Promoting the Implementation of Life Skills Education in Namibian High Schools: Teachers' Perspectives

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ABSTRACT:
Life Skills Education (LSE) in Namibia falls under the branch of social sciences which is a key learning area for the development of society, the importance of human rights, the mechanisms of globalisation, the importance of human rights, democracy, and environmental issues. This learning area is expected to empower learners with knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes to understand the physical world. All schools in Namibia are expected to implement LSE with the aim of making meaning out of life. This article investigated on the perspective of teachers on the implementation of LSE using a qualitative approach. The qualitative data were collected from randomly selected six state schools in Windhoek. Purposive sampling was used to select research participants. Principals, Life Skills (LS) teachers and grade 11 learners formed the sample. Semi-structured interviews were done with principals and LS teachers. Data from learners were collected using focus group interviews. The findings were that high schools in Namibia do implement LSE with reluctance. LS teachers reluctantly use participatory approaches. Learners enjoy the topics in the subject, but many do not attend all lessons since there are no assessments at the end of the instructional phase. Principals and their teachers understand the importance of LSE. Evidence collected showed that teachers implement LSE reluctantly as they are quite aware that it is a non-examinable subject. There is some form of support from other government departments and local authorities occasionally send human personnel to teach learners on different topics. The key recommendations are that schools need special infrastructure reserved for LS teaching. The ministry of higher education should provide more qualified teachers both males and females to improve the implementation of LSE. Most importantly the status of the subject could be changed to a promotional subject, maybe teachers and learners could change their perception.

Keywords: Life Skills, Implementation, Adolescents, Participatory approaches.

1. Introduction

Life Skills Education (LSE) has been incorporated in the school curriculum in both developed and developing countries as a significant form of psycho-educational intervention. There is no universal agreement on the conceptualisation of the

term which makes it difficult for educators in the classrooms to deliver the subject to learners. What is agreed is that it is a necessary ideology that must be included in the learning process of all learners. The reasons for its inclusion in the curriculum were based on the idea that learners must be equipped with psychological and psychosocial skills which can be used to prevent occurrences of social maladjustment and improve their development of human potential. Maithreyi (2018) substantiates that LSE was established as the "gold standard" in the prevention of everyday social problems ranging from alcoholism, violence, and drug addiction among many others.

LSE refers to a combination of interrelated skills that should enable children and adolescents to lead a healthy, fulfilling life and assume social responsibility (UNICEF, 2019). WHO in 1994 defined life skills as abilities for adaptive and positive behaviour, that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life. These aptitudes or competencies are expected to contribute to the successful, autonomous functioning of a person in adulthood. According to human developmental growth stages, high school learners are teenagers and go through a challenging time when they exhibit a lot of creativity, idealism, buoyancy, and an adventurous spirit (Nagaraju, 2016). These adolescents require LSE to be able to decipher knowledge, attitude, and values in real life settings.

The world has truly become a global village which is so dynamic. Things are changing at a tremendous speed, and these experimenting adolescents are at risk of making wrong decisions if they are not guided. On top of these rapid changes are natural epidemics that are robbing children of their childhood as they become parents when orphaned at an early age. The impacts of growing up, technological development, and natural epidemics increase stress on the adolescents. Jyoti and Giri (2016) argue that there is an urgent need to provide adolescents with a new set way to deal with the demands of life. The same perception is shared by Prajapati, Sharma and Sharma (2017) whose opinion is that new challenges require an immediate and effective response from a socially responsible system of education.

Acquiring life skills is the beginning of wisdom as one is helped to focus and develop positively to become a productive member in society. LSE is an effective strategy for enabling learners to act responsibly, take initiative, and take control of their life, according to literature (Nagaraju, 2016). This article is going to explore on the perspective of teachers on the implementation of Life Skills in selected high schools in Namibia and how the implementation may be enhanced for the benefit of learners.

