

Namibian teachers' understanding of education for all issues

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to find out Namibian teachers' understanding of their work circumstances, goals of education for all (EFA) and quality of education. To obtain data on these issues, a structured questionnaire was administered to a proportional representative sample of 1611 primary and secondary school teachers from six regions. Some of the study's main findings were that several sampled teachers taught under difficult circumstances in which their schools lacked classroom furniture, electricity, water, teaching and learning materials; had problems communicating with parents of their learners; had difficulties managing overcrowded classrooms; were given heavy administrative loads that prevented them from effectively undertaking their teaching duties and that they knew little about the existence of EFA goals.

These and other findings are discussed in the paper and developed into insights for enhancing educational practice in Namibia and for identifying issues on which to base further research.

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Background

The World Declaration on Education for All: Meeting Basic Learning Needs (EFA) (UNDP, UNESCO, UNICEF, World Bank, 1990) captured the understanding, planning and strategies for meeting basic learning needs of all learners in the world. The teachers' appropriation of this understanding seem not to have been focused on in the declaration.

To take stock of progress made in the practice of Educational for All, the World held an Education Forum in Dakar, Senegal, in 2000. The main outcome of the deliberations of this forum was the *Dakar Framework for Action; Education for All: Meeting our collective commitments* (UNESCO, 2000). In this framework, participants in the World Education Forum committed themselves to the attainment of six EFA goals by 2015. Three of these goals were about:

- expanding and improving comprehensive early childhood care and education, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children;
- ensuring that by 2015 all children, particularly girls, children in difficult circumstances and those belonging to ethnic minorities, have access to and complete, free and compulsory primary education of good quality;
- improving all aspects of the quality of education and ensuring excellence of all so that recognised and measurable learning outcomes are achieved by all, especially in literacy, numeracy and essential life skills.

As was the case in 1990, the *Dakar Framework For Action* lacked focus on teachers' appropriation of these and other EFA goals. The EFA vision enunciated in Dakar seem not to have been shared with teachers in a participatory way. This tendency was also reflected in the *Framework of EFA Fast Track Initiative-Accelerating progress towards quality universal primary education by 2015* (World Bank, 2004). This was the case because the initiative's focus was on "recipient countries' policy performance and accountability for results". There was no indication of how teacher capacity, for instance, could influence the success of the initiative. Focus was instead placed on the recruitment and payment of teachers and on quantitative aspects of enrolment and retention of learners in primary school.

The World Bank's Education Sector Strategy update of 2005 that was on analyzing learning outcomes, indicators of learning outcomes and drivers of the learning outcomes did not focus on the influence of teachers on learning outcomes. Instead, one of the aims of the strategy was "to replace information-based, teacher-directed methods with learning that develops the ability to create, apply, analyze and synthesise knowledge" (World Bank, 2005, p. 59). The main focus of the update was not on the shift in teacher education strategies and the utilization of the teacher resource in EFA. According to its latest strategy entitled: *Learning for all: investing in people's knowledge and skills to promote development, World Bank Group Education Strategy 2020*, the Bank continues not to prioritise the essential role of teachers in meeting EFA goals (World Bank, 2011).

Unlike the World Bank, UNESCO (2006) acknowledged the need for competent teachers to deliver the EFA promise. It noted however, that most studies in the area focused on teachers' academic skills and not on their perceptions and views pertaining to their work that contains pedagogical and professional aspects that go beyond academic skills. This paper provides some information on this in the context of teachers' apprehension of EFA goals and education practices in Namibia.

The need to pay attention to teachers' capacities that influence quality education in schools and the need to engage them in the manner they understand their work preconditions and circumstances are amply demonstrated in Aidan Mulkeen's (2010) book entitled *Teachers in Anglophone Africa: Issues in Teacher Supply, Training and Management*. Based on a synthesis of case studies conducted in Eritrea, The Gambia, Lesotho, Liberia, Malawi, Uganda, Zambia and Zanzibar, the book covers content on teacher supply, deployment, utilization, training, supervision, career and finance. Some important conclusions of the synthesis that relate to the present paper are captured in the following findings:

The teacher training curriculum was not always well aligned with the needs of the classroom. Three major observations emerge. First, training in pedagogical methods was often theoretical, making it less likely to have an impact on classroom practices. Second, the teaching of the content knowledge (that is, the subjects that a teacher would be expected to teach) was often not closely aligned to the school curriculum. Third, these difficulties were often compounded by students' poor proficiency in the language of instruction. Teacher trainers were not always well equipped to deliver training in a practical and relevant manner. Some, particularly in primary teacher training, had little experience teaching at the appropriate level (Mulkeen, 2010, p.174).

