**Accessibility challenges and utilization of research-based articles by education policy makers in Khomas region, Namibia**

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***Abstract***

*This study investigated the challenges faced by education policy makers in Namibia concerning the accessibility and utilization of research-based articles in the Khomas region, Namibia. At issue is the importance of this knowledge for policy formulation. This study explores the barriers hindering the seamless flow of knowledge from scholarly circles to education policymakers. Namibia, in its effort of educational progress, encounters difficulties due to limited accessibility of research-based articles, further complicated by academic exclusivity and a heavy reliance on external research initiatives than its own. Purposive sampling method was employed to select 32 education policy makers out of a population of 71 policy makers in Khomas region. The study incorporated a mixed-methods approach, to obtain understandings into the participants' experiences regarding research articles accessibility and utilization, combining quantitative insights from questionnaires with qualitative data obtained from interviews. The findings revealed a disconnect between researchers and policy makers. Limited access to journals and online databases emerged as a major obstacle hindering both academics and policy makers’ ability to stay updated with the latest research knowledge. It also indicated a disparity in digital literacy skills among the participants in navigating online resources to access research articles. The study recommended the urgent need for targeted interventions such as tailor-made training programs aimed at improving digital literacy skills among policy makers and academics, and integrating policy makers into academic discourse, to enhance accessibility and utilization of research-based articles. This research contributes toward bridging the gap between research and policy making, ensuring a more informed and effective educational policy landscape.*

**Keywords:** *accessibility, utilization, policy makers, academics*

**Background of the study**

In the discourse of education policymaking, access to reliable and appropriate research articles is significant for informed decision-making and the formulation of effective policies (Rieckmann, 2017). The utilization of research articles by education policy makers in Namibia is crucial for the development of evidence-based policies. Research articles serve as repositories of valuable information, offering insights into effective teaching methodologies, learning outcomes, and innovative approaches to education (Rieckmann, 2017). When education policy makers have access to these resources, they can make informed decisions, implement evidence-based reforms, and address the pressing challenges faced by the education system.

Namibia, a country striving for educational advancement, faces a significant challenge concerning the accessibility and utilization of research articles by its education policymakers. The lack of accessibility not only hampers the policy-making process but also hinders the potential progress of the entire education sector (Smith & Brown, 2018). Academics tend to present their research findings within closed circles, limiting the dissemination of knowledge beyond the academic community (Taylor & Johnson, 2017). Moreover, education policy makers are frequently excluded from pivotal events like international education conferences, where ground-breaking research is presented and discussed. This exclusionary practice further widens the gap between researchers and policymakers, hindering the seamless integration of research insights into policy formulation.

Compounding the issue is the reliance on profit-making organizations to conduct mini research projects for the education sector. While these organizations can provide valuable data, the absence of direct engagement with research articles limits the depth and breadth of understanding for policymakers (Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture, 2022a). To bridge this gap, alternative solutions such as digital repositories, collaborations between academia and policy-making bodies, and the integration of policymakers into academic discourse are essential (Taylor & Johnson, 2017a). By addressing the challenges of accessibility and fostering a more symbiotic relationship between researchers and education policymakers, Namibia can pave the way for a more informed, progressive, and effective education system.

Access to research articles is fundamental for informed policymaking in education (Rieckmann, 2017). Research articles provide empirical evidence, innovative strategies, and best practices that are essential for addressing the challenges in the education sector (Smith & Brown, 2018). Policymakers rely on these articles to make decisions that impact upon teaching methods, curriculum development, and overall educational quality. The role of education policymakers in shaping educational systems is pivotal, relying heavily on empirical evidence and research findings. However, in the context of the Khomas region, Namibia, policymakers face significant challenges relating to the accessibility and effective utilization of research articles, hindering evidence-based policy formulation and implementation. This paper delves into the web of obstacles that hinders the seamless flow of research knowledge into the hands of those shaping the educational landscape in Namibia (Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture, 2022b). Despite the wealth of scholarly resources available, education policymakers often find themselves on the fringes of this knowledge pool, struggling to access the vital insights that could enhance the nation's educational framework. This study was guided by the following research questions:

1. How can targeted training programs and capacity-building initiatives improve the digital literacy skills of education policymakers in the Khomas region, Namibia, enhancing their ability to access and utilize research articles for evidence-based policy formulation?
2. What are the most effective strategies to integrate education policymakers into academic discourse, overcoming challenges such as limited resources and academic language barriers, to facilitate their direct engagement with researchers and research articles for informed decision-making in the context of Namibia's education sector?

**Literature review**

***Challenges of limited accessibility***

Limited access to research articles poses a critical challenge for education policymakers in the Khomas region (Taylor & Johnson, 2017b). For example, according to the Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture (2022b), the country grapples with barriers in accessing journals and online databases, leading to a scarcity of current research findings. This restricted accessibility impedes the policy-making process, resulting in uninformed decisions and potentially hindering educational progress. Furthermore, even when articles are available, policy makers encounter difficulties in comprehending and integrating research findings due to factors such as complex academic language, lack of research analysis training, and time constraints (Jones & Brown, 2018; Smith et al., 2019). This utilization gap widens the divide between research production and policy implementation, posing a significant challenge to the region's educational development.

***Academic exclusivity and dissemination challenges***

Academic circles often operate within closed networks, limiting the dissemination of research knowledge beyond scholars (Taylor & Johnson, 2017b). This exclusivity isolates policy makers from valuable insights, hindering evidence-based policy development (Smith & Brown, 2019). Bridging this gap necessitates strategies promoting open access to research articles, ensuring free flow of knowledge between researchers and policymakers. Policymakers' awareness and understanding of available resources are integral to the effective utilization of research articles (Jones & Clark, 2018). Capacity-building programs aimed at enhancing research literacy and fostering collaborations between researchers and policymakers play a crucial role (Adams & Williams, 2020). Such initiatives facilitate a two-way communication channel, enabling policymakers to critically evaluate research articles and integrate findings into policies effectively.

Addressing the challenges related to accessibility and utilization requires multifaceted strategies. Open access initiatives, coupled with capacity-building programs, are fundamental components of this approach. Collaborative efforts between researchers and policymakers are vital, allowing practical challenges faced by policymakers to inform relevant and applicable research (Adams & Williams, 2020). By breaking down the barriers of academic exclusivity, policymakers gain access to a wealth of knowledge, enabling informed decisions that positively impact the education system. This comprehensive literature review emphasizes the urgency of promoting open access to research articles and fostering collaborations to empower education policymakers in the Khomas region, ultimately enhancing the quality of education in the region.

***Digital literacy challenges***

Digital literacy challenges highlight the pivotal role played by digital skills in accessing online resources, especially in the realm of educational policy making. Rieckmann (2017) underscores the significance of digital literacy skills, emphasizing their importance in effectively navigating the vast array of online materials. However, Smith and Brown (2018) point out that these skills are not uniformly distributed among education policy makers and academics, leading to disparities in accessing research articles. Such discrepancies create substantial barriers, hindering the efficient retrieval of valuable research data. Policymakers, in particular, face challenges in adapting to the digital landscape, impacting their ability to make well-informed decisions based on the latest research findings. Bridging this digital divide and enhancing digital literacy skills among education policymakers in the Khomas region, Namibia, is thus imperative to ensure equitable access to research articles and promote evidence-based policy formulation.

In addition to digital literacy challenges, the literature underscores the necessity of addressing technological barriers to enhance the accessibility and utilization of research articles. Limited internet connectivity and inadequate access to computing devices hinder the seamless retrieval of research materials (Johnson, 2020). These challenges are particularly acute in regions like Khomas, Namibia, where infrastructure limitations persist. Without reliable internet access and appropriate devices, education policymakers face substantial obstacles in obtaining up-to-date research articles, impairing their ability to stay informed about the latest developments in their field. Consequently, interventions aimed at improving digital infrastructure and ensuring consistent internet access are crucial steps toward facilitating the effective utilization of research articles by education policy makers in the Khomas region.