State the problem

Teachers in any education system are mainly responsible for the implementation of the curriculum. Society expects them to inculcate values that are accepted in a productive individual. In LSE, teachers bear the heavy burden of not only giving academic achievements but visible products that easily assessed by everyone. Literature has it that education is responsible of transforming society. It is against this background that Life Skills work. The article dwelled on how teachers perceive the implementation of LSE in an effort to fulfil the purpose of education.

Research objectives

- To evaluate the perception of teachers and principals in the implementation of Life Skills Education.
- To assess the effectiveness of teaching methods used in implementing the subject.
- To identify challenges faced and make recommendations.

Relevant literature

Life Skills Education plays a significant part in the learning journey of all learners. Integrating it in the schools' curriculum encourages the development of balanced and confident learners who will eventually participate in nation building. It is an essential programme that is needed by anyone who wants to lead a meaningful life. UNICEF (2019) acknowledges that LSE provides a transformative vision for better life outcomes for young people. The idea behind integrating LSE is to equip

individuals with skills that allow them to learn, to work and be personally empowered. If successfully implemented, LSE improves the quality of education as the products will eventually become responsible citizens.

LSE implementation needs to focus on enhancing psychosocial competencies that will take the learners along the road of boom and development. The memorisation of facts does not position learners in a trajectory of societal development. LSE should be considered as a practical subject where the approach should aim at maintaining a balance between what is and how it is. LSE as a subject does not only appeal to the brain; therefore, it needs teaching approaches which are dynamic and involving. Learners must research from their personal experiences as well as from people around them. The teacher in this subject should just be a facilitator and guiding the young minds in developing problem-solving skills among other things.

Progress in the implementation of LS needs teachers who have more than sufficient pedagogical and content knowledge of LSE. Maturity and professional conduct by the teachers are of great value for the learners to appreciate and develop values that will take society forward. It is the responsibility of LS teachers to create conducive environments that can result in learning. Life Skills teachers must cultivate positive attitudes of learning in children so as to help them discover their own strengths and weaknesses as substantiated by Hako and Mbango, (2018).

2. Methodology

Design:

The strategy of inquiry used in the study was qualitative research design. Data used were collected using semi-structured and focus group interviews.

Participants/Sample:

As Creswell (2014) stated that in qualitative research three to five cases are enough to gather data for a comprehensive study, the article used six schools to gather data from. Stratified sampling strategy was used to select schools to choose participants from. The school were divided into two homogenous strata according to locations. From then on, a simple random technique was used to select three schools. The participants were purposively selected which meant that Life Skills teachers were the appropriate participants as they are the implementers of the subject. The school principals became part of the participants as they are the managers of the schools where the LSE is being implemented. The grade 11 learners were purposively selected for the focus group interviews because of their experience in the subject.

3. Results

The data were thematically analysed, and the following themes were established using research questions.

- Teachers' and principals' perceptions
- Participatory teaching approaches
- Support and challenges

Perceptions of principals and teachers

The implementation of LSE was noted to be a value addition programme and both the teachers and principals unanimously agreed that it must not be missed by any learner. It was agreed that LSE is a basic learning need for all learners. One principal had this to say:

"Life Skills is part of everyday teaching and lessons are allocated to every class on the timetable."

The value of content that is covered in LSE cannot be equated to any content from other subjects. It is from this subject that learners are exposed to real life situations and problem-solving skills are learnt. The participants revealed that relevant and appropriate execution of LSE is a need of the hour, for the learners as they are exposed to this fast-changing environment. Their argument concurs well with Prajapati, et al (2017:1) who believe that LSE can be helpful as it specifically addresses the needs of children who are facing many emerging issues such as global warming, famine, poverty, suicide, population explosion and many other psychological issues.

Principals revealed that proper implementation of LSE is part of their supervision. Even though LSE is offered as a non-examinable subject, teachers in

this department have their own objectives to achieve. One principal had this to say:

"My work is not only in the office, I work around the school yard and even in the bathrooms picking up lesson dodgers. One of the lessons dodged is LS".