Although these findings find resonance in the Namibian education system, their main focus is, however, on what should be done to teachers and their preparation and not what should be done in partnership or in consultation with teachers to improve their capacity for delivering the EFA promise of quality education fairly distributed across age, gender, region, ethnicity, race, social economic status and country. This paper covers, among other things, teacher issues from the perspective of Namibian teachers with the aim of getting a glimpse at their understanding of the Namibian education system, their perceived competence needs to participate in the EFA school regimes and their work circumstances.

UNESCO's (2010) *Methodological Guide for the Analysis of Teacher Issues* was prepared to support the Teacher Training Initiative for Sub-Saharan Africa (TTISSA) whose main purpose was to analyze teacher issues that influence the progress of meeting EFA goals in the sub-continent. Two of the important issues covered in the guide are teacher needs, defined as the number of teachers needed for the increased school enrolments to meet EFA goals, and teacher training effectiveness geared towards the enhancement of optimal relationships between professional teacher training and what pupils (i.e. learners) learn at school.

The number of teachers needed, in itself, does not communicate the types of teachers that are needed. These should be teachers with theoretical and practical skills that would enable them to teach in such a way that their learners acquire the knowledge and skills contained in the curriculum. For them to teach in this way teachers should undergo effective teaching practice during their pre-service and in-service training. According to the guide, the assessment of teaching practice in several countries in Sub-Saharan Africa is subjective, ineffective and a one-off evaluation that takes place only during pre-service training. The result of this is the production of several teachers who in fact are wrongly certified as competent to teach. What is the teachers' understanding of all this? Do they perceive their training to be effective or not? There is paucity of research data on this issue in Sub-Saharan Africa. One of the issues addressed in this paper is how Namibian teachers perceive the quality of their pre-service and in-service training.

From an ethical stand point it is imperative that teachers be consulted on the work they do and their understanding be sought regarding the improvement of their work. For instance, the response to the question: "Do teachers perceive their training to be effective?" should

be taken seriously before revisions, modifications and changes to the training are mooted. It is not sufficient for instance, to discuss the achievement of the Millennium Development Goal of Universal Primary Education with equity by 2015 without paying attention to the views of primary school teachers (UNICEF, 2010).

In a comprehensive monograph entitled *A Human Rights-Based Approach to Education for All*, UNESCO and UNICEF (2007), handle ethical and human rights issues of learners and teachers in the context of EFA in a balanced way. With respect to teachers, the two UN organizations arrive at the following insightful conclusions:

It is imperative that, alongside a commitment to respect the rights of children, there is equal recognition afforded to the rights of teachers. It is neither possible nor acceptable to demand that teachers respect children's rights when their own rights are violated and ignored. Ultimately, unless the rights of teachers are respected, a quality education for children cannot be achieved. Lack of support, low status, poor pay and inadequate training and supervision diminish the quality of teachers. There is widespread evidence among teachers in some countries of poor attendance, persistent lateness and low motivation. Improved management, higher pay, effective appraisal systems, forums through which teachers can influence policy, acknowledgement of their concerns, and opportunities for them to identify their training and other needs would all contribute to improving morale and motivation and, in consequence, raise teaching standards (UNESCO and UNICEF, 2007, p.72).

In response to some issues captured in the above quotation, the present paper contains data on relations amongst Namibian teachers, between teachers and school principals and between teachers and education regional officials, and on issues pertaining to teacher support, professional status and training.

The position that teachers should be involved, consulted and provided with opportunities to participate in education reform processes aimed at enhancing EFA policies and practices was given a boost by the High-Level Group on EFA at its 8th meeting that was held on 16-18 December, 2008 in Oslo, Norway. In its Oslo Declaration, the group endorsed the creation of an International Task Force on 'Teachers for EFA' (UNESCO, 2008). This Task Force is a voluntary global alliance of EFA partners who work together to address the 'teacher gap' that, in many countries, influences the progress towards the attainment of EFA goals. Consisting of the policy gap, the capacity gap and the financing gap, the 'teacher gap' addresses quantitative and qualitative teacher needs that countries face when implementing plans to attain EFA goals. In endorsing the creation of the Task Force, the High-Level Group on EFA noted that "national governments must strike a balance between the short-term need to get teachers into classrooms and the longer term goal of building up a high-quality professional teaching force. Addressing the teacher gap requires country driven long-term strategies and firm commitments. **Policies must encompass attention to professional development opportunities, adequate employment and teaching conditions and greater participation of teachers in decision-making via social dialogue**". (UNESCO, 2008, p.4; emphasis added).

As indicated earlier, among other things, the present paper presents data on Namibian teachers' perceptions of their professional development opportunities, employment and teaching conditions. As far as we are aware, generating research data on these issues is new in Namibia because the country does not seem to have benefited from the initiatives of the International Task Force on 'Teachers for EFA'.

