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EDITED BY

Yonah Matemba,
University of the West of Scotland,
United Kingdom

REVIEWED BY

Simon Vurayai,
Great Zimbabwe University, Zimbabwe
Rumbidzai Mashava,
University of Botswana, Botswana

*CORRESPONDENCE

Mackenzie Ishmael Chibambo
✉ mackchibambo@gmail.com

†These authors have contributed equally to this work

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A comparison of teacher's involvement in curriculum development in developing and developed countries: a case study of Namibia

DesRee Sabata Matiki[†], Mackenzie Ishmael Chibambo^{*†} and Joseph Jinja Divala[†]

Department of Education and Curriculum Studies, University of Johannesburg, Johannesburg, South Africa

Curriculum development is an on-going process which involves different stakeholders such as teachers, parents, curriculum specialists, academic institutions and the general public. The involvement of all these stakeholders is essential for the success of any curriculum. This study sought to determine how teachers are involved in the curriculum development processes in Namibia. It did this by examining related literature from selected developing and developed countries on teacher involvement in the curriculum development processes. It further deployed a qualitative research approach which had a sample size of 11 secondary school teachers and six NIED officials who were interviewed. The empirical data alongside the reviewed literature, and the theoretical framework were thematically analysed. The findings revealed that secondary school teachers in Namibia did not meaningfully participate during the key stages of the curriculum development processes. These findings further affirmed the assumptions that teacher's voices are mostly discounted during curriculum development processes despite the centrality of their roles and functions. The study further established that Namibia, like many African countries, use the top-down approaches when developing their curricula unlike developed countries such as Australia, Finland and Singapore.

KEYWORDS

equity, curriculum transformations, intentions, top-bottom approaches, bottom-up approaches

Introduction

Since independence in 1990, education systems in Namibia have undergone different reforms in response to government's commitment towards the provision of equitable and quality education for all. To this end, Curriculum reforms have since then remained one of the main agendas for national development in Namibia. On this basis, curriculum reforms have entailed regular revisions of educational policies and practices in order to align them with the global and national economic development agendas [[National Institute for Educational Development \(NIED\), 2018](#)]. The National Institute for Educational Development of Namibia (NIED) was established by the Namibian Ministry of Education in the 1990s to facilitate curriculum reform moments. Alongside NIED, the [Education Amendment Act 14 \(2017\)](#) (see Act no 14 of 2017)

has also been part of the driving force behind curriculum reforms in Namibia. Since the Education Act considers basic education (grades 1–12) as very important for economic growth and development, then curriculum reforms have been highly structured and controlled by the State through NIED making sure that it adheres to the needs of Namibia.

While curriculum has several contested meanings (see [Stenhouse, 2006](#); [Talla, 2012](#)), this study adopted Talla's definition, which views a curriculum as any written document that includes plans and strategies for achieving desired goals of education. This means, for teaching and learning (T/L) to be effective, teachers and students are required to follow an insulated and structured curriculum. This view of a curriculum resonates with the assumption that education should mainly be concerned with the creation and transfer of knowledge which is embedded in a given curriculum ([Talla, 2012](#)). This view further presupposes that the main role of the teacher is to transfer knowledge and skills to the learners through talking, modelling and guidance, while restricting them to normative classroom practices. In the case of Namibia, many scholars have observed that teachers have not been fully engaged during the designing, development and implementation stages of the curriculum except for classroom implementation (see [Negumbo and Carl, 2017](#); [Nghihalwa, 2018](#); [Mushelenga, 2020](#)). These realities forced the scholars to conclude that teachers' voices have been missing conspicuously during all the key curriculum development processes. As [Carl \(2017\)](#) argues, teacher inclusion during curriculum development processes usually helps them share their experiences about the possibilities, challenges and limitations existing in the schooling context. Carl further argues that teachers need to be included since they are the only people who know their learners, the content to be taught and the resources needed to make that curriculum successful. Likewise, [Talla \(2012\)](#) contend that best educational practices demand that all stakeholders should get involved, as early as possible during all curriculum development processes. Talla further proposes that all stakeholders' voices should be included when selecting different bodies of knowledge, and the contexts in which these knowledge bodies will be taught. According to [Priestley et al. \(2021\)](#), curriculum development processes should prioritise teacher involvement since they are the main implementers and consumers of that knowledge. [Priestley et al. \(2021\)](#) further state that teachers are more likely to experience ownership of curriculum reforms since they will recognise and understand the knowledge, theories and concepts that underpin the curriculum. By inference, both [Talla \(2012\)](#) and [Priestley et al. \(2021\)](#) seem to suggest that best curriculum reforms should engage grassroots users at the earliest stage through bottom-up approaches. Supporting this view, [Etim and Okey \(2015\)](#) equally observed that teachers should be involved in all these processes because they are better acquainted with student's needs than does anyone else involved in the curriculum development process. This position is true in the sense that teachers are essentially the ones who do interact with these students on daily bases, and are as such able to identify issues relating to students learning experiences. This then implies that teachers' inclusion during all curriculum development processes should be non-negotiable owing to their experiences and the roles they play during implementation and evaluation.

Besides these, [Carl, \(2009, 2012, 2017\)](#) argues that teachers' involvement during curriculum reforms is not only essential for institutional memory but also for their own professional development and empowerment. For [Kelly \(2004\)](#), teachers' involvement during

curriculum reforms cannot be sacrificed because it has the potential harness the success of that curriculum. Agreeing with this, [Ornstein and Hunkins \(2018\)](#) contend that teachers' inclusion in curriculum development processes makes teachers work light and easy during implementation as they are the custodians of that curriculum.

Since education is supposed to respond to the needs of society, then curriculum development processes should include people those who have lived-experiences of that social system, in this case teachers and students are the key stakeholders (see [Kelly, 2004](#); [Priestley et al., 2021](#)). It can be argue then that teachers should not be relegated to classroom spaces only if they are to understand the goals and the spirit in which the curriculum reformation processes was conceived ([Smith and Lovat, 1998](#); [Lovat and Smith 2003](#); [Stenhouse, 2006](#)). Importantly, as Stenhouse has argued, since curriculum concerns intentions (plans) and practices (reality), there has always been a gap between these curriculum intentions (theory) and realities (practices) during implementation stages. Such gaps have mainly emerged because what is real differs according to different individuals and contexts, and that the reality of curriculum designers and developers might not be the same reality for the teachers and/or the students as distant and discounted consumers of that curriculum.

