



REPUBLIC OF NAMIBIA

National and Regional Consultations on Transforming Education in Namibia Progress Report



**Inclusive, equitable quality education
is a shared responsibility**

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Position Paper 3

Teachers, teaching and the teaching profession

1. Introduction

At the core of the education project is the teacher. The success of any country to achieve global, regional or national commitments in education lies on the quality of its teachers who are the backbone of the education system. The debate about teachers internationally has often focused on how to prepare teachers effectively for the role that they are likely to play during the 21st century (Zhu & Zeichner 2013). With the growing populations in Africa, African countries are facing the world's worst teacher shortage. To achieve SDG4 in terms of universal access to education by 2030, 6.3 million primary school teachers need to be hired in Africa alone (UNICEF Office of Research, 2021).

In addition, to ensure that schools are provided with teachers, another issue of importance is whether children are in school and indeed learning. The provision of teachers is only effective if attention is paid to the provision of quality teaching. Teacher qualifications, professionalism, motivation and commitment, as well as effective needs-driven continuous professional development (CPD), are key to ensure quality in any education system.

2. Challenge

With the advancements of digital technologies and the fourth industrial revolution, teachers have been called to adapt their teaching approaches to be in line with global innovations and digital technologies. These innovations have put pressure on governments to rethink the tertiary education programmes to bring them in line with current global developments and to ensure relevant CPD of teachers. In addition, with the growing population of children accessing early childhood education and basic education, it is estimated that 69 million teachers are still needed globally to meet SDG 4¹. To meet global and national education goals, the 21 Eastern and Southern African countries need to recruit 5 million additional teachers by 2030. Namibia needs to recruit an average of more than 1 600 qualified teachers annually over the next 20-year period, this compares to the current situation where the highest number of teachers per age cohort is just over 700 (MoEAC, 2017). Without enough teachers, classrooms are overcrowded, teachers are overworked, and the quality of teaching is inadequate to enable all learners, especially the most vulnerable, to achieve the expected learning outcomes.

Teachers have been very much in the spotlight recently as parents realised, during COVID-19 lockdown, how dependent they are on teachers and how hard even schooling one or two children is, let alone a whole class. The 'learning loss' during the lockdown (Angrist 2021; Kuhfeld et al. 2020) has also focused attention on the dangers of young people leaving school unable to read or numerate. This concern was exacerbated by a realisation that learners from poor, remote rural and marginalised communities are most at risk of being left behind due to lack of access to digital technologies for online teaching and learning purposes (Mundy & Hares 2020).

¹ Based on data by the UNESCO Institute of Statistics, to achieve universal basic education by 2030, the world education systems will require additional 24.4 and 44.4 million teachers respectively in primary and secondary. Sub-Saharan Africa and Southern Asia account for over 76% of the need for new teachers in developing countries. In Sub-Saharan Africa, 70% of countries for primary against 90% for secondary face serious teachers' shortages leading to the continent being home to the most overcrowded classes; hence the most overburdened teachers.

COVID-19 struck an already very unbalanced teacher supply and quality situation. Teachers are expected to provide mental health and psycho-social support to learners who have lost their parents or guardians due to COVID-19, as well as AIDS. At the same time, teachers themselves are equally affected by losing a loved one or their own colleagues due to the pandemic. Yet, many are not trained to provide such services.

The UNESCO (2014) report defined 4 strategies to provide the best teachers to reach all children with good quality schooling. Its report said that teachers:

1. Should be selected, employed and deployed to reflect the diversity of the children they will be teaching.
2. Must be trained to support the weakest learners, starting from the early grades.
3. Who show real effectiveness should be deployed to the most challenging parts of a country to assist with redressing past inequalities.
4. Should be provided with the right mix of incentives so they remain in teaching and make sure all children are learning, regardless of their circumstances.