Countries that have benefited from the Task Force's initiatives have gained substantial theoretical and practical EFA wisdom from teachers' understanding of good quality education, the perception of the decline of good quality education, why good quality education declines, and the influence of qualified and unqualified teachers on good quality education (VSO, National Union of Teachers, Mozambican Education for All Movement, 'MEPT' and Teachers' for EFA, 2011; VSO, National Union of Teachers, Gambia Teachers Union, The Education for All Campaign Network-The Gambia, 'EFANet' and Teachers for EFA, 2011).

Some of the findings of the present study that will be given in later sections of this paper are also consistent with the latest EFA Global Monitoring Report's conclusions on factors that influence quality education in schools. With respect to teachers, these factors are described in the following summary (UNESCO, 2011, p.10):

Teachers count. Attracting qualified people into the teaching profession, retaining them and providing them with the necessary skills and support is vital. Ensuring that teacher deployment systems distribute teachers equitably is also a key to achieving more equitable learning outcomes. Another pressing concern is recruitment. If universal primary education is to be achieved, another 1.9 million teachers have to be recruited by 2015, more than half of them in sub-Saharan Africa.

Real teaching time matters. Teacher absenteeism and time spent off task during lessons can significantly reduce learning time as well as widen learning disparities. One survey in two Indian states found that regular rural government teachers were absent at least one day a week. Addressing employment conditions of teachers and strengthening school governance and accountability can raise learning achievement and reduce inequality.

The classroom environment is important. Poorly equipped classrooms and students without textbooks and writing materials are not conducive to effective learning. In Malawi, average primary school class sizes range from 36 to 120 pupils per teacher. In Kenya, the proportion of children with their own mathematics textbook ranges from 8% in North Eastern Province to 44% in Nairobi.

In his book entitled: *Finnish Lessons: What can the World Learn from Educational Change in Finland?* Pasi Sahlberg (2011), has further demonstrated the pivotal role of teachers in the promotion of quality education in an education system. According to Sahlberg, the Finnish education system is the best in the world because of the excellent quality of its teachers. This is the case because of three main reasons. Firstly, the most talented, creative and motivated youngsters become teachers in Finland after a rigorous selection and training process. Secondly, individuals can only become teachers in Finland after obtaining academic teacher education research-based Master's degrees. Such degrees may take 5-7 years to complete. Thirdly, research-based teacher education ensures that teachers acquire deep knowledge of the most recent advances of research in the subjects they teach and that they become familiar with research on how subject matter of various types can be taught and learnt. Moreover, teachers adopt research-oriented attitudes towards their work.

We wish to submit that if the Finnish people can evolve a research-based teacher education system that promotes quality education, any other education system can do the same. The trick is allowing teachers to be involved in their own capacity building and enabling them to infuse action research in their work. Some findings from the present study shed some light on Namibian teachers' perceptions of the quality of their training and their conditions of service.

According to the latest EFA Global Monitoring Report (UNESCO, 2011), Namibia's primary school enrolment continues to improve. Despite this, the survival rate to the last grade of primary education has decreased. Whereas it was 93% in 1999, it was 87% in 2007. In terms of gender, Namibia seems to be moving away from gender parity when it comes to secondary school gross enrolment ratio. This is the case because whereas it was 1.11 in 1999, it increased to 1.17 in 2008, indicating a higher ratio of female learners enrolled in secondary schools than that of male learners. If graduation figures at tertiary education institutions are used as a measure of gender parity, it appears that the trend displayed in secondary schools is reflected at Universities and other tertiary education institutions in Namibia.

The decrease in the survival rate to the last grade of primary education is but one indicator of challenges of quality in the Namibian education system. The other challenges are that many children in Namibia leave school lacking basic literacy and numeracy skills, there is a shortage of suitably qualified teachers, there is a lack of adequate and good quality teaching and learning facilities and there is lack of common understanding and agreement on quality standards (Wright, 2011). This can still be said even if the latest SACMEQ scores covering the period of 2000-2007 indicate that there has been a 9% increase in reading and mathematics achievement amongst grade 6 learners. This increase is still very low when comparisons are made amongst Southern and Eastern African countries participating in the SACMEQ assessments (UNESCO, 2011).

To tackle problems associated with attaining EFA goal 6 that is on quality education issues, Namibia augmented its EFA strategic plan with an Education and Training Sector Improvement programme (ETSIP) (Ministry of Education, 2006). Covering a 15-year span (2006-2020), ETSIP was designed to improve quality in the entire education system. With respect to teachers, the programme was aimed at ameliorating a situation which was described in 2006 as follows:

“Substantial progress has been made in increasing the proportion of qualified teachers in general education, including from just 17% in 1995 to 55.6% at primary level, and from 39% to 83.5% at present at secondary level. Improvements in teacher qualifications have not yet translated into effective teacher quality and effective teaching. Still, about 45% of primary and 16.5% of secondary teachers are not formally qualified for their teaching. **Even those who are formally qualified still lack competencies critical to improved student learning, including English (which is the medium of instruction from grade 4 onwards), mathematics and science. Many teachers have difficulties interpreting and implementing the curriculum**” (Ministry of Education, 2006; emphasis added).