The data collected from the principals showed that both groups shared the same perception, and that implementation should need collective effort to produce the desired results. Teachers acknowledged the availability of curriculum and the syllabus that is provided by the responsible ministry. According to them the following was deduced as components that promote the implementation of LSE.

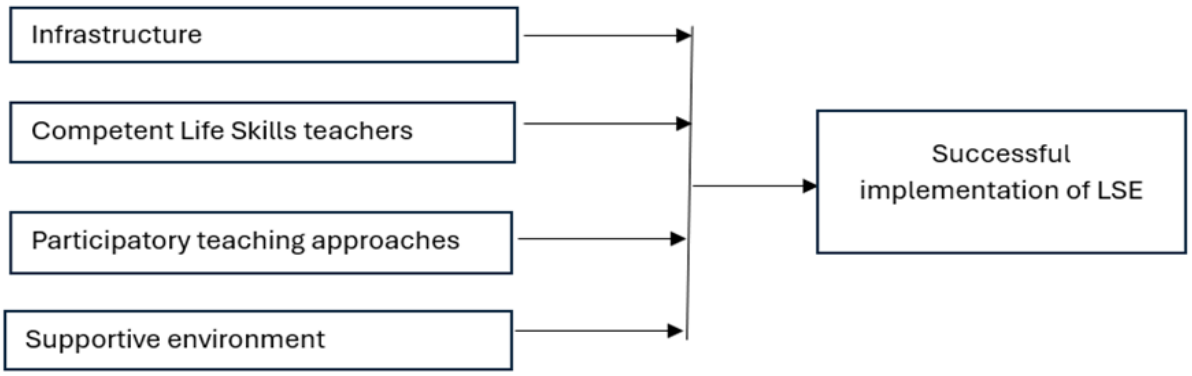

Figure 1.1 Components that can improve the implementation of LSE.

The data collected showed the variables that can affect the implementation of LSE. LS teachers were mainly concerned with lack of working space as four out of the six schools visited had no designated accommodation specifically meant for LSE. These teachers argued that learners have a lot of social issues that need to be addressed privately. The argument went to link LSE with academic performance of the learners. They brought out the issue that if social issues are not addressed learners do not perform in other subject areas. Thus, the issue of lack of infrastructure does not promote the proper implementation of LSE.

LSE is a very broad curriculum that touches life-changing matters in an individual's journey of learning. From the interviews carried out, the principals brought out that competent and mature teachers are most likely to implement the curriculum better compared to young teachers. Teachers with a positive attitude and who can manage their lives have the capability of delivering better results. The views from the interviews concur very well with Smith and Harrison (2013) who substantiate that some teachers may find it difficult to teach LSE depending on their social status. They went on to say that character, comfort with one's sexuality and life experience make some teachers better suited to implement LSE. Learners need role models to copy from, so the personality of teachers contributes much to how effectively the implementation can go.

The implementation of LSE according to the data collected can be improved if training colleges work in unison with schools. The schools that were sampled had only one LS teacher for all the grades. The information revealed was not only the lack of qualified teachers but also gender imbalance. All the schools had only female teachers and the principals commented that the boy child was disadvantaged. They believed there were some issues that male teachers can best deliver to the boys as compared to female teachers. This disparity was caused by that gap in communication with the training colleges. The scenario in schools agrees with Hako, Karolina and Mbango (2016) who noted insufficient LS teacher training. The participants in the interviews argued that gender imbalance in teaching staff may be a contributing factor to the high rate of gender-based violence in the country. De Klerk, (2013) had also noted that gender-based violence continues to rise unabated as schools continue to neglect LSE.

However, the implementation of LSE can be promoted if collective effort is put by all

stakeholders concerned. The major stakeholders who can promote the implementation of LSE are the teachers. Data gathered revealed that teachers need appropriate training to execute successful implementation which concurs well with Lagat, (2017) whose opinion is that concrete teacher training is necessary in improving LSE implementation. Positive attitude in LSE should start with the teachers who should use collective approaches to influence the learners. Appropriate teaching methods that involve the learners were suggested by the principals even though they cited limited time given to the subject.