However, teachers only shine when they have relevant, well-constructed, progressive curricula; well prepared and responsible school leadership; and appropriate learner assessment policies (UNESCO 2014), as well as appropriate conditions of service. Too often curricula are imposed on teachers. When this happens, as with Curriculum 2005 in South Africa, however good and progressive the curriculum, it is likely to fail (Fiske & Ladd 2004). Teachers were expected to respond to latitude in developing their own instructional content and approach. However, apartheid education had not prepared most teachers for such innovation – it had taught them to deliver exactly what was in the textbook and what they had been taught. It left most teachers anchorless. Underspecifying the content undermined equity as the teachers in township and rural schools struggled with no specific content (Taylor & Vinjevold 1999). A generation of children were not taught the basics of literacy and numeracy. The South African schooling system 20 years later has still not recovered from this traumatic experience. This should be a lesson to schooling systems not to implement curriculum changes without considerable engagement with teachers and initial research and piloting.

3. International good practice

Key to good practice starts with robust and well-constructed teacher training programmes – with strong practice elements, such as ZINTEC in Zimbabwe. The Zimbabwe Integrated Teacher Education Course (ZINTEC) was launched in 1981 to meet the anticipated gap in trained primary school teachers as the post-independence government opened access (Chivore 1994). The aim was to provide a teacher training programme that allowed student teachers to supplement the cadre of existing teachers as quickly as possible. To do this the course comprised of the first 16 weeks of intense learning, followed by the commissioning of these new trainees into schools to take over teaching for five terms, then they would return for two terms where more content in pedagogical aspects was delivered (Majoni & Nyaruwata, 2015) allowing the trainees to gain more knowledge and reflect on their school-based experiences. They had to teach as well as work on the courses over the four years, after which, they could graduate with a Certificate in Education from the Department of Teacher Education at the University of Zimbabwe. As in the ZINTEC model lecturers/trainers need to model exactly what they expect students to do in the classroom, otherwise there is evidence that newly qualified teachers (NQTs) simply mimic the approach that was used in teaching them when they were at school (Valcke 2013), which perpetuates problems.

Training teachers in issues of equity and good practice is required but it has been known for a long time (Thompson 1995) and is increasingly acknowledged that in-service training and using a cascade model of training has minimal impact on teachers' practice: most teachers are trained in an environment which seems miles away from the reality of their classroom, so transferring skills learned in such a workshop is extremely difficult and beyond the skills of most teachers. In recent years better training programmes have been supplemented with training materials and in-school coaching of the trainees. While this 'triple dose' approach has been shown through RCT processes to improve teacher practice (Fleisch 2018) finding suitable coaches and budgeting for such a labour-intensive process is highly problematic in most developing countries. Other options are being explored, such as virtual coaching, which is cheaper, but with limited or no success (Fleisch 2018). Other projects have explored using Communities of Practice, Professional Learning Communities and other collegial forms of nudging or persuading teachers to change their practice (Hargreaves 2013).

An important aspect of quality is the realisation of the critical importance of the Foundation Phase. This has been driven by research which shows that investing in early childhood education and the Foundation Phase presents better value for money and has a bigger impact on life chances for learners than investment at other phases in the schooling cycle (ref). At school level this has often resulted in the Foundation Phase (FP) no longer being a neglected corner of the primary school where difficult teachers are deployed as punishment. Schools are increasingly deploying their best and most competent class teachers to the FP. This is generally positive except where upper primary with no experience of FP is parachuted into the phase. FP teaching requires teachers who know how to teach reading and progressively build numeracy skills. The focus on the FP has been further strengthened by the increasing use of international benchmarked comparability tests and the use of Early Grade Reading and Maths Assessment (EGRA and EGMA). The publication of the results from such tests have led to international league tables and the prominence of national reading scores in the Human Development Index (HDI), which have led to senior government engagement with the issue of literacy in the country's schools.

The focus on play-based learning is an example of the international trend towards implementing evidence-based teaching – that is teaching practice informed by data and evidence of what works (Valcke 2013). The focus on using a phonics-based approach to teaching reading is also based on evidence about how the brain works and what is most effective in teaching weaker learners, in particular, how to read.

In South Africa the Flemish Association for Development Cooperation and Technical Assistance – VVOB - uses evidence to improve teaching through teachers being trained as action researchers. This seems to lead to more reflective and focused teaching and support of teachers (Prew & Dieltiens 2021). This recognises that teaching is contextual and that it is a complex task which benefits by teachers exploring their own practice and approaching the task as a problem to be solved.