Pertaining to teacher education, ETSIP was designed to respond to the following indictment:

“Criticism of the quality of teachers produced by the colleges of education and UNAM is widespread. Issues such as lack of content, wrong content, lack of appropriate methodologies, poor delivery of the programme and poor response to the needs of the schools are cited, **(albeit often without proper research**

and data). At present there are no clear guidelines on the content quality or throughput by phase and subject and no umbrella body exists to provide such guidance to teacher education institutions. The NQA is currently developing regulatory structures for professional standards for teachers and teacher education institutions. These will be operationalised within the next five years and the reform programme will fall within, and will to a great extent be dictated by, these standards and structures.” (Ministry of Education 2006; emphasis added).

Some of ETSIP's accomplishments were reported to include the fact that 85% of secondary school teachers and 55% of primary school teachers were qualified, a competence based curriculum had been introduced, national professional standards for teachers in Namibia were introduced and that there was an increase in the training of mathematics teachers (Kabajani, 2008).

Over the years, the EFA Forum has organised annual 'EFA week' celebrations and EFA consultative meetings at which the accomplishment of the education system have been hailed and the challenges pertaining to quality education outputs have been highlighted (Mbumba, 2006; Simataa, 2007; Mbumba, 2009; Kaiyamo, 2009; Ministry of Education, 2010; Wright, 2011).

In 2011, the Ministry of Education organised a national conference on the **“Collective delivery on the education promise: Improving the education system for quality learning outcomes and quality life.”** The Cabinet of the Republic of Namibia directed the Ministry of Education to implement several resolutions that emanated from the conference. For instance, the Ministry was directed to:

- “Recruit teachers to counter-act the shortage of teachers, including retired teachers and qualified teachers from friendly countries;
- Upgrade teachers- at both national and foreign institutions;
- Develop teachers' housing system and fund, including and encouraging private partnerships;
- Strengthen teacher training and development;
- Provide more in-service teacher education and more teaching and learning material for Mathematics, science, technology, lower primary and languages (English and Namibian Languages);
- Reduce the administrative work load of teachers to afford more time for teaching and learning activities;
- Improve pre-service and in-service training of teachers in national languages;
- Review and strengthen the teaching of English from Grade 1 onwards by providing in-service training to teachers and fully implementing the English Language Proficiency Programme “ (Iyambo, 2011).

It is unfortunate that there is a paucity of research data in the country pertaining to concerns and challenges regarding teacher quality and quality education. For instance, several educational concerns that necessitated the introduction of ETSIP in 2006 have not yet been subjected to research. Moreover, several resolutions from the 2011 national education conference that the Ministry of Education has been directed to implement require to be supported by some evaluation research data. Such research should, in our view, benefit from contextualised and experiential understanding of teachers and teacher educators.

To make a contribution towards this endeavor, this paper presents data from a study on Namibian teachers' understanding their training, conditions of service, work circumstances,

the curriculum, goals of education for all, quality education and the priorities of the Namibian Education System.

Although the study had 8 objectives, we in this paper provide findings based on the following two objectives. These were to:

- Explore practical, relational and teaching problems teachers experienced in their day to day work;
- Establish the proportion of the sampled Namibian teachers who had knowledge and understanding of the six objectives of EFA, access to education, gender parity and quality education

The rest of the paper consists of the methodology employed, results and their discussion, recommendations and conclusions

Methodology

Population

The population of the study consisted of 10814 Namibian teachers in primary, combined, secondary and special schools from Erongo, Hardap, Kavango, Khomas, Omusati and Otjozondjupa education regions.

Sample

A proportional representative sample of 1611 primary and secondary school teachers from Erongo, Hardap, Kavango, Khomas, Omusati and Otjozondjupa education regions was constituted. We could not include all 13 education regions in the study because of insufficient funds. Table 1 shows the distribution of the teachers who responded to the questionnaire according to education region.

The description of the sample according to school type is as provided in table 2.

In terms of the urban and rural designation of schools, about 74% of teachers taught in urban areas and about 26% of them taught in rural areas. About 93% of the teachers in the sample taught in public/government schools and about 7% of them taught in private schools. About 68% of the teachers in the sample were female and about 30% were male.

Whereas the youngest teacher in the sample was 19 years old, the oldest was 65 years old and the mean age of the teachers was 39 years. The minimum teaching experience in the sample was less than a year and the maximum was 45 years. The mean of the teaching experience was about 15 years. About 52% of the teachers were married and about 37% of them were single. The rest of them were either divorced, cohabiting or living according to other arrangements.