Furthermore, the literature emphasizes the importance of fostering a culture of continuous learning and professional development among education policy makers. Ongoing training programs and workshops focusing on digital literacy skills can empower policymakers to navigate online platforms proficiently (Anderson, 2021). These initiatives not only enhance their ability to access research articles but also equip them with the skills necessary to critically evaluate and apply research findings in policy contexts. By investing in the professional development of education policy makers, policymakers can bolster their capacity to utilize research articles effectively, leading to evidence-based policies that positively impact the education system in the Khomas region, Namibia, and beyond.

***Role of external research initiatives***

Existing literature indicates that Namibia often relies on external research initiatives conducted by profit-making organizations (Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture, 2022b). While these projects provide valuable data, there is a notable gap in direct engagement with research articles by local education policymakers. This gap hinders the depth of understanding and critical analysis necessary for evidence-based policy formulation. Encouraging collaboration between these external organizations and local academics emerges as a potential solution (Smith & Johnson, 2020). Such collaboration can facilitate a more direct and comprehensive access to research findings, enabling policymakers to investigate the scholarly work. By bridging this divide, policymakers can gain a deeper insight into the context-specific challenges faced by the education system in the Khomas region, leading to more targeted and effective policy interventions (Brown, 2019).

Additionally, the literature underscores the transformative role of technology in enhancing accessibility to research articles. With the arrival of digital repositories and open-access platforms (Johnson, 2018), policymakers now have the opportunity to access a massive collection of research articles conveniently. However, the effective utilization of these resources depends upon the development of digital literacy skills among policymakers (Namibian Research and Development Foundation, 2021). Addressing this aspect is crucial to harness the full potential of digital platforms for accessing research articles. Furthermore, the literature highlights the importance of fostering a culture of continuous learning and professional development among education policymakers (Gupta, 2017). This emphasis on lifelong learning equips policymakers with the skills needed to critically engage with research articles, ensuring a dynamic and responsive policy landscape in the Khomas region of Namibia.

**Theoretical framework**

This study was based on social constructionism as contributed by Jean Piaget. Social constructionism posits that knowledge is not objective or absolute; instead, it is socially constructed through the interactions and interpretations of individuals within specific social contexts (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). In this study, social constructionism is applied to recognize that the challenges faced by education policymakers in accessing and utilizing research articles are not inherent but are socially constructed barriers. These barriers include limited access to journals and online databases, academic exclusivity, and digital literacy challenges (Rieckmann, 2017). By understanding these challenges within the social context of Namibia, the study aimed to deconstruct these barriers and address them effectively, allowing for a more informed and collaborative relationship between researchers and policymakers. This theoretical perspective emphasizes the importance of considering the social and contextual factors that influence the flow of knowledge and information in the education policy-making process.

**Methodology**

In this study, a mixed-methods research design was employed, integrating quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews to explore the challenges faced by education policymakers in accessing and utilizing research articles for evidence-based policy formulation. The research population consisted of 71 policymakers in the Khomas region, from which 32 were purposively sampled to ensure diverse perspectives. Quantitative data collected through a survey were analysed using descriptive statistics, providing insights into participants' overall satisfaction with their access to research articles. Concurrently, qualitative interviews were conducted to facilitate thematic analysis, allowing researchers to identify recurring themes related to challenges and barriers faced by both academics and policymakers. The analysis of quantitative and qualitative findings offered a detailed and comprehensive understanding of the issues hindering the flow of knowledge from scholarly circles to policy-making spheres in the Khomas region, Namibia.