The Japanese system has institutionalised another form of action research. A strength of the Japanese system is the community approach that prevails in schools in Japan. This is based on cultural norms which dictate that failure of one is failure of all. As a result, considerable effort is made in making sure that everyone working in a school are welcomed, included and part of the team. Teachers expose themselves to observation by their peers, with a structured critical process used to discuss a lesson they have co-planned and then one teaches in front of the others. This is known as 'lesson study'. It is a form of collaborative research on teaching and learning processes in school that is conducted by and for teachers. It focuses upon key school issues as they relate to the teachers' teaching processes and students' learning styles. They are conducted as a learning community circle, involving co-planning, lesson delivery, observing, checking, and reflecting. The approach is supportive and collaborative. It exposes teachers to their peers' practices in a safe supportive environment (Prew & Maringe 2015).

Although controversial, there is evidence that differentiating teachers' pay based on outstanding student results leads to improved maths, science and reading achievement (Woessmann 2011). In most countries implementing results-based pay for teachers is a very controversial issue as it can lead to perverse incentives driving good teachers out of marginalised and deep rural schools where they are most needed, to teach in urban schools where results will be better and so the chances of getting an income supplement are greater. Not surprisingly most teacher unions and many teachers oppose results-based pay. Another approach being tried in some countries where teacher morale and commitment is low, is to increase teacher agency and rewards. This can take various forms such as giving teachers more responsibility through distributed leadership, or providing teachers with support in the classroom through implementation of paraprofessional teacher assistant programmes. The latter allows teachers to devote more time to teaching and less time on administration and class discipline (Scottish Executive 2001). Giving teachers more responsibility is often not favoured by teachers who find that more responsibility just deepens burnout. However, a well-run teacher reward system can have positive impact on teacher morale and identifies high performing teachers and most improved teachers. South Africa's National Teaching Awards is such a scheme as is the Global Teacher Award (www.globalteacherprize.org).

4. Current Situation in Namibia

In 2020 (MoEAC, 2020) Namibia had 31,462 teachers in 1,922 schools. Of these teachers 19,038 work in primary schools. 66% of the teachers were female. 1,412 teachers in 2020 were unqualified as teachers (MoEAC 2020). The teachers (of Grade 6 classes) scored better in SACMEQ literacy and maths tests than most of their colleagues across the region (MoEAC 2017b).

Teachers are trained by universities. The University of Namibia (UNAM) trains more teachers than other institutions. There are concerns about how teachers are prepared and this is exacerbated by a lack of tradition of inducting newly qualified teachers (NQTs) in their first placement.

The best schools, which are occasionally in deep rural areas, create strong teaching teams. The commitment by the school management and teachers within these teams overrides all else and leads to committed learners who then perform well in national school leaving exams (Mzabalazo Advisory Services, 2016). These schools have also proven that meaningful parental involvement in supporting schools to ensure that learning takes place results in fewer learners repeating a grade and less drop-outs. Establishing trust between schools, parents and communities enhances teacher motivation and commitment to teach despite challenges such as COVID-19.

The incentives for teachers who are teaching in remote communities has contributed to attracting more qualified teachers to these communities. There is need to ensure that these inducements increase in line with inflation.

CPD is offered, but it tends to be orchestrated from the head office or regional education offices. The advisory services are meant to provide support to the teachers through workshops and in their schools. As in other countries centre-based one-size-fits-all CPD is not effective at leading to real change in the classroom.

The private sector support in providing digital technologies to schools has equally contributed to enhancing positive teaching outcomes. However, there is no national strategy to co-ordinate private sector and donor funding. The result is that often funds are allocated to favourite schools, which are often not the most needy, and not allocated to national priorities.

5. Reflections from the Regional Stakeholder Consultations

Teachers are perceived as having an impact on the life of the child, negative or positive. They are regarded as the providers of knowledge and should thus be well qualified to instil such knowledge to learners from early childhood education through to secondary education. The basic education system is still faced with a huge number of either under-qualified or un-qualified teachers, especially at the senior secondary grades and in maths and science subjects, which is impacting on the quality of learning outcomes.

The stakeholders during the regional consultations provided their perceptions of teachers, teaching and the teaching professions as highlighted below.