Whereas 62.5% of the teachers had Grade 12 as their highest academic qualification, 15.4% held diplomas in fields other than education and 8.3% of them had degrees in fields other than education. In terms of professional qualifications, the majority of the teachers (i.e. 57.9%) in the sample had teaching diplomas, 10.9% had Bachelor of Education degrees, 13.9% had Postgraduate Diplomas in education and only 0.9% had Masters' of Education degrees. Teachers reported that about 77.3% of them were trained at the beginning of their careers and 22.7% were not.

The mean of the duration of the teachers' training in years was about 3.2 years. The sampled teachers reported that 78.5% of them found the training they received to be very relevant to their work.

With regards to in-service training, 53.5% reported that they had received in-service training in the last two years and 46.5% of them reported that they had not.

On average teachers in the sample had been teaching at their current schools for about 10 years. Although the largest class size reported by the teachers was 85 learners in a class, the mean class size reported was 37 learners in a class. 84.6% of the teachers taught in regular classrooms.

Research instrument

A largely structured questionnaire consisting of four thematic sections was used in the study. Whereas section 1 covered content on the theme of personal and professional details of teachers, section 2 captured the day to day teaching practices of the teachers, section 3 covered questions on the Namibian Education System and section 4 contained questions on the movement of education for all. The questionnaire was pretested in some schools in the Caprivi region.

Procedure

Permission to carry out the research in schools was obtained from the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Education (see appendix 2). In granting the permission, the Permanent Secretary urged the researchers to ensure that research activities did not interfere with the normal school programmes, teacher participation in the study was on a voluntary basis and that confidentiality of the teachers' participation in the study was to be strictly observed. Researchers adhered to these conditions.

Researchers divided themselves into two teams. Whereas one team collected data from Kavango, Omusati and Otjozondjupa education regions, the other team collected data from Erongo, Khomas and Hardap education regions

On arrival in each education region, researchers met with the Director of Education to register their presence in the region and using the letter of permission, explained to him or her that they had been authorised by the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Education to conduct the study. In addition, the researchers explained the purpose of the study to the Director. After the Director had given his or her blessing, the researchers proceeded to sampled schools to collect data.

At each school researchers first met with the Principal to explain the purpose of the study and the manner in which the study's questionnaires could be responded to. The questionnaires for the school were left with the principal for distribution to teachers with the understanding that teachers would fill in the questionnaires on a voluntary basis. In most cases, teachers were given two days to complete the questionnaires after which they were collected by the researchers.

Data Analysis

After all the data were collected, the questionnaires filled in by teachers from the 6 sampled education regions were numbered from 1 to 1611 and open-ended questions were coded by the researchers. The data were then entered, cleaned and analyzed using frequencies, Chi-square cross-tabulations, the Mann-Whitney U-test, Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) and Multiple Regression Analyses.

Results and their discussion

Teachers' perceptions of their day to day teaching practices

One of the objectives of this study was to explore practical, relational and teaching problems teachers experienced in their day to day work. An insightful picture emerges when we consider teacher responses to whether they experienced specific practical, relational and teaching problems in their day to day work. According to table 3, more than 80% of the teachers reported that they did not experience practical problems pertaining to transport to and from school, receiving of salaries, integrating in the community, health and finding time to prepare lessons. This means that for the majority of the sampled teachers, these problems did not interfere with their delivery of quality education. The only exception to this was that about a quarter of them reported that they were teaching under difficult circumstances. Such circumstances created a situation in which their schools lacked tables and chairs, had electricity and water problems. When all 13 education regions are taken into account these circumstances may not be limited to a few teachers.

When we consider relational problems in table 3, we note that whereas 95% of the teachers did not have difficulties communicating with their colleagues and school principals, about a third of them had problems communicating with educational region officials and with parents of their learners. It is essential to highlight that significantly more of these teachers from the Kavango and Khomas regions than those from other regions had problems communicating with regional officials (Chi-square= 16.7; df = 5; p <0.005). A general comment to make here is that educational region officials such as Directors, Inspectors of Schools, Subject Advisors and Coordinators of various initiatives should be accessible to teachers. Our data shows that a number of educational regions are not good at making their officials available to teachers. This is particularly so for teachers with limited teaching experience (Chi-square = 29.1; df =3; p <0.001) and female teachers (Chi-square = 6.7; df = 2; p <0.036). The Hierarchical nature of the ministry of education may also explain this finding. Teachers may have difficulty interacting with their superiors.

