eight (8) respondents in the age group of 20 – 30 years. This represents 33% of the respondents. Finally, data from figure 2 shows that there were four (4) respondents in the age group 41 to 50 years. This represents 16.7% of the

respondents. 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.

Figure 3: Respondents' years of teaching experience



The results in figure 3 above reveals that the majority (50%) of the respondents had over 10 years of teaching experience while those who have been in service between 6 and 10 years constituted 38% of the respondents. Data in figure 3 further

revealed that 12.5% 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.

Figure 4: Respondents' highest Qualification



The results in figure 4 above shows that all the participants had teaching qualifications with the

majority (50%) having acquired a bachelor honors degree in education. Data in figure 4 further

revealed that 25% of the respondents have graduated with a bachelor's degree in education whilst the remaining participants (25%) had either a Diploma in education or a master's degree in education. Data in figure 4 shows that the research respondents do possess knowledge and skills in education that could be utilized once engaged in the process of national curriculum development.

Research findings and discussion:

Strategies to enhance teachers' participation in the national curriculum development:

Data constructed through semi-structured interviews revealed that the participation of Onamutai primary school teachers in the national curriculum development is crucial for the development of educational programmes that are both relevant and effective. During data construction process, respondents were asked to share possible strategies that can be employed in the Namibian education system to ensure effective primary school teachers' participation in the development of the national curriculum. Several strategies to maximize the effectiveness of primary school teachers' participation in national curriculum development were highlighted. Strategies to maximize the effectiveness of primary school teachers' participation in national curriculum development are discussed under emerged themes.

Enhanced communication and collaboration:

Enhanced communication and collaboration emerged as a significant strategy that could be employed in the Namibian education system to ensure effective primary school teachers' participation in the national curriculum development process. In this strategy respondents highlighted the importance of improving communication channels and fostering collaborative efforts between various educational stakeholders to facilitate greater teachers' involvement in the national curriculum development. Semi-structured interviews with primary school teachers and senior education officers (SEO) underscored the need for more structured and transparent communication

processes. This strategy is supported by Bryk et al. (2016) as stating that regular updates and open lines of communication from the Ministry of Education can significantly enhance teachers' participation in the national curriculum development by keeping them informed about curriculum development processes and timelines.

Fostering collaboration between teachers, education officers, and curriculum developers was identified as a critical strategy that can enhance primary school teachers' participation in the national curriculum development. Research respondents expressed the desire for more collaborative platforms where they could share their insights and experiences directly with those responsible for national curriculum design. This is consistent with the findings by Vescio, Ross, and Adams (2008) as they argued that encouraging a collaborative approach to curriculum development that includes teachers, curriculum developers, and other educational stakeholders can lead to a national curriculum that is practical, relevant, and can be effectively implemented in classrooms. Research respondents argued that collaborative teamwork among educational stakeholders can lead to an effective national curriculum that reflects the realities of the classroom and addresses learners' diverse needs. According to Jones and Thompson (2020), such collaborative approaches not only enhance the quality of the national curriculum but also foster a sense of inclusivity and transparency in the development process.

Moreover, the integration of digital communication tools was highlighted to enhance collaboration among curriculum stakeholders. Teachers and Senior Education Officers suggested the use of online platforms for discussions, feedback, and updates on the national curriculum development. Digital tools can provide a more accessible and efficient means for teachers to engage in national curriculum development, regardless of geographical constraints.

Research respondents argued that enhancing communication and fostering collaboration are crucial strategies for ensuring effective teachers'

participation in national curriculum development. The respondents express the need for the directorate of education to initiate education system that foster an environment that is more inclusive and participative by utilizing digital tools, establishing collaborative forums, and introducing frequent communication updates. This finding aligns with the literature by Hargreaves and Shirley (2019) which emphasized that the integration of digital communication tools can further enhance collaboration, providing a more accessible and efficient means for primary school teachers to engage in national curriculum development. This approach not only empowers teachers to contribute valuable insights but also leads to a more relevant and effective national curriculum that meets the needs of all stakeholders.