Since teachers in Namibia have not been fully involved during curriculum development processes, as demonstrated by the above scholars, it could be possible that Namibian education system has misses-out on the significant values that come with teacher involvement during such curriculum reform moments. While conceding that any democratic process has its own dilemmas when it comes to citizenry full representation and participation, we also do re-affirm that successful curriculum reforms demand that all key stakeholders should be included through use of possible representative structures (see [Carl, 2017](#)). Worryingly, available accounts show that Namibia's education system has always lacked accountability and transparency when it comes to inclusion of teachers and students during curriculum development processes. As [Carl \(2017\)](#) argued, it is this lack of transparency and ring-fencing of curriculum processes that have created problems of poor education standards and quality usually demonstrated through poor students' academic performance and completion rates.

Since Namibia's Vision 2030 has recognised education as the vehicle for social change and economic growth through skills development and social mobility ([Ministry of Education, 2015](#)), then it can also be argued that full involvement of teachers during curriculum reforms is indispensable, if they are to help develop quality graduate who can ably drive these development agendas ([Vally and Spreen, 2010](#)). We thus argue that inclusive and participatory curriculum development processes should include all critical stakeholders' voices if socio-economic growth and transformation is to become possible and sustainable. Nevertheless, in the absence of evidence-based data on teacher-voices in Namibia, it might have been impossible to gauge how policy-makers have managed to design inclusive curriculum policies and practices. Accordingly, the aim of this study was to examine the extent of teachers' involvement and participation during curriculum development and implementation processes.

Problem statement

In light of Namibia's continued effort to remodel the curriculum at policy level, it is essential to review how key stakeholders are

involved, as well as the associated structures that are in place to ensure that all critical stakeholders participate effectively. Furthermore, Namibia's Vision 2030 has recognised education as the vehicle for transforming the illiterate masses into a knowledge-based community (Ministry of Education, 2015). It is not a secret that most Namibian schools are confronted by social inequalities, inadequate financing models, and shortage of skilled staff among others, all of which challenge the Vision 2030 aspirations. In order for the Vision 2030 to be realistic, Namibia needs an effective curriculum that reflects socio-economic and political realities of Namibia. This can only be possible if curriculum development process include all the critical stakeholders, through which societal needs can be mirrored. Moreover, in the absence of evidence-based data regarding teacher involvement and participation during curriculum development processes, it is difficult to explain and understand how educational policies and practices could be trusted to help meet the aspirations of the Vision 2030 and quality education in the short-term. To this end, the extent to which all critical stakeholders such as teachers get involved during curriculum reformations still remains under-researched. Therefore, the aim of this study was to examine the nature and extent of teachers' participation during curriculum development processes in Namibia.

Literature review

Understanding curriculum development

Curriculum development is seen as the process of planning, implementing, and evaluating the curriculum which eventually leads to a curriculum plan (Lunenburg, 2011). Curriculum making, according to Priestley et al. (2021), is not just a process of creating curriculum as an end product, but a powerful process of learning for those involved as well. Similarly, Stenhouse (2006), Carl (2012) and Ornstein and Hunkins (2018) have further considered curriculum development as an on-going process, which includes a wide range of stakeholders. For Odoom and Ainoo (2021), stakeholders may include all those who participate in the educational transactions, and they vary according to different educational systems. In some cases, they include professional educators, consultants, administrators, teachers, students, parents, politicians and community members (Ornstein and Hunkins, 2018). For emancipatory philosophers, postmodernists, poststructuralists and progressivists, curriculum development and implementation processes should prioritise learners as rational agents and an end in themselves (Freire, 2005; Blignaut, 2009; Nouri and Sajjadi, 2014). These philosophers argue that learners are the main reason the curriculum exists although it is executed in communion with their teachers. Likewise, Stenhouse (2006) includes parents and guardians as key stakeholders of curriculum development and implementation processes because they are the ones who stay with these learners whenever they leave the schools. As Chibambo (2023) argues, parents and guardians make sure that learning continues by monitoring homework, financing their children's education, and supporting them socially and morally among many other roles. Similarly, community members are key stakeholders since they participate in school committees, in school management and development committees, and financing school projects. According to Hewitt (2006), Talla (2012) and Carl (2017) teachers work with the curriculum everyday by interpreting policy statements into teachable

units, do the actual teaching and prepare assessments tasks and evaluation, hence their involvement during such curriculum reforms becomes indispensable.

By now, it is clear that curriculum development and implementation processes involve demand involvement of critical stakeholders such as teachers, students and others. For Namibia, all educational institutions under the Ministry of Education (MoE) are required to do periodical reviews of their curricula after every 5 years. This means stakeholders are required to come together and have their voices heard during such curriculum reform moments. As Priestley et al. (2021) had argued, curriculum development involves an interaction between various stakeholders, from contested locations, and with contested power relations, all of which are framed by particularities and contextual aspects of social activities. As a result, various factors such as conceptual resources of policy, beliefs, values and professional knowledge of participating stakeholders involved inform and permeate the curriculum development processes. The ultimate goal of all these educational processes should be to promote the highest good for the common man and society as a whole. And, this becomes possible when all stakeholders who have different minds and capabilities join hands in deciding the role and the future of schooling and education, and by default socioeconomic growth and development of that nation.

Teachers' involvement in curriculum development

The idea of involving teachers during curriculum development is as old as the concept of education itself. Around the world, many researchers have discussed the importance of involving teachers during curriculum transformations as early as 1900's. Many scholars have however proposed that teachers should initiate and lead curriculum development processes instead of trusting politicians to lead this process as is the case in many countries in Africa including Namibia. For example, Priestley and Xenofontos (2020) argued that effective curriculum development has to be underpinned by developing a conceptual understanding that is spearheaded by curriculum makers such as teachers. Priestley et al. (2021) equally assert that teachers should become foot-soldiers in leading curriculum reformation processes rather than allowing them to occupy passengers' seats. Supporting Priestley's position, postmodernists and poststructuralists argue for negotiated-curricula wherein students and teacher voices are put at the centre of the curriculum processes (see Freire, 2005; Blignaut, 2013; Nouri and Sajjadi, 2014). Conversely, technical instrumentalists and traditional neo-conservatists argue that only capable distinguished scholars should lead and decide the direction of the curriculum. They content that technical experts and authors should be the only ones to design, develop and implement curriculum because they are knowledgeable.