To enhance quality education for all, parents should be involved in the education of their children. For this to happen, teachers should be in regular communication with parents. Our data revealed that more than a third of the sampled teachers had difficulties communicating with parents of their learners. This was particularly the case for teachers from Khomas, Kavango, and Hardap regions (Chi-square = 64.4; df = 5; p <0.001), younger teachers (i.e. teachers in the age category of 19-30 years) (Chi-square = 8.7; df = 3; p <0.03) and teachers with limited teaching experience. Based on this, we identify parental involvement in the Namibian education system as an area of concern. Two recent incidents that have been covered in the Namibian press illustrate this concern. In one incident some learners from a School in the Khomas Education Region were suspended from school because their parents did not attend the school's teacher-parent meetings. The debate that ensued over this demonstrated a breakdown in communication between the school's principal and the parents. In the other incident, as a form of punishment for disrupting a class, a child was locked up in a tuck shop for four hours. After school the teacher who locked him up forgot that he was still in the tuck shop. The school and parents did not know where he was. After the debacle, a serious need for regular communication between the school and the parents involved was demonstrated (Smit, March 9th, 2012).

On the matter of teachers' perception of specific teaching problems, 78% to 83% of the sampled teachers did not have problems teaching learners of different age groups, finishing

the syllabus in a year, implementing the curriculum designed by the Ministry of Education and that they did not observe a high degree of learner absenteeism in their classes (see table 3). From the 2011 Education Conference proceedings we note that this finding goes against the popular belief that several Namibian teachers do in fact face these problems. According to our data, a small minority of teachers reported that they experience the problems. More data from the entire education system may be required to either confirm or disconfirm this state of affairs.

The teaching situation of concern was revealed however, when 36% to 54% of the teachers reported that they had problems teaching learners from disadvantaged backgrounds, lacked teaching and learning materials, had difficulties managing overcrowded classrooms and that they were given heavy administrative loads which prevented them from effectively undertaking their teaching duties. We highlight the finding that teachers' perception of these problems was influenced by variables of region (Chi-square = 30.7; df = 5; $p < 0.001$), school location (Chi-square = 3.9; df = 1; $p < 0.05$) and class size (Chi-square = 20.8; df = 4; $p < 0.001$). The situation depicted was that teachers from the Khomas, Kavango and Omusati regions were more likely to experience difficulties teaching learners from disadvantaged backgrounds, to manage overcrowded classrooms and report heavy administrative work loads than those from the Otjozondjupa, Erongo and Hardap regions. Moreover, the larger the number of learners teachers taught, the more likely they faced these problems. This was particularly the case for teachers from urban areas. More teachers from rural areas than those from urban areas lacked teaching and learning materials.

As is the case for all teachers from all over the world, Namibian teachers are expected to advance Education for All by, among other things, applying principles of inclusive education in their teaching practices (UNESCO, 1994; Zimba, Mostert, Hengari, Haihambo, Möwes, Nuugwedha and February, 2007; Ministry of Education, 2011). Despite all efforts that have been made in Namibia since independence in 1990 to apply inclusive education in the education system (Zimba, Möwes, Naanda, 2007; Zimba, 1999), data from the present study show that several teachers still have difficulties including learners from disadvantaged groups in their teaching. Our data show that this challenge is exacerbated by overcrowded classrooms which many teachers find difficult to manage and heavy administrative work loads. We submit that as is the case in Mozambique, the Gambia and elsewhere in Sub-Saharan Africa, the practice of Education for All is compromised when teachers work under conditions such as the ones our findings depict here (Mulkeen, 2010; VSO, National Union of Teachers, Mozambican Education for All Movement, 'MEPT' and Teachers' for EFA, 2011; VSO, National Union of Teachers, Gambia Teachers Union, The Education for All Campaign Network-The Gambia, 'EFANet' and Teachers for EFA, 2011).

We were intrigued to note that despite some serious difficulties several teachers reported to have in executing their duties, about 81% of them perceived their professional situation to be either satisfactory or very satisfactory and about 60% of them indicated that they would not give up teaching for other jobs even if they were given the opportunity to do so. This implied that against all odds, the sampled teachers were satisfied with their teaching profession. Female teachers and older teachers were reported to assume this disposition more firmly than male teachers (Chi-square = 10.3; df = 2; $p < 0.01$) and younger teachers (Chi-square = 24.7; df = 3; $p < 0.001$). This is inconsistent with the view that was recently expressed by the Secretary General of the Namibia National Teachers' Union (NANTU). Nico Smit (9th March, 2012, p.3) reported that the NANTU Secretary General "warned that keeping the salaries of teachers stagnant would result in a mass exodus of qualified

teachers [from the teaching profession] and a lowering of the quality of education in the country". According to this warning, teachers may in fact choose to leave the profession if their wages were not increased. However, this may not take place given the fact that unemployment in the country is reported to be 52%.

Table 3 contains data on how teachers perceived specific practical, relational and teaching problems they faced in their day to day work.