Success in LSE may happen if supportive environment is provided. The principals as school managers argued that they were ready to give time for this noble cause, but at times circumstances tempt them to give more attention to examinable subjects. One principal had this to say,

"As much as I want my learners to attend all subjects, non-examinable subjects can be sacrificed and concentrate on those that affect my school rank."

So collective effort is affected by the system of ranking schools that the ministry does after releasing the end of year national examinations. Not only do the principals have that attitude, but also the LS teachers and their learners. As much as other resources are made available, naturally people do not want to expound their efforts on things that do not quickly see the impact. On this note even learners testified that LS lessons are sometimes given to other teachers where learners concentrate more to improve their grades.

Participatory teaching approaches

Literature has shown that LSE is a subject in its own class. Abobo and Orodho (2014) stated that LSE is about teaching values which cannot be learned but are taught through living them. They argued that books may not have the content that LSE needs. What must be done in LSE is making the learners participate in different life situations to encourage them to think critically. Views from literature concurred with what the participants of the study revealed. LS teachers corroborate that the aim of teaching LSE is to help the learners live a meaningful life later so writing does not help much in this subject. Learners need to acquire skills and values that are obtained through social interaction and observing what others do. As argued by Kirchhoff and Keller (2021) that participatory teaching and learning methods are effective in addressing real life situations ranging from risky sexual behaviour, poor eating habits such as consuming high-calorie foods and different sorts of addictions that affect adolescence. LS teachers argued that learning in LSE may not show immediate results, but what they were sure of was that through various activities learning was being promoted. Learning in LSE should be fun and interactive.

From the focus group discussions, learners revealed that discussion and debates done during the lessons were so encouraging. The methods of teaching which involved them were identified and most of the learners showed preferences to listen and discuss with resource persons. Their argument was that experts in various fields bring knowledge and what they get is much more useful than other theories from books. The schools sampled have ties with other government departments, especially the health department and correctional services. The focus group interviews revealed that learners do benefit from these informal discussions, and many are able to find help by themselves.

As noted by Nagaraju (2016) dynamic teaching processes promote the implementation of LSE. What was noted throughout the study was that learners can value the time of LS if the topics are of their age and if they feel valued. The reasons why they run away from LSE were mainly the methods of delivery. Learners showed that the sit and listen approach does not motivate them to attend the lessons. As was noted by Nagaraju (2016) that the basic components of approaching LSE implementation include practical activities, feedback and reflections, consolidation, and reinforcement as well as practical application of the information learnt. Data collected revealed that learners need this procedure. The aspect of being listened to was brought out by all the six focus groups attended. Learners pointed out that they have many ideas which they want to air out, so

debating was cited by many as the preferred approach as it invokes critical thinking and self-assessment.

Both learners and teachers brought out the aspect of taking learning out of the classroom. Even though they appreciated the idea of visiting different higher learning institutions, they felt that more could be done. LSE is not only about career guidance, but it should also include a wide range of areas so that learners acquire knowledge, attitudes and psychosocial competencies that will enable them to take positive actions towards developing and maintaining healthy behaviours and making informed decisions always. The data collected from focus groups showed that learners need to visit areas such as correctional services and rehabilitation centres. They argued that some resource persons from these areas do explain the circumstances in their working areas, but hearing only instils that eagerness to see and believe.

The interviews done showed that there are many interactive and participatory teaching and learning methods that can address real life situations thereby training learners essential skills. Focus group interviews appreciated much the efforts of the drama clubs that visit schools. They cited the Oyo drama club that was acknowledged for not only teaching but creating employment opportunities for the young adults. These methods are not only fun, but they teach learners and attract their attention.