As Blignaut (2009) and Carl (2017) contend, when we think of teachers as autonomous subjects of change, then we should also think of education as a practice of freedom manifested through inclusive curriculum development processes. This implies that the success of any curriculum reformation processes may depend on teachers' involvement and their active participation (see Wiles, 2009; Alsubaie, 2016). Alsubaie further cautions that, when the curriculum is imposed on the teachers using the *Pipes Model or bottom-up approach*, such

teachers may be belaboured to understand the content; struggle to interpret its goals, and eventually toil to grapple with the spirit in which that curriculum was designed. Since teachers are already overloaded with large classes and other administrative functions, then any curriculum that was developed without their involvement may become an excess baggage and a thorn in the epithelium (Nouri and Sajjadi, 2014). It is in this spirit that Carl (2017) and Ornstein and Hunkins (2018), recommend for total involvement of teachers during curriculum development processes. Besides this, teacher involvement in curriculum development processes could help them acquire right knowledge and competencies, which can in turn help them deliver educational content effectively, and this could as well boost their motivation, professional development, and self-esteem (see Carl, 2017). As Etim and Okey (2015) postulate, teachers should be involved during curriculum reforms because it is the only time that educational goals are defined; programme values are articulated, and specific outcomes get outlined. Above this, teachers should be involved because they are better placed to gauge whether specific activities will fit into specified time-frames and/or whether such activities will be culturally responsive or not.

Additionally, Obilo and Sangoleye (2010) observe that teachers face a lot of challenges such as being over-worked, low salaries, lack of bonuses and limited operational resources, which can get complicated if these teachers are not involved during curriculum development processes. These problems can only be avoided if teachers are included right at the conception stage of that curriculum. Although, teachers are trained to handle different challenges, it is still not that easy for every teacher to handle some curriculum challenges that arise from the ever-changing nature of society and its needs. This then implies that teacher's involvement during these reforms would help minimise some of the common problems that have been endemic to the system (Bilbao, 2018).

Teacher involvement in curriculum development in developing countries

In Africa, use of the top-down/bottom approach (administrative approach/Pipes Model) to curriculum development is very popular probably because of the social structures and authoritarian regimes which ruled the continent until late 1990s and its economic implications. According to Talla (2012), in this approach, policy-decisions are made at the top of the ladder and the outcomes are taken down to the powerless masses. In business management, this is called *Pipe Business Models*, wherein decisions flow from the top through gravitation force to the bottom of the tap into the bucket. Since water does not flow back the stream, such decisions are often final, and subsume imposed-precision to reforms and its outcomes. In this approach, teachers just like the learners are never consulted nor engaged when designing and developing the curriculum (Talla, 2012; Priestley and Xenofontos, 2020). Talla bemoans this approach as authoritarian and dehumanising since it treats the teachers and students as lifeless objects and empty buckets (Nouri and Sajjadi, 2014). Similarly, Freire (2005) and Carl (2017) condemn such curriculum policies for entrenching elitism and power-relations which usually leave teachers with limited options for freedoms and during the teaching and learning processes. Moreover, Ramparsad (2001) has established that teacher involvement during curriculum development

stages in South Africa was still very limited and that teachers had limited freedom to teach and act creativity during the implementation stages. He also contended that curriculum reforms in South Africa had indeed assumed the *Pipes Model*, which eventually contributed towards the failure of most of those reforms. Further studies by Carl (2009, 2017) and Hoadley (2017) have also revealed that teachers in South Africa were mostly excluded from the initial curriculum designing and development processes outside the classrooms.

In Ghana nonetheless, Abudu and Manesh (2016) have observed that teacher participation during curriculum development processes has been equally low and uninspiring. They argue that teachers have not really participated because of lack of funding, huge workload, lack of expertise and non-availability of the teachers whenever they are needed. These reasons suggest that teachers have sometimes been too committed to other tasks hence cannot participate in curriculum reforms. It can also be that these teachers are deliberately deprived of the necessary resources that can help them meaningfully participate during these curriculum development processes (Boliver, 2011a,b). This kind of system deprivation is what Fricker, Boliver and Bourdieu termed epistemic injustices or Symbolic Violence (see Bourdieu and Jean-Claude, 1979; Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992; Fricker, 2007, 2014). Unlike in Ghana, Mwanza (2017) has established that teachers in Zambia have not really been involved during curriculum development processes until at classroom level, hence making their work difficult when supporting teaching. Likewise, Oloruntegbe (2011) notes that teachers have not been involved during curriculum reforms except during actual teaching. He further posits that this problem is common across the Sub-Saharan Africa. He finally recommends that teachers should not only be needed during the teaching but also during the entire curriculum reformation processes.

Teachers' involvement in curriculum development in developed countries

Some developed countries, such as Finland, Singapore and Australia have adopted grass-root (bottom-up) approaches to curriculum development processes (Talla, 2012; Skedsmo and Huber, 2019; Beblavy and Muzikarova, 2021). In the bottom-up approach (grassroots approach), decisions are made by those who implement curriculum policies in order to increase ownership and awareness of the changes. This approach resembles the participatory curriculum processes which ensure that teachers and learners become part of the change processes throughout the conception stages (see Talla, 2012; Nouri and Sajjadi, 2014; Skedsmo and Huber, 2019). As Carl (2017) has argued, people who implement and consume the curriculum should be adequately involved in developing that curriculum if they were to be comfortable with it.