Teachers' knowledge and perceptions of EFA goals

About 81% of the sampled teachers expressed the importance of non-gender discrimination access to education for all Namibian children. As pointed out earlier, Namibia has performed extremely well in affording access to education for the majority of its children and in attaining a gender situation in which more than 50% of the learners in school are girls. Two challenges exist in the education system due this situation. The first one is the challenge of providing quality education to all learners that have access to it at primary and secondary schools, vocational training institutions and tertiary education institutions. The second challenge pertains to the fact that boys and young men are increasingly lagging behind girls and young women in access to education and in academic achievement at all levels of the education system. Although it is important to undertake comprehensive research to understand why this state of affairs has arisen, Namibia should note that the boy child now requires attention akin to that which has been given to the girl child the past twenty years.

In terms of the curriculum content, the majority of the teachers thought that in addition to favouring theoretical knowledge to increase learners' understanding, it was equally necessary to favour practical knowledge so that learners can use it in their daily life. Currently, the debate in the country is on whether the school curriculum has been sufficiently designed to impart practical life skills to learners. The intricacies of this debate are beyond the scope of the data we have.

We highlight the finding that about 41% of the teachers thought that repeating grades was a way of telling repeaters that they had failed to master sufficient content covered in a grade. This was affirmed by more teachers from the Khomas region than other five regions (Chi-square = 49.9; df = 20; $p < 0.001$), more primary school teachers than combined school and secondary school teachers (Chi-Square = 25.3; df = 12; $p < 0.013$) and more female than male teachers (Chi-Square = 27.9; df = 8; $p < 0.001$). It is noteworthy that only about 7% of the teachers expressed the view that repeating grades was an expensive practice for the education system. Not only is repeating grades expensive, it artificially inflates enrolment figures and exacerbates overcrowding in classrooms. In the Namibian education system, this is particularly acute at the grade ten level. It is not clear from our data whether the sampled teachers appreciated this reasoning.

It is insightful to note from table 4 that teachers thought that according to them the first priority of the Namibian education system was to improve quality of education. It was neither to improve the work conditions of teachers nor to increase access to primary and secondary schooling, reduce inequalities between girls and boys, reduce inequalities between the formerly disadvantaged and advantaged learners and nor to reduce the number of repeating learners. What this means to us is that teachers were focusing more on the 6th EFA goal that is on quality education than on other goals. This is consistent with

the thinking that was expressed repeatedly at the 2011 nation conference on education in Namibia.

Our data revealed that less than two thirds of 1585 teachers knew about the existence of EFA objectives. About 38% of them did not. We wish to highlight that whereas more female than male teachers knew about EFA objectives (Chi-Square = 7.5; df = 2; $p < 0.024$), the older the teachers were (Chi-Square = 20.9; df = 3; $p < 0.001$), the more they knew about the objectives. Although we are unable to explain why the less experienced the teachers were the less they knew about the EFA objectives, efforts should be made to popularise the objectives amongst teachers. This is important to do because it is unreasonable to expect teachers to work towards the attainment of EFA objectives that they are not aware of. When undertaking this popularization process, cognizance should be taken of the current sources of information on EFA. According to our data, the majority of the teachers obtained information on EFA objectives at school, during training and from reading education material. Less than 1% of them obtained information on the objectives from their trade unions. We think that this is unfortunate because professional teacher organizations are supposed to empower and keep their members informed about important developments in the profession that enhance quality education in schools.

The mass media and the government should not be exonerated from the responsibility of informing teachers about EFA objectives. From our data, very few teachers obtained their information on the objectives from the mass media and from reading government reports and documents. We wondered why the majority of the sampled teachers seemed not to have benefited from the Ministry of Education's annual activities on EFA.

When 986 teachers who reported that they knew about the EFA objectives were asked to state some of the objectives, 39% of them could not state even one of them. The majority of those who could were aware of EFA objectives pertaining to free and compulsory primary education of good quality for all children by 2015 and the improvement of all aspects of quality education in literacy, numeracy and life skills (table 5). A limited number of the teachers could state the other four EFA objectives. To relate all this to this study's objective of establishing the proportion of the sampled Namibian teachers who had knowledge and understanding of the six objectives of EFA, we can say that a substantial number of them were unaware of the objectives. This state of affairs is surprising after 11 years of the Dakar EFA Forum because Namibia has made sustained efforts to implement EFA objectives through its ETSIP programme

Conclusion

Emanating from the findings and their discussion we make the following conclusions:

- For teachers to effectively work towards the attainment of EFA goals, they need support from policy makers, regional education officials and parents. Several teachers in this study reported that they did not receive such support.
- In the areas of teaching and learning, this study's findings revealed a number of needs. Firstly, to address difficulties of teaching learners from disadvantaged backgrounds and difficulties of managing overcrowded classrooms, there is a need for the establishment of specialised programmes in inclusive education. Secondly, to attend to perceived difficult conditions under which teachers worked, low teacher motivation and to diminish the impact of heavy administrative loads on quality education for all in

schools, there is a need to improve teachers' work conditions. Thirdly, there is a need for comprehensive research data on teaching problems teachers face in Namibian schools.