Teachers:

- There is a mismatch between demand and supply of teachers across the different phases, schools and colleges, as well as within subject areas.
- Universities are producing teachers with subject combinations which militate against deployment and advancement. The MoEAC needs to ensure they only train teachers in subject combinations and in subjects and levels which add value to the system and lead to employment.
- There are inconsistencies in the appointment of teachers at all levels. The appointment of teachers needs to be regularised and quality assured.
- While there is great demand for teachers of Namibian languages, especially in the junior primary and secondary phases, there is a lack of trained language teachers, which has resulted in the Language Policy not being implemented in many schools.
- The lack of qualified teachers in particular fields of expertise especially in mathematics, sciences, technical subjects, computer studies and to teacher learners with disabilities and other special needs undermines the quality of learning available in many schools and increases dangers of learner dropout and ill-discipline.
- Many experienced teachers have retired and are replaced by novice teachers who have more theory and little or no teaching practice, and who are not inducted into the service on taking up their first position.
- High teacher: learner ratios resulting in teachers in some regions and schools having up to 50 learners in one classroom.
- Lack of teacher housing, especially in remote rural areas, to attract qualified teachers. This is compounded by a sense that salary inducements to work in remote areas have not kept pace with inflation.

Teaching:

- Limited teaching and learning materials.
- Lack of skills in the use of digital technologies to enhance teaching.
- In some cases, 5 learners have to share a textbook making teaching and learning more difficult.
- School principals are also teaching. They are already overloaded with school administration work and thus cannot give proper attention to teaching when they are called on.
- A lot of time is lost in disciplining learners instead of teaching. This is compounded by a lack of parental engagement. This is described by one participant as a '*loophole in the education system*'.

- Teachers having to cope with addressing the impact of COVID-19 and to adapt the curriculum to address the individual needs of learners who have missed out on different parts of their programmes.
- Life skills teachers overwhelmed with having to address mental health and psycho-social challenges when they are not trained in this field.
- Lack of access to digital technologies, limited capacity to use digital technologies in teaching and lack of access to electricity and internet connectivity in schools that disrupts access causing teaching and learning to be affected.

Teaching profession

- The lack of a teacher profession regulatory body to set standards for the profession and ensure they are observed.
- National Standards and Performance Indicators have been developed, and provide school management with guidelines of how to improve teaching and learning and to ensure conducive environments for learners. However, they are outdated and do not speak to the actual circumstances that are occurring in schools. They need to be reviewed to bring them in line with current developments.
- Although teaching is regarded as a profession, some of the characteristics of a profession have not been put in place. For instance, there are several pathways for teachers to get trained, including some which are entirely online. This means that they graduate with no school exposure at all. Such teachers enter the system without basic understanding of what it means to deliver a curriculum. Further, there is no mechanism to enable professionalism to be measured, recognised, and rewarded.
- University admission requirements are not being adhered to, resulting in poor performing students in Grade 12 opting for teaching as a career, and being accepted into university programmes.
- CPD is not offered across the board – particularly for primary school teachers – and is not needs driven. For instance, teachers are expected to support learners with special educational needs, but limited training and support is provided, leaving teachers feeling disempowered.

6. Proposed transforming levers

There are a number of levers open to the Ministry to address the concerns of teachers and to pro-actively intervene to improve the quality of teaching taking place in schools.

Teachers:

- Teacher placement needs to be more professionally handled. Presently, teachers are not being posted to where they are most needed and add most value and teacher appointment needs to be regularised to stop differences in appointment processes between schools. There is a general need for school and teacher planning to be improved, with better planning of teacher supply linked to planning for teacher retirement and replacement.
- Student teachers need to be better prepared to teach a class. They should be provided with more opportunities to practice during their initial teacher training. The University of Namibia (UNAM) refers to this practice as ‘school-based studies’. This name implies that it is an academic exercise and not a practical one.
- The MoEAC should implement a higher education Bachelor of Education curriculum framework with subjects aligned to the school curriculum. From this tertiary education institutions must design their basic education degree courses aligned to the reality in

Namibia's schools in terms of subject choice and subject combinations. This process might be assisted by the MoEAC establishing a committee consisting of the Ministry and teacher training institutions to assess the training needs in order to deliver the new curriculum. This will also require training institutions to develop effective programmes for student teachers as well as upgrading courses in using IT and ICDL.