According to Vatikka et al. (2015), Finland has adopted a grass-root approach to developing the curriculum. They observe that the Finnish local municipalities and teachers are given the autonomy to make decisions regarding curriculum changes they want. They further assert that the National Curriculum of Finland (NCF) has often democratically guided curriculum reforms while affording the teachers and students the much needed voice and autonomy. The NCF has however provided clinical guidance about what is needed, while teachers are responsible for generating school-based curricula, and personalised pedagogies. Likewise, Vatikka et al. (2015) hinted that

such teacher involvement has increased ownership of the curriculum, teacher motivation and responsibility. Although Finland is considered an epitome of successful national education reforms, it has mainly relied on grassroots pilot programmes for many years before its efforts became official policies. Finland believed that top-down reforms tended to be gradual and problematic to implement, regardless of how smartly designed and feasible they might have been perceived. Thus grassroots approaches have by contrast, become more responsive and targeted making them better positioned to achieve good results. For Skedsmo and Huber (2019) while many people still believe in the *Pipes model of curriculum development*, where there is limited political will, poor commitment and lack of competences, grassroots approach has often worked wonders. Accordingly, curriculum development in Finland has been viewed as a profession, where teachers have often generated curricula approaches, with the support of upper educational levels and government (Ornstein and Hunkins, 2018).

In Australia, teachers are also reported to be actively involved in the curriculum development processes. Kirk and McDonald (2001) for example, has revealed that teachers are involved in the planning and production of new syllabuses, and curriculum guides at all stages. These teachers have served as syllabus writers; as members of the advisory committees, and as participants in school-based trials of the syllabuses. Equally, Ornstein and Hunkins (2018) report that central boards have played major roles in trailing the history of curriculum to provide mutual guidelines, while leaving details of curriculum development and implementation to schools and school districts. Furthermore, Ornstein and Hunkins posit that Singapore has also followed the grassroots approach to curriculum development. For example, the Singapore Ministry of Education has usually empowered schools to make decisions and develop new frameworks for new curricula activities in the schools.

According to Beblavy and Muzikarova (2021), an audit study in Central European countries, revealed that there were many quality impactful initiatives that were being developed using grassroots approaches to curriculum development. Most of these programmes targeted specific educational systems that were confronted by challenges such as poor digital skills or critical thinking. For example, in Slovakia, a billionaire real-estate developer had established a boarding school known as the Leaf Academy which adopted grassroots approaches to the curriculum development. Likewise, in the Czech Republic, a car manufacturer called Škoda had established a university which was mainly anchored in grassroots approaches to curriculum development, just like the Invendor Innovation Academy had done in Hungary. In all these countries, grassroots approaches have proved to be very successful in empowering the teachers, students and society through improved relationships, academic performance and power-relations.

Briefly, the lessons emerging from these developed countries suggest that governments have often given schools the freedom to develop their own curricula without much bottlenecks, red-tapes and punitive laws. Since curriculum reforms are essential in the building of strong educational systems, embracing democratic values remain the hub for creating a successful and empowering educational system. While Pipe Models have been used for a long time due to their efficiency and quick results, still the increased need for citizenship participation and democracy, the grassroots approach has gained ground in many developed countries. As Skedsmo and Huber (2019) have established, during curriculum reforms even where grassroots

approaches are used, there are possibilities for backtracking to Pipes Models, and when this happens, there have been resentment from the teachers who fear for the erosion of their academic freedom (also see Locke et al., 2011). This then reinforces the need for curriculum reforms that value stakeholder involvement, collaboration, and best leadership styles, as any perceived despotism may cause frustration and the feeling of exclusion among the powerless players such as teachers and students.

Theoretical framework

Theory of capital and class distinction

This study has been informed by Bourdieu's *theory of capital and class distinction* to help us explain and understand how power-relations play out in public policy formulation, and how the elite manage to prolong their political interests and control of the people and resources. This way, we understand curriculum reforms as being highly political spaces where various forms of capital come into contact, while leaving the powerless as the victims of exclusion and injustices. As Lovat and Smith (2003) and Boliver (2011a,b) had argued, knowledge of the elite is usually imposed on the marginalised people through curriculum reforms, similar to what Bourdieu (1977, 1984) called *symbolic violence*. In this study, the exclusion of teachers' voice during curriculum development processes in Namibia, represents a systematic form of symbolic violence also known as epistemic harming (Fricker, 2014) or curriculum injustices (Chibambo, 2023). As Boliver (2011a,b) had argued, when people are deliberately deprived of the necessary resources and means that would help them make meaningful social contribution towards their development and that of society, then that becomes epistemic harming and wronging. We therefore borrow this understanding to analyse how teachers and students in Namibia have been epistemologically harmed by consistently being excluded from participating in the curriculum reforms. We assume that their involvement would have helped them develop their profession, motivation and teaching profession hence improve the quality of education for personal and national development as articulated in the Vision 2030 (see Kelly, 2004; Talla, 2012).

Conversely, Wacquant (2006), observed that while the capital and class distinction theorem is quite complex, it has been used by many scholars in analysing how power-relations and differentiation occur in education and society, and its roles on equality. Precisely, Bourdieu described capital as a collection of assets put to productive use (Bourdieu and Jean-Claude, 1979; Bourdieu, 1984). He divided these assets into economic, symbolic, cultural and social capital. Essentially, economic capital refers to wealth and material resources usually accumulated or inherited, while social capital refers to social networks, and relationships. Cultural capital conversely, refers to values people bring from their homes into social spaces and forums such as schools, while symbolic capital refers to combined effects of all the three forms of capital usually reflected in elements of power such as prestige, respect and attention. When holders of symbolic capital impose their knowledge systems on the marginalised people, in this case teachers and students, then that constitutes symbolic violence, which is reflected in the maxims of reputability and respectability. Basically, symbolic violence may also be the imposition of categories of thought and/or perception (beliefs)

upon the voiceless people who then are forced to accept that body of knowledge as truthful and just. It thus incorporates unconscious structures that aim to promote and sustain knowledge of the powerful and their social belief systems (also see [Fricker, 2007](#)). For [Bourdieu and Wacquant \(1992\)](#), Symbolic violence is worse than physical violence since it is embedded in the very modes of actions and structures of human reasoning, and imposes the phantom of legitimacy and reality.