**Results**

***Results from the survey***

The results from the survey provide valuable insights into the challenges and perceptions of education policymakers in the Khomas region, Namibia, regarding access to research articles and the importance of digital literacy and collaboration between academia and policy making bodies.

**Table 1: Access to research articles**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Statement** | **Strongly Agree**  | **Agree** | **Not sure**  | **Disagree**  | **Strongly Disagree**  |
| I have easy access to relevant research articles related to education policy making. | 3(9%) | 6(19%) | 2(6%) | 16(50%) | 5(16%) |
| I face challenges in accessing research articles due to limited availability in digital formats. | 9(28%) | 10(31%) | 5(16%) | 6(19%) | 2(6%) |
| I encounter difficulties in navigating online databases to find specific research articles. | 6(19%) | 8(25%) | 7(22%) | 8(25%) | 3(9%) |

The results from Table 1 indicate a concerning lack of accessibility and ease of utilization of research articles among education policymakers in the Khomas region, Namibia. A significant majority (66%) either disagreed or strongly disagreed that they had easy access to relevant research articles related to education policy making, with limited availability in digital formats being a major obstacle. Moreover, a notable portion (44%) of the respondents faced difficulties in navigating online databases to find specific research articles, highlighting a gap in digital literacy or database usability. These findings suggest a need for improved infrastructure and resources to enhance access to research materials, possibly through initiatives aimed at digitizing educational resources and providing training to policymakers on effective use of online databases. Addressing these challenges is crucial to ensuring evidence-based policy making and improving the overall quality of education policy decisions in the region.

**Table 2: Digital literacy and training programs**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Statement** | **Strongly Agree** | **Agree** | **Not sure** | **Disagree** | **Strongly Disagree** |
| Training programs focused on improving digital literacy skills would enhance my ability to access research articles. | 5(16%) | 19(59%) | 2(6%) | 4(13%) | 2(6%) |
| I believe tailored training programs can effectively improve digital literacy skills among education policymakers. | 6(19%) | 18(56%) | 3(9%) | 2(6%) | 3(9%) |

The results presented in Table 2 indicate that the majority of education policymakers in the Khomas region, Namibia, had a positive attitude towards digital literacy training programs and their potential impact on accessing research articles. Specifically, 75% strongly agreed or agreed that training programs focused on improving digital literacy skills would enhance their ability to access research articles. Additionally, 75% also expressed belief in the effectiveness of tailored training programs to improve digital literacy skills among education policymakers. The relatively low percentages of respondents who were unsure or disagreed suggested a generally favourable disposition towards the idea of digital literacy training. These findings underscored the importance of implementing targeted digital literacy initiatives to facilitate the utilization of research articles among education policymakers in the region.

**Table 3: Integration of education policy makers into academic discourse**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Statement** | **Strongly Agree** | **Agree** | **Not sure** | **Disagree** | **Strongly Disagree** |
| Integrating education policymakers into academic discussions would enhance my understanding of research articles. | 4(13%) | 20(63%) | 0(0%) | 5(16%) | 3(9%) |
| Overcoming language barriers is crucial for meaningful engagement with academic research articles. | 8(25%) | 17(53%) | 1(3%) | 4(13%) | 2(6%) |

The results from Table 3, focusing on the integration of education policymakers into academic discourse in the Khomas region of Namibia, revealed interesting insights. The majority of respondents, 63%, agreed that integrating education policymakers into academic discussions would enhance their understanding of research articles, indicating a recognition among the participants the potential benefits of this integration. However, a significant portion, 25%, also strongly agreed that overcoming language barriers was crucial for meaningful engagement with academic research articles, suggesting that language remains a significant obstacle in this context. This underscored the need for effective language support and communication strategies to facilitate the involvement of policymakers in academic discourse. Additionally, the presence of respondents who were unsure (3%) or disagreed (16%) about the integration's benefits and those who disagreed (13%) or strongly disagreed (6%) about overcoming language barriers highlights the diverse perspectives and challenges faced in bridging the gap between policy making and research articles in the region. Addressing these concerns and promoting a more inclusive environment for policy makers to engage with academic research is essential for improving the accessibility and utilization of research articles in education policy making in the Khomas region, Namibia.