- The majority of the teachers in the study indicated that the first priority of the Namibian Education System was to enhance quality of education for all learners. It was perceived by several teachers that this could be undermined by insufficiently trained and not well trained teachers, the complexity of the curricula and the practice of learners repeating grades. Because there was some ambivalence in the data about the quality of Namibian teachers and about the complexity of the curricula, we have suggested further enquiry on these issues.

Table 1: Regional distribution of sample of teachers

Regions	Frequency	Percentage
Kavango	356	22.1
Otjozondjupa	171	10.6
Omusati	281	17.4
Erongo	187	11.6
Khomas	471	29.2
Hardap	145	9.0
Total	1611	100.0

Table 2: Sample of teachers according to school type

School Type	Frequency	Percentage
Primary School	760	47.2
Combined School	267	16.6
Secondary School	460	28.6
Special school	104	6.5
<i>Sub-Total</i>	1591	98.8
Missing values	20	1.2
Total	1611	100.0

Table 3: Specific practical, relational and teaching problems perceived by teachers

Practical problems	Frequency of perception of practical, relational and teaching problems				Total
	Yes		No		
	n	%	n	%	
Do transport problems reduce your school attendance?	192	12.3	1374	87.7	1566
Do you have difficulties in receiving your salary?	129	8.2	1440	91.8	1569
Do you have difficulties integrating yourself in the community, the village or the city where you teach?	170	10.8	1403	89.2	1573
Do you have health problems which cause you to be absent from school often?	148	9.4	1420	90.6	1568
Do you have difficulties in finding time to prepare your lessons?	282	18.1	1273	81.9	1555
Do you teach under difficult physical conditions (e.g. lack of tables, chairs, erratic electricity, access to water, etc.?)	376	23.9	1195	76.1	1571
Relational problems					
Do you have difficulties communicating with the principal?	75	4.9	1466	95.1	1541
Do you have difficulties communicating with your colleagues?	78	5.0	1489	95.0	1567
Do you have difficulties communicating with regional officials (e.g. school inspector, education officers, subject advisers)?	487	31.4	1065	68.6	1552
Do you have difficulties communicating with parents of your learners (e.g. lack of cooperation, language differences, infrequent meetings, etc.)	558	35.5	1012	64.5	1570
Teaching problems					
Do you have problems teaching learners of different age groups in your class?	271	17.2	1304	82.8	1575
Do you have difficulties with finishing the syllabus in a year?	352	22.5	1212	77.5	1564
Do you have problems teaching learners from disadvantaged backgrounds (e.g. a lack of concentration of the learners due to hunger, a lack of interest in education)?	847	53.7	729	46.3	1576
Is there a high degree of learner absenteeism in your classes?	345	22.0	1226	78.0	1571
Do you lack teaching and learning materials (e.g. school books, teaching guides, etc.)?	649	41.3	924	58.7	1573
Do you have difficulties in managing your class because there are too many learners?	573	36.4	1001	63.6	1574

Do you have difficulties in implementing the curriculum/programmes designed by the Ministry of Education?	350	22.4	1211	77.6	1561
Are you given heavy administrative loads which take much time and which prevent you from effectively undertaking your teaching activities?	752	47.9	817	52.1	1569

Table 4: Teachers' rankings of priorities of education for Namibia

Rank	Educational Issue
1	To improve quality of education
2	To allow more children to attend pre-school
3	To review the curricula
4	To improve the work conditions of teachers
5	To allow all the children to complete primary education
6	To allow all the children to attend secondary education
7	To develop the professional training of young people and adults
8	To develop higher education
9	To reduce inequalities between girls and boys
10	To reduce inequalities between the formerly disadvantaged and advantaged learners
11	To reduce the number of repeating learners
12	To support the elimination of illiteracy among the adults

Table 5: Information on teachers who could state any of the EFA objectives

EFA Objective Stated	Number of teachers	Percentage
Could not state any EFA objective	386	24.98
Meeting learning needs of all young people and adults	105	6.80
Expansion and improvement of early childhood care and education	123	7.95
Free and compulsory primary education of good quality for all children by 2015	349	22.57
Achievement of a 50% improvement in adult literacy by 2015	147	9.50
Achievement of gender equality in education by 2015	167	10.80
Improvement of all aspects of quality of education in literacy, numeracy and life skills	269	17.40
Total	1546	100.00

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