Simply put, Bourdieu sought to analyse the processes of socio-cultural reproduction, and how capital differences can advantage one group at the expense of the other. On these bases, [Bourdieu \(1984\)](#) concluded that education policies and practices reincarnate exclusions and social-class preservation. He then concluded that curriculum development processes may face different forms of capital transcending academic and non-academic features all of which need critical reflections. He also posts that advantaged children usually come to school already familiar with the schooling culture and content unlike the poor children. Accordingly, poor children are regarded as docile, costly and difficult to teach when compared with rich children. Bourdieu then regarded this distinction as the product of social labour from the parents, which will eventually determines differentiated success levels among the learners. Since these experiences mainly happen during curriculum implementation, involving teachers and students during the designing and development stages might have been essential in evading them. As argued before, this theory immensely help us explain the dangers of teacher exclusion during curriculum reformations, and its consequences epistemological harming and curriculum inequalities. In the case of Namibia, these exclusions suggest that teachers are not only excluded but are also epistemologically harmed as they cannot understand the goals and the spirit in which the curriculum was developed and by extension these teachers cannot teach effectively and/or help break the problems of sorting among learners of different capitals. Using the maxims of symbolic violence, respectability and reputability alongside the reviewed literature, we sought to analyse how teacher voice exclusion could promulgate curriculum (in) inequalities and injustices within the Namibia educational context.

Research methodology

In this study, the data was collected using qualitative research design. According to [Creswell \(2013\)](#), qualitative research is used to gain deep understanding of underlying reasons, opinions, and motivations concerning a research problem. Qualitative research was used mainly to gain in-depth understandings of curriculum development processes; nature of teacher's involvement and its implications on curriculum justice and quality education. Like [McDonald and Headlam \(2008\)](#) argued, qualitative research methods tell researchers of what and how people feel about something. We therefore probed how teachers perceive curriculum designing and development processes in Namibia, and its implications on curriculum justice and equality.

Data sampling and population

In terms of sampling techniques and population, this study utilized purposive sampling to obtain the much needed participants.

[McMillan and Schumacher \(2014\)](#) state that purposive sampling is about the researchers selecting participants from the greater population that have the necessary characteristics such as knowledge on the topic of interest. Therefore, teachers and NIED officials were selected for purposes of data collection because of their professional role and experiences with the curriculum. In this case, A population of 17 participants was selected to participate in this study. Data was then collected from secondary school teachers and NIED officials in the Otjozondjupa region in Namibia. These teachers were chosen because they are the ones who use the curriculum on a daily basis. Additionally, officials from NIED were selected because the curriculum for basic education in Namibia is initiated and led by them. We thus looked for particular characteristics such as participant availability, roles and experiences in relation to this study.

Data collection and analysis methods

This study collected data through semi-structured interviews and observations. The questions that were asked during the interview process were guided by the research questions. The advantage of semi-structured interviews is that it provides similar data that can easily be compared. Hence, the same questions were asked to all participants so that we should compare the responses of the participants. As [Creswell \(2014\)](#) states, qualitative researchers can conduct face to face interviews or telephonic interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs). In this study, due to the Covid-19 pandemic interviews were conducted on secondary school teachers telephonically, Zoom, and Microsoft teams to bridge the barriers of distance, time and physical contact which were highly regulated by the State. Data were also collected using a questionnaire, which is a written list of questions that are answered by respondents ([Kumar, 2011](#)). We used the English language because all the subjects were educated enough. Questionnaires were also used because they were economic, reliable, quick and easy to complete by those who had busy schedules, although interviews followed whenever clarity was needed ([Cohen et al., 2018](#)). We also used open ended questions which according to [Kumar \(2011\)](#), provide participants with the freedom to express themselves, and produce a wider range of data. In this regard, the target group of NIED officials freely expressed their views on the nature of teacher involvement in the development of the curriculum through these questionnaires. Finally, policy documents, journal articles and books were also consulted for teacher curriculum approaches and injustices across the world. The collected data were later analysed using an inductive approach as advanced by [McMillan and Schumacher \(2014\)](#), which included data organisation, segmentation, description, categorisation, and development of thematic patterns, which finally yielded the main themes.

Trustworthiness of the study

While quantitative research use validity and reliability, qualitative studies us trustworthiness to ensure credibility, transferability, confirmability and dependability of the findings (see [Korstjens and Moser, 2018](#)). In this case, credibility refers to how confident the researcher is in the truth of the research study's findings. This study only targeted NIED officials and teachers who had the right knowledge and

experience regarding curriculum development and implementation processes in Namibia. It further used interviews, observations and literature reviews to make sure that the findings are credible and verifiable. For transferability, the study was done in NIED of Namibia which had specific characteristics. It also brought in extensive case studies from across the globe on curriculum development models for comparative purposes. This means while these results maybe unique to Namibia, they can as well apply in other contexts provided they have similar characteristics see [Kumar \(2011\)](#). For confirmability, we ensured that the findings emerged from participants' responses, and that personal motivations were strongly avoided. We further subjected the responses to the theoretical lenses and the existing literature. We also conducted audit trails, by clearly highlighting all data collection and analysis tools that led to the findings. According to [Korstjens and Moser \(2018\)](#), dependability refers to the degree to which the study can be replicated by others, and yield similar outcomes. Thus, pretesting of the instruments and audit trails alongside triangulation of the data collection tools ensured that the processes were rigorous and transparent allowing other researchers to replicate our study within similar or related contexts.

Ethical considerations

[Creswell \(2013\)](#) suggests that it is crucial to follow ethical procedures that include informed consent, confidentiality, and anonymity. Details of the study and its purpose were provided to the participants so that they could decide whether to participate or not in the study. Participants thus understood the intention of the study, and how their information was going to be used before making a choice. Furthermore, the participants were made aware that their participation was voluntary, and that this information would be used only for academic purposes. The participants were also given assurance that both their identities and responses would be kept confidential, and that they were free to withdraw from participation anytime they wanted to do so without any penalties. Hence, the identities and responses of the teachers and NIED officials were kept confidential through use of pseudonyms such as (Official 1, Official 2, Teacher 1, and Teacher 2) to represent the participants. Once participants had given a confirmation of their desire to participate in the study, a consent form was provided where they were expected to sign for their acceptance. Finally, ethical clearance letter was obtained from the University of Johannesburg (UJREC) before collecting data from any target participants. Once the clearance was granted by the University, we then applied for ethical clearance from the Director of Education in the Otjozondjupa region, school principal(s) and the Director of NIED before engaging the target group of subjects.

Main research question

What is the role and extent of teacher involvement in curriculum development process?

Sub-research questions

- a. How does the Namibian government conduct curriculum development processes?

- b. To what extent are teachers involved in the curriculum development processes?
- c. Why should teachers be involved in the curriculum development processes?
- d. How best should curriculum development process be conducted?