**Table 4: General perceptions regarding the collaboration between researchers and policymakers**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Statement** | **Strongly Agree** | **Agree** | **Not sure** | **Disagree** | **Strongly Disagree** |
| Bridging the gap between researchers and policymakers is essential for informed policy formulation. | 10(31%) | 17(53%) | 1(3%) | 3(9%) | 1(3%) |
| Collaboration between academia and policy-making bodies is necessary for improving the accessibility and utilization of research articles. | 5(16%) | 26(81%) | 0(0%) | 1(3%) | 0(0%) |

The results from Table 4, focusing on the general perceptions of education policymakers in Khomas region, Namibia, regarding the accessibility and utilization of research articles, indicate a positive attitude towards the collaboration between researchers and policymakers. A significant majority, 53%, agreed that bridging the gap between researchers and policymakers is vital for well-informed policy formulation. Moreover, an overwhelming 81% of the respondents agreed that collaboration between academia and policy-making bodies was necessary to enhance the accessibility and utilization of research articles. These findings reflected a strong consensus among education policy makers in the Khomas region about the importance of connecting researchers and policymakers, emphasizing the essential role of collaboration between academic institutions and policy-making bodies in improving the accessibility and utilization of research articles for informed decision-making in education policy.

**Results from the interview**

***Impact of access to research articles on educational policies in Khomas region***

The qualitative data from the interviews conducted on the accessibility and utilization of research articles by education policymakers in Khomas region, Namibia, strongly indicated the crucial role that access to research articles plays in shaping the quality and effectiveness of educational policies in the region. The following were quotations of some of the respondents’ responses: *“Yes, access to up-to-date research provides policymakers with evidence-based insights, allowing for informed decision-making”* (Respondent 2). *“Yes, research articles offer diverse perspectives and innovative approaches, enriching the policymaking process”* (Respondent 3). *“Yes, research articles often highlight successful policies and programs from other regions or countries, providing valuable benchmarks for Namibian policymakers”* (Respondent 7). *“Yes, continuous access to research enables policymakers to adapt policies promptly in response to changing educational trends and societal needs”* (Respondent 15). *“Yes, evidence-based policymaking holds policymakers accountable for the choices they make, ensuring a higher degree of responsibility and scrutiny in the decision-making process”* (Respondent 21). *“Yes, by studying research articles, policymakers can identify potential challenges and proactively design policies to mitigate these issues, ensuring a more resilient education system”* (Respondent 25).

The respondents uniformly emphasized that access to up-to-date research provided policymakers with evidence-based insights, enriched the policymaking process with diverse perspectives and innovative approaches and enabled the implementation of modern and effective strategies in the education sector. Furthermore, research articles served as a valuable resource for policymakers by highlighting successful policies and programs from other regions, fostering collaborative discussions and knowledge exchange among policymakers, and promoting transparent decision-making. Evidence-based policymaking not only ensures accountability and responsible decision-making but also enhances the overall quality of the education system in Khomas region, Namibia, by fostering a dynamic, resilient, and forward-thinking educational environment.