Capacity building and training:

During data construction, capacity building and training were among the listed strategies that could be employed to enhance primary school teachers' participation in the national curriculum. Research participants suggested the need for the Ministry of Education, Art and Culture to equip primary school teachers with the necessary skills, knowledge, and resources to actively engage in the national curriculum development process. Literature by Guskey (2018) aligns to this observation by highlighting that specialized training focusing on curriculum design, development, and implementation can equip teachers with the theoretical and practical knowledge required to participate effectively in the development of a curriculum. In addition, research findings revealed that formal training programs, ongoing capacity-building initiatives are essential to equip primary school teachers with necessary skills required for the development of the national curriculum. The research findings revealed that continuous professional development opportunities, such as workshops, seminars, and collaborative learning sessions, can help primary school teachers stay updated on best practices and emerging trends in the development of the national curriculum.

The research findings revealed the need for the Ministry of Education, Art and Culture to provide primary school teachers with the theoretical and practical knowledge required to participate effectively in the process of the national curriculum development, ensuring that they are well-prepared to offer meaningful input. In addition to formal training programs, ongoing capacity-building initiatives are essential to ensure that primary school teachers are equipped with the skills needed for effective curriculum development. Respondents suggested for continuous professional development opportunities, such as workshops, seminars, and collaborative learning sessions. They believe that these activities would help them stay updated on best practices and emerging trends in national curriculum development.

The respondents argued that providing teachers with access to resources and support is critical for their effective participation in the development of the national curriculum. Teachers emphasized the importance of having access to relevant materials, such as research articles, curriculum guidelines, and case studies, to inform their contributions to national curriculum development. This observation concurs with the study by Borko (2014) accentuating that mentorship and support networks can play a significant role in capacity building, helping teachers navigate the complexities of curriculum development.

Research findings revealed that capacity building and training are essential strategies for ensuring effective teachers' participation in curriculum development. The research findings revealed that investing in primary school teachers' professional development programs, provision of ongoing learning opportunities, and offering access to resources and support, the education system can empower primary school teachers to take an active role in shaping the national curriculum. Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2019) literature concurs to undertaking by stating that such investment can lead to the creation of a more relevant, effective, and inclusive educational framework that better meets the needs of both educators and learners.

Conclusion:

The research findings revealed that improving communication and fostering collaboration among educational stakeholders are essential strategies for enhancing primary school teachers' participation in national curriculum development. Establishing clear communication channels as well as creating platforms for collaboration between primary school teachers, senior education officers, and curriculum developers can ensure that the curriculum reflects classroom realities and addresses diverse learners' needs. The integration of digital communication tools was also recommended to facilitate more efficient and accessible collaboration.

The research findings revealed that capacity building and training are critical strategies for effective primary school teachers' participation in national curriculum development. Providing targeted professional development programs and ongoing capacity-building initiatives can equip primary school teachers with the necessary skills and knowledge to engage in the process of national curriculum development. Continuous professional development opportunities, such as workshops and seminars, are essential for keeping primary school teachers updated on best practices and emerging trends for national curriculum development. Ensuring that primary school teachers have access to relevant materials and support networks can further enhance their ability to contribute effectively to national curriculum development.

Recommendations:

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

Ongoing professional development and capacity-building initiatives were identified in this study as crucial for equipping primary school teachers with the necessary skills and knowledge. It is therefore recommended for the directorate of education in

Namibia to offer regular training programs, workshops, and seminars on national curriculum development. Creating mentorship programs and support networks can further assist primary school teachers in navigating the complexities of national curriculum development.

The research findings revealed outdated policy regarding who should participate in national curriculum development. The outdated policies implemented by the department of education hinder primary school teachers' participation in the national curriculum development. Therefore, this study recommends for the review and adjustment of existing policies related to national curriculum development to ensure that these policies support and encourage primary school teacher participation in national curriculum development. This includes revising policies to provide clear guidelines for teacher involvement, allocating resources for professional development, and creating accountability mechanisms to ensure that teachers' contributions are considered in curriculum decisions.

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