Presentation and discussion of the findings

The study was designed to determine the extent to which teachers are involved during curriculum development processes (reforms) in Namibia, and its implications on curriculum (in) justices. Accordingly, we interviewed 11 secondary school teachers, and six NIED officials who filled the questionnaires and /or were telephonically interviewed. The sampled teachers had at least a 10-year teaching experience, while NIED officials had an eight-year administrative experience. Mainly, NIED officials comprised of curriculum developers, researchers, in-service trainers, and were also overseers of the curriculum development processes.

Curriculum development processes at National institute for educational development in Namibia

The first research question sought to determine how curriculum development processes are done at secondary schools in Namibia. According to the [Ministry of Education \(2015\)](#) in Namibia, NIED is the body that is tasked with the sole responsibility of overseeing curriculum reforms for Basic Education in Namibia. NIED officials revealed that there are four major steps followed when doing curriculum reforms. The process begins with research (needs assessment), followed by design, implementation and then evaluation. They also reported that the curriculum is developed and reviewed in consultation with different stakeholders such as academic institutions, teachers, society, curriculum specialists, school principals, curriculum coordination committees, textbook publishers, and non-profit organisations among others. This revelation seemed to suggest that curriculum reforms in Namibia are at least done transparently and democratically as suggested by [Talla \(2012\)](#) and [Carl \(2017\)](#).

Participation of teachers during curriculum reforms in Namibia

The second question sought to unveil the extent to which secondary school teachers are involved during these reforms. The interviewed teachers reported that based on NIED policies, teachers participate only through workshops and trainings on how to implement the ready-made curriculum in the schools. For example, four teachers reiterated that some teachers were involved in curriculum development panels organised by NIED. Further questions revealed that this kind of representation was not only done non-systematically but was also inadequate and sporadic. The teachers also observed that such meetings helped them express their fears and the challenges they face when implementing the curriculum. Conversely, the majority of the teachers indicated that their

participation was limited to the implementation stages in the classrooms. These findings agree with those mostly cited in the literature review sections in Nigeria, Ghana, Zambia and South Africa, where teachers were merely reduced to classroom practices (see Gyurko, 2012; Talla, 2012; Carl, 2017; Mwanza, 2017; Skedsmo and Huber, 2019; Beblavy and Muzikarova, 2021). Most of these scholars observed that teacher involvement is indispensable since they (teachers) are the ones who actualize the curriculum in the classroom spaces. Relative to this, the following quotations represent what the various teachers exactly said regarding their involvement during curriculum reforms.

'I cannot exactly recall any teachers telling me that they were fully involved. We are only involved mainly at implementation stages' (Teacher D)

'We just discover that, after every five years, there is a new curriculum, and we must implement it. We don't know where it is coming from.. We have to take it and 'stuff' it down our throats and then implement it...' (Teacher H)

'Honestly speaking, teachers only attend workshops and trainings after the curriculum has been developed... and then nothing more...' (Teacher K).

The comments above illustrate that teachers in Namibia are not really engaged during the initial curriculum reform processes. In other words, they are simply treated as empty buckets and dumping ground for the knowledge that was developed elsewhere from above. For Bourdieu (1977, 1984 and Wacquant, 2006), this represents symbolic violence and epistemological harming (also see Fricker, 2007, 2014; Boliver, 2011a,b) and epistemological injustices in education (Chibambo, 2023). Wherever symbolic violence happens, knowledge of the powerful is often transferred down the *Pipes*, and it does get imposed upon the marginalised individuals such as students and teachers who have to swallow and parrot that knowledge without any critical reflections and engagement it (Freire, 2005; Nouri and Sajjadi, 2014; Blignaut and Koopman, 2020). Since knowledge of the powerful comes with ideologies aimed at sustaining hegemony, the poor are often disadvantaged as they subconsciously internalise this knowledge, and take it as absolute truths hence generating symbolic violence and inequalities (Bourdieu, 1984; Lovat and Smith, 2003; Stenhouse, 2006). Several authors have already emphasised the importance of teacher involvement at all stages such as teacher motivation, professional development, teacher efficiency and self-esteem (Blignaut, 2009, 2013; Gyurko, 2012; Talla, 2012, 2009; Nouri and Sajjadi, 2014). However, some NIED officials admitted that teacher participation was very limited to implementation. For example, Official number 6 said:

'Ahhh, yes teachers' roles in these processes are mostly limited to translating what has already been developed by the experts in the field. And you know what? Involvement here remains in 'principle' since some of the stages are not fully followed.'

This statement explains the problematic level of teacher involvement as also expressed by the teachers. While some few teachers did not find any problems with these developments, the fact that most teachers found this arrangement abusive symbolises that these teachers do value their autonomy and freedom within policy

circles. This then implies that such exclusions do not only demotivate them but also reduces them to mere spectators and objects whose fate for professional development and socioeconomic contributions remain in the hands of the privileged few (see Boliver, 2011a,b; Oloruntegbe, 2011; Mwanza, 2017).

Perception of National institute for educational development officials on teachers' participation during curriculum reforms

Teacher involvement in curriculum reforms can only be practical and meaningful when institutions follow the grassroots approaches rather than *Pipe Models*. While Pipes have been commonly used to fast-track reforms due to their quick results, especially where political and economic capitals are limited, jump-starting the curriculum reformation processes using grassroots approaches have often worked in many European countries and have more long-term benefits than the Pipes can offer (see Skedsmo and Huber, 2019; Beblavy and Muzikarova, 2021). Thus, following *Pipe Models* to curriculum development may have serious implications on ownership, engagement, motivation, reputability, respectability and skills transferability in the long-term (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992; Bourdieu 1977, 1984), and actual implementation especially for inexperienced teachers who may struggle interpreting the content and the spirit of the curriculum project. Moreover, since curriculum is both plan, intentions and reality (Lovat and Smith, 2003; Stenhouse, 2006), then it becomes an issue during implementation especially when the implementers are the excluded others who have inadequate knowledge and experience about that curriculum. In this case, both teachers and students' reality may become contradicted and disadvantaged as they meet the experiences and reality of the designers.

In this study, the teachers reported that their participation during curriculum reforms was still at undesirable levels. They argued that teachers should not only be involved through sporadic training sessions but rather through regular involvement and continued professional development trainings (CPDs). These sessions should utilize rotational policy that can allow every teacher to have a turn. This is what some of the teachers had to say.