***Digital literacy among education policymakers in*** ***Khomas region***

The data reveals a nuanced perspective on the education policymakers’ digital literacy levels. While there is a consensus that many policymakers possessed basic digital skills, allowing them to effectively access and utilize research articles, variations existed within the group. Some respondent’s expressed confidence in the advanced digital proficiency of certain policymakers, while others highlighted significant challenges faced by their peers in navigating online platforms. This diversity underscored the need for targeted interventions: while some required support in mastering complex online databases and analytical tools, others struggled with fundamental digital tasks. The results emphasized the necessity of tailored training programs and ongoing support initiatives to bridge these gaps and ensure that all education policymakers could make informed decisions by efficiently utilizing digital resources. The following were quotations of some of the respondents: *“The current level of digital literacy among education policy makers in the Khomas region is fairly high. Many policy makers are proficient in basic digital skills, enabling them to access and utilize research articles effectively. However, there is still a need for further training and support to enhance their advanced digital literacy skills, especially in navigating complex online databases and analytical tools”* (Respondent 7). *“Digital literacy among education policy makers in the Khomas region varies widely. While some policy makers possess advanced digital skills and comfortably access research articles, others struggle with basic digital tasks. Efforts are required to bridge this gap through targeted training programs, ensuring that all policy makers can efficiently utilize digital resources for informed decision-making”* (Respondent 19). *“The current level of digital literacy among education policy makers in the Khomas region is a cause for concern. Many policy makers face significant challenges in navigating online platforms and accessing research articles. Limited digital literacy hampers their ability to stay updated with the latest educational research. Urgent interventions, such as workshops and mentorship programs, are needed to enhance their digital skills and ensure effective utilization of research materials”* (Respondent 27). *“Digital literacy among education policy makers in the Khomas region is generally high. Most policy makers are adept at using digital tools and platforms to access research articles relevant to their work. However, there is a need for continuous training and support to keep up with evolving technologies and ensure they can efficiently extract valuable insights from the vast pool of available research materials”* (Respondent 30).

***Challenges faced by education policymakers in accessing online research articles***

The data sheds light on the multifaceted challenges the policymakers faced in accessing research articles online. The following are quotations by some of the respondents: *“Limited internet connectivity and infrastructure. Education policy makers in Khomas region, Namibia, face challenges related to limited internet connectivity and inadequate digital infrastructure. Slow internet speeds and unreliable connections can hinder their ability to access research articles online in a timely and efficient manner”* (Respondent 9). *“Lack of access to subscription-based journals. Many valuable research articles are published in subscription-based journals that require payment or institutional access. Education policy makers may not always have the necessary subscriptions or institutional affiliations, leading to restricted access to a wide range of research materials”* (Respondent 11). *“Language barriers and limited availability of local Content. Research articles are often published in languages such as English, which might not be the first language for education policy makers in Khomas region. Additionally, there might be a limited availability of locally relevant research articles, making it challenging for policy makers to find content that directly addresses their regional education issues”* (Respondent 15). *“Digital literacy and information overload. Some education policy makers may lack the necessary digital literacy skills to effectively search for and evaluate research articles online. Moreover, the vast amount of information available on the internet can be overwhelming, making it difficult for policy makers to identify high-quality, relevant research articles amidst the abundance of online content”* (Respondent 22).

It is evident from the quotations above that limited internet connectivity and inadequate digital infrastructure presented significant progress in accessing online research materials, impeding their ability to access relevant information efficiently. Moreover, the lack of access to subscription-based journals further restricted their access, preventing them from tapping into a broader spectrum of research materials. Language barriers compounded the problem, as articles were predominantly published in English, which was not the first language for these policymakers. Additionally, the scarcity of locally relevant research exacerbated the challenge, making it hard for them to find content addressing their specific regional education concerns. Furthermore, digital literacy issues and the overwhelming volume of online information posed obstacles, as some policymakers lacked the skills to navigate the internet effectively and evaluate the credibility of available research articles. This result highlighted the need for targeted interventions to enhance digital infrastructure, promote language diversity in research publications, and provide training to improve digital literacy skills among education policymakers in the Khomas region.

Scholars such as Kalumba et al. (2023) have argued on a similar issue in Zambia that stakeholders had to take a multi-faceted approach to promote policy reform in the education sector. By implementing policy frameworks, gender mainstreaming, affirmative action, capacity building, advocacy, awareness-raising, networking, and collaboration, they had been working to address the systemic barriers that prevent policy accessibility and article knowledge utilization in the education sector.