Support and challenges

Implementing LSE is a complex activity which goes beyond providing information. The environment must be enriched, and the teacher should be competent and very innovative. The pedagogical competence of the teacher determines the extent to which implementation can be successful. The school principals interacted with showed a positive attitude and explained the means of supporting the teachers. All the schools had the lessons timetabled and the LS teachers showed sincerity in their work. LSE needs proper accommodation like any other subject. Learners complained about lack of private rooms to meet the LS teacher. LS teachers operate from the common staff room which makes it difficult for learners to have private discussions. The environment which is provided by the schools needs to be improved.

The study revealed that implementation of LS in schools is making use of human capital theory so much. The principals revealed that different professionals are invited to educate learners on various issues that affect adolescents. Nurses, police officers, members of the correctional service department and other non-governmental organisations including drama groups visit the schools to provide life skills to learners. Learners could get firsthand information, and onus is on them whether to use the information or ignore it. Drama groups teach the learners through play which is a fun way of learning. The teachers argued that bringing drama groups to schools was a silent method of teaching.

The challenges associated with implementation cited by the participants in the study were:

- Only female teachers were teaching the subject and boys felt they were not represented.
- One teacher is not enough for the whole school.
- Time allocated for the subject was too limited.
- Teachers cited the problem of language barrier since classes had mixed ethnicities.
- Infrastructure available did not support privacy.
- Financial constraints limit their movements to areas of interest.
- Principals and teachers complained about the status of the subject.

The challenges that were highlighted by the participants are a hindrance to the expected results by the Ministry of education. The education system in Namibia has gone through several reforms in line with Vision 2030 which is perceived as a curriculum for the future and teaching LS to all learners is one of the reforms. There are numerous skills within vision 2030 which should be deliberated through the implementation of LSE.

4. Discussion

The study on LSE was determined to evaluate the position of teachers as implementers of the

curriculum. Teachers are blamed on many platforms for failing society in terms of moulding learners. The study observed that LSE was introduced with the intention of helping learners navigate the challenges of childhood and acquire necessary life changing skills. The results obtained showed that teachers have a positive attitude towards LSE. School principals play their role in supporting the noble cause. The policies from the ministry were clear and many participants showed that they understood them. However, after the study it was noticed that implementers could not match what the policy planners had in mind. In practical terms LSE need more teachers than what was planned. The methods of teaching expected needs more time if learners were to be involved. From the sampling population, it was noted that time was the main limiting factor in achieving the desired results. Because LSE is a non promotional subject, both teachers and learners end up sacrificing it. The school management would give more preference to other promotional subjects which improve the school rankings nationally.

However, it was noted that LSE support learners by providing an open environment where social problems could be discussed. The study noted LS teachers were able to identify disadvantaged learners, and many were receiving assistance after these discussions. Even though there were challenges in implementing the subject, it was noted that efforts to help learners were yielding results.

5. Conclusion

The study investigated on the implementation of LSE in Namibia using state high in Windhoek, the capital city. The schools sampled showed that LSE is being implemented with reluctance. Results of the study show that learners are being shortchanged in this area. Time allocated to this subject is so limited that it can be concluded that schools are simply complying to the policy but due diligence to help the learners is minimal. All the schools visited were allocated one teacher to cater for all grades and worse still they were only female teachers meaning there was gender imbalance. Collected data revealed that concerted efforts from all stakeholders would yield positive results. From the focus group discussions, it was deduced that learners valued the knowledge received from LSE. It is unfortunate that inappropriate implementation of LSE does not promote the 2030 government vision of making Namibia a knowledge-based society.

The study results showed that there were limited teachers for LSE and it is therefore highly recommended that teacher training colleges supply more trained personnel. The issue of gender imbalance among teachers must be addressed. The boy child is not being represented in schools which maybe a reason why passion killings are on the rise. Furthermore, the status of the subject is derailing progress as both teachers and learners have a tendency of relaxing knowing very well that there are no public examinations to expose them. It can be suggested that the subject becomes a promotional one or it can be infused into other subjects where learners are given some form of formal evaluation at the end of the instructional phase.

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