'Truthful realization of the curriculum takes place only when teachers understand it fully so that they can easily implement it as critical stakeholders...' (Teacher I)

'Teachers are more knowledgeable about what happens in the classrooms, hence must be involved at all stages of curriculum development...' (Teacher G)

'Since teachers are the ones that deliver the content to learners, they need to be at the heart of the curriculum review processes...' (Teacher C)

The above comments suggest that these teachers are aware of the need to participate in the curriculum reformation processes although they are not involved. These statements support Bernstein (1999, 2000), Kirk and McDonald (2001), Frost (2008, 2020), Talla (2012) and Mwanza (2017)

who argued that the success of any curriculum may depend on the level of teacher involvement. Similarly, [Obilo and Sangoleye \(2010\)](#) contended that the task of implementing any curriculum successfully lies with teachers' participation because they are the custodians of knowledge, interact with texts and the learners, and understand the constraints and opportunities within the schools. For [Bernstein \(1999\)](#), teacher involvement mostly happens at tertiary level, which is the *reproduction stage* of the implementation phase. Such late involvement is not only counterproductive to democracy but also deforms teachers' ability to function well, and own the reformed curriculum. This further undermines teachers' autonomy, confidence and creativity as they work with an alien product ([Freire, 2005; Nouri and Sajjadi, 2014](#)). Within these contexts, teachers are treated as thoughtless objects and second-class citizens who should obey instruction, and internalise knowledge from the elite in a symbolic violence fashion ([Bourdieu, 1977, 1984](#)). This problem reincarnates controversial question of 'knowledge of the powerful' and 'powerful knowledge' regarding the conceptualisation of the curriculum and its challenges (see [Young, 2008; Young, 2010](#)). Specifically, young observed that arguments for inclusive stakeholder voices have often remained contentious among postmodernists, technical instrumentalists and neo-conservatist scholars, and that the 'social realist' position would help settle such debates. Young argues that curriculum reforms are both political (Power-based) and social (communal-based) hence knowledge of the elite and knowledge of the powerless would often have to compete within such spaces. [Bourdieu \(1984\)](#) further contended that within social spaces/fields, where power differences are pronounceable, symbolic capital may be abused hence leading to symbolic violence against the marginalised and powerless groups such as teachers and students. This experience may further promote differentiation and inequalities among the teachers and the students alike as the curriculum represents the identities of the elite and the rich.

Perception of National institute for educational development officials on teacher participation during curriculum reforms

We asked NIED officials on the degree and effectiveness of teachers' involvement during curriculum development processes. The majority of the officials (four) out of six deplored the current levels of teachers' involvement and participation as being ineffective and inadequate for successful curriculum transformations. The following extracts reveal what the officials said:

'Teachers' roles are mainly that of translating what has been developed already and nothing more than that..' (Official 4)

'Yes, of course, the involvement process at NIED is only on paper but not really in practice..' (Official 2)

These comments reaffirm that teachers are only involved during implementation stage but not the development phases confirming the findings from South Africa, Zambia, Ghana and Nigeria ([Talla, 2012; Mwanza, 2017; Beblavy and Muzikarova, 2021](#)). Agreeing with this, official number six further reported that teacher involvement in Namibia was indeed very limited and unequal. Below is what the official actually said.

'Teachers are mostly used at NIED to assist with translation of documents already developed by NIED officials through Cambridge, and this mainly happens at classroom teaching level...'

The above claims resonate with what [Bernstein \(2000, 2003\)](#) had observed when he argued that teachers are mainly disregarded during knowledge production and recontextualisation stages until the reproduction stage where they have to translate the documents into lesson plans and do the actual teaching. Bernstein further contended that this practice robs the teachers of their ability to develop their creativity and profession while getting empowered as counted members of the community of practice. For [Bourdieu and Wacquant \(1992\)](#), symbolic capital can serve as both as a threat and an opportunity for the actualization of curriculum reforms through the symbolic violence threats and *Cultural State of Emergency* opportunities. Cultural State of Emergency only occurs when symbolic violence has taken place and that agentive voice, knowledge and cultures are at risk of being obliterated in a fashion called *epistemi-cide* ([Leibowitz, 2017](#)). Thus to avoid epistemi-cide, students and teachers' knowledge should be preserved throughout inclusive and democratic curriculum development processes. And as, [Young \(2008, 2010\)](#) argued, inclusive curriculum processes should be based on the principles of social-realism in order to minimise epistemological harming and exclusions.

Challenges faced by National institute for educational development during curriculum reforms and solutions

NIED officials were then asked if there are any challenges during curriculum reforms and possible solutions. Most of the officials reported that NIED was challenged by lack of funds, political capital and absenteeism of teachers. Two of the six officials reported that whenever they wanted to funds to allow many teachers participate during curriculum reforms, such funds were not provided by management. Precisely, official number 6 reported that there were threads of red-tapes involved when making curriculum decisions. He observed that under the current economic situation, it was hard for all teachers to participate during curriculum reforms. This finding resonates with the Nigerian case, and what [Beblavy and Muzikarova \(2021\)](#) regarded as systematic forms of epistemological harming and deprivatation. Similarly, officials 1 and 4 also complained of teacher absenteeism from schools due to classroom and administrative commitments. Some NIED officials thus argued that teachers should be left out of curriculum development processes since they would disrupt classes if taken on board. This argument however seems to be unreliable since not every teacher would go there at once. If anything, teacher absence during curriculum development processes should be faulted for contributing towards poor quality education ([Talla, 2012; Skedsmo and Huber, 2019; Beblavy and Muzikarova, 2021](#)). When asked for possible solutions, members proposed that CPD induction trainings should be done using rotational policy where teachers can rotate whenever attending such meetings. They also proposed lobbying for more funds from government and NGOs to finance teacher inclusion during curriculum reforms.