- Teacher skills need to be enhanced. To this end CPD should be fully instituted, provided on an ongoing basis covering all teaching subjects and requirements. In addition, teachers should be given more involvement in developing curriculum, determining the focus and content of CPD courses and, for skilled teachers, acting as mentors and trainers on these courses. School Heads of Department (HoD) need specific training on instructional leadership.
- The MoEAC needs to make teaching more attractive and ensure teachers are available for schools where they are most needed. This will involve providing more substantial inducements, including housing and salary top-ups, to better trained teachers to work in remote rural schools, where they are most needed. In addition, high performing teachers should be provided with the chance to earn awards as motivation.

Teaching

- There is a need for the training, registration and accreditation of teachers located in various training institutions in Namibia to be regulated to avoid under-trained teachers entering the teaching profession. Experienced, but under-qualified teachers need access to professional development opportunities which include an element of recognition of prior learning (RPL). Equally, there is a need for minimum standards to be set for being appointed in promotional posts.
- Planning needs to be improved with the system conducting an extensive school audit in order to place teachers according to their areas of subject specialisation and reviewing the teacher: learner ratios and applying agreed ratios more consistently.
- Overall, conditions of service for teachers need to be improved, particularly in rural schools, with every school having electricity, computers, internet access, decent staff rooms and teacher housing. The experience of teaching would be enhanced were the MoEAC to strengthen partnerships with the private sector to provide digital technologies and also train teachers in their use to enhance teaching and learning.

Teaching Profession

- There is a much repeated need to speed up the establishment of the Professional (Regulatory) Council of Teachers that should be responsible for overseeing the regulations that govern the teaching profession; it should also provide support for the teaching profession by ensuring that high standards of conduct are maintained, by conducting investigations of teacher misconduct that are fair, rigorous, and timely, and by prohibiting teachers who have been found guilty of serious misconduct from teaching. It could also oversee the CPD of teachers.
- The MoEAC should also establish a Quality Assurance Division to quality assure teacher training and ensure better alignment between the needs of the schools and the production of teachers by universities, along with ensuring that teacher training courses have a longer practical school placement element. Having a practical element should be mandatory. Preferably a whole year of the course should be spent in schools. This would save money on teacher training and provide more teachers to be deployed at minimal expense.
- The Ministry could consider establishing a system of school-based mentoring and support for the development and improvement of teaching practice. This is something that could be used to improve the quality of pre-qualification teaching practice, induction of NQTs, as well as supporting ongoing development for employed teachers, and ensuring inclusion is

understood and teachers trained to implement elements of inclusion and manage classes effectively.

- All schools should have a mandatory induction programme in place for NQTs when they are posted to the school. The induction process should be the responsibility of a senior teacher who can act as mentor to the NQTs. To this end the Ministry could consider appointing retired teachers to support and mentor novice and more experienced teachers.
- The MoEAC should provide mandatory professional development courses leading to a qualification and in-service training. This will be assisted by the strengthening of the advisory services with more senior education officers (SEOs) in each subject. These are key to implementing effective CPD.
- The recommendations of the Teacher Incentive Study need to be implemented. This includes rewarding high performing teachers and motivate them to support their peers who might be struggling.
- Finally, the Ministry could consider employing teaching assistants to relieve teachers of some administrative and classroom organisational tasks, which detract them from teaching and which reduce class sizes. Such a scheme has successfully assisted teachers and helped reduce youth unemployment in various countries, including South Africa.

7. Conclusion

It is important to consider the whole value chain when approaching the challenge of improving the quality of teachers and teaching practice. There are many inter-dependencies that make the task a complex one to address. There is a need for improved system-level planning and a set of agreed standards and goals for the profession, and for a professional body to be established. The agreed standards need to be catered for in the pre-service training provided, and then in CPD, and there is a need to both support teachers through mentoring, teacher assistants and specialist services located in the regions, and to create an enabling environment in the school where the numbers of learners in a class is reasonable, and needed resources are supplied.

There are significant costs involved which are going to be difficult to fund without savings being made and priorities being agreed. It is suggested that a long term vision is needed of the ideal position, and that short and medium-term targets should be set that are realistic and achievable. In the medium term, if there are improvements and the number of learners repeating is reduced, the financial savings could be used to further reduce learner: teacher ratios, properly resource schools, provide improved system oversight and strengthen needs-driven CPD.

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