Discussion of the findings and implications on policy and practice

In the main, these results have provided important insights regarding the extent teachers are involved in curriculum development processes in Namibia. We thus established that teachers and NIED officials, who participated in this study, had considerable experience about curriculum reforms in Namibia. We also established that there were some teachers who have managed to represent their colleagues during curriculum reforms although it was non-representative. We also established that teacher participation within NIED was more on paper than in practice, and this contradicted the common practice in developed countries such as Hungary, Czech Republic, Australia, Finland, Singapore, China and others (see Kirk and McDonald, 2001; Frost, 2008, 2020; Skedsmo and Huber, 2019; Beblavy and Muzikarova, 2021). In Namibia, teachers were ultimately excluded from participating throughout the curriculum reforms until the implementation or reproduction stage (Bernstein, 2000; Frost, 2008; Talla, 2012).

We equally established that teachers in South Africa, Ghana, Zambia, Zimbabwe, and Nigeria are mainly involved at the reproduction stage, making them become *the means to an end* but not an end in themselves (see Freire, 2005; Frost, 2008, 2020; Biesta, 2013; Nouri and Sajjadi, 2014). Furthermore Carl (2017) trashed the assumptions that teachers should only implement the curricula because of the need for speed, cost-saving and efficiency as argued by *Pipe Modelists*. Evidence from Finland, Singapore, China, Slovakia, Czech and Hungary have shown that grassroots approaches to curriculum reforms have paid significant dividends towards the success of the curriculum and staff development in the long-term (Frost, 2008; Ornstein and Hunkins, 2018; Beblavy and Muzikarova, 2021). Accordingly, teacher participation should begin at the on-set of the programme running through the reformation cycle.

Perhaps the lesson for Namibia and other developing countries is that decentralising curriculum reforms as has been the case in China, India, Australia, Singapore, Finland, Hungary, Czech, and Slovakia could pay more dividends than clinging to antediluvian curriculum development models such as the Pipes (Talla, 2012; Vatikka et al., 2015; Ornstein and Hunkins, 2018; Skedsmo and Huber, 2019; Beblavy and Muzikarova, 2021). We also recommend that teachers- who implement the curriculum- should not just be used at classroom/reproduction levels but also at conceptualisation (production) and recontextualisation stages (see Bernstein, 1999, 2000). In developed countries, teachers have collaborated with local governments and have been given maximum freedoms to design, develop and implement their own curricula with some limited guidance from local authorities. This practice have empowered, improved stakeholder relations, boosted teachers' self-confidence and enhanced curriculum ownership by the users. Teachers in Namibia can equally benefit in the same way, and become responsible for their own practices in the line of duty. We recognise that many Sub-Saharan countries are facing challenges such as lack of funds, huge teacher workloads, limited resources and poor living conditions which can derail grassroots models. We however maintain that more can be done to improve teacher-participation during and after curriculum reformations. Our position gains traction based on the overwhelming evidence that has been provided by the literature review from developed countries, and the empirical findings of this study.

Conclusion

From the above discourses, we conclude that teachers in Namibia are insignificantly involved in the curriculum reformation processes by NIED. Their participation has often been reduced to mere classroom work and nothing more. Like postmodernists have argued, such type of involvement does not only constitute objectification, but also reduces the teachers to thoughtless objects and empty-buckets-like sub-beings. These teachers have become the means to the end, but not an end in themselves, which is a form of epistemological injustice deplored by both Immanuel Kant and other critical theorists such as Paul Freire, Ladson-Billings, Bell Hooks, Gert Biesta, Banks and Banks and others (see Freire, 2005; Biesta, 2013; Chibambo, 2023). Moreover, we have demonstrated that teachers in Namibia need to be fully engaged during curriculum reforms because they are the ones who actualise the curriculum on the ground, and know what works or does not work. As Skedsmo and Huber (2019) and Beblavy and Muzikarova (2021) had contended, the Pipes Model has had its advantages for long time and in short-term, however rapid social changes and increased calls for democratic values in all spaces of life today, require that curriculum reforms utilise grassroots and representative approaches. Grassroots approaches have indeed yielded significant benefits in those countries they have piloted including increasing teacher freedoms, ownership, performance and responsibility over the curricula and have had long-term benefits. Since teachers are aware of students' needs, challenges and opportunities, then their participation should become mandatory if future democratic pitfalls are to be avoided. After all, it is often discomfiting to talk confidently about new concepts of the curriculum when one has limited knowledge about them especially where the developers did it in their own boardrooms away from the users.

Limitations

Curriculum development processes are very dynamic, and do involve different stakeholders who have multiple and varied interests, motivations, knowledge and inclinations. The study only focused on teachers as they implement the curriculum, and have direct access to the leaners. Furthermore, due to time and financial constraints, the study was limited to secondary school teachers in the Otjozondjupa region, excluding teachers from other 13 educational regions of Namibia, which would have enriched the findings.

Recommendations

From these debates, we recognise that Namibia and other African countries have adopted Pipe Models for curriculum reformations. The study recommends decentralisation of these processes by allowing teachers and students to fully participate in all the stages of curriculum reformations as the final users. Furthermore, we recommend that teacher participation should follow representative democratic processes based on rota methods. For example, academic unions and HoDs can select teachers to participate in the reformation sessions, and these will later orient their constituents through regular training workshops and CPDs to ensure rapid knowledge diffusion. Finally, Namibia should conduct

regular research to compile annual reports that can consolidate concerns, solutions and opportunities for curriculum reformation processes.

Recommendations for future work

It would seem that part of the study population did attest that there is some form of bureaucratic and red taped representation at the moment within the secondary education system, although the procedures for selecting these people remain unclear. Secondly, the effectiveness of the current system of selecting representation for curriculum development committees is still unclear, and very political. Thus, there is need to probe further if these measures are working to the advantage of the public, and the challenges facing the current arrangements. Again, the claims that students and teachers are confused with content overload need further research to understand what it means by overload and its implications education quality. Since learners were left out in this study, their perceptions on current curriculum arrangements become important if indeed the essence of teacher voice and democracy is to escape ideological contradictions.

Data availability statement

The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article/[supplementary material](#), further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author.

Ethics statement

The studies involving humans were approved by the University of Johannesburg EREC. The studies were conducted

in accordance with the local legislation and institutional requirements. Written informed consent for participation was not required from the participants or the participants' legal guardians/next of kin in accordance with the national legislation and institutional requirements.

Author contributions

All authors listed have made a substantial, direct, and intellectual contribution to the work and approved it for publication.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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Supplementary material

The Supplementary material for this article can be found online at: <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/feduc.2023.1243573/full#supplementary-material>

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