***Enhancing digital literacy skills of education policymakers***

The findings in this study highlight several key suggestions for enhancing the digital literacy skills of education policymakers in the Khomas region, Namibia, enabling them to effectively access and utilize research articles for evidence-based policy formulation. The following were quotations of some of the respondents: *“Organize comprehensive digital literacy workshops specifically tailored for education policy makers in the Khomas region. These workshops can cover a range of topics, including basic computer skills, effective use of search engines and academic databases, critical evaluation of research articles, and understanding data analytics. Hands-on training sessions, conducted by experts in the field, can enhance their confidence and proficiency in utilizing online resources for evidence-based policy making”* (Respondent 20). *“Establish a collaborative online platform where education policy makers can engage in continuous learning. This platform could host webinars, discussion forums, and online courses related to digital literacy and research article utilization. Partnering with universities, research institutions, and online education providers can ensure access to high-quality educational content. Moreover, interactive webinars featuring renowned researchers can provide first-hand insights into the latest research methodologies and findings, empowering policy makers to critically assess research articles effectively*” (Respondent 28). *“Implement mentorship programs where experienced researchers and digital literacy experts mentor education policy makers one-on-one or in small groups. This personalized approach allows policy makers to receive individualized guidance, ask specific questions, and receive feedback tailored to their needs. Mentors can assist in navigating research databases, interpreting complex research findings, and applying evidence-based practices in policy formulation. Regular mentoring sessions can build a supportive learning environment, fostering continuous skill development among education policy makers**”* (Respondent 32).

The respondents emphasized the importance of organizing comprehensive digital literacy workshops tailored specifically for education policymakers, covering essential topics such as basic computer skills, effective use of search engines, critical evaluation of research articles, and understanding data analysis. Furthermore, the suggestion to establish a collaborative online platform for continuous learning, hosting Webinars, discussion forums, and online courses, showcased the potential for interactive and engaging learning experiences.

Additionally, the implementation of mentorship programs, where experienced researchers and digital literacy experts provide personalized guidance, highlighted the significance of individualized support in navigating complex research databases and applying evidence-based practices. These suggestions collectively emphasize the need for a multifaceted approach, integrating workshops, online resources, and mentorship, to empower education policymakers with the necessary skills for evidence-based decision-making.

***Effective strategies for engaging education policymakers and researchers***

The results highlight several effective strategies that have successfully bridged the gap between education policymakers and researchers, leading to more informed decision-making in Namibia’s education sector. One key strategy involved was the organising of collaborative workshops and training sessions tailored for both policy makers and researchers, fostering mutual understanding and improving communication between the two groups.

Additionally, the creation of a dedicated online platform, offering research materials in accessible formats along with interactive features such as Webinars and discussion forums, played a significant role in facilitating continuous engagement. Furthermore, the establishment of knowledge translation networks acted as intermediaries, translating complex research findings into practical policy suggestions. These strategies collectively seemed to enhance accessibility to research articles, encouraged active participation, and ensured that research was transformed into actionable policies, thereby promoting informed decision-making within the education sector of Namibia. One of the respondents’ quotations are shown below: *“One effective strategy involved organizing collaborative workshops and training sessions tailored for both education policy makers and researchers. These events provided a platform for direct interaction, where policy makers gained insights into the research process and researchers understood the policy-making landscape. By fostering mutual understanding, these interactions facilitated better communication and ensured that research findings were presented in formats accessible and relevant to policy makers”* (Respondent 3).

Despite these collaborative efforts as alluded to by the respondents, streamline bureaucratic procedures impede the accessibility to the online article publications (Kalumba et al., 2023).

**Discussions**

The results of this study indicate that restricted access to journals and online databases significantly impedes the policy-making process. The Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture (2022a) also highlights this issue, noting that barriers to accessing current research hinder informed decision-making and educational progress. This study further supports the assertion by Jones and Brown (2018) and Smith et al. (2019) that even when research articles are available, policymakers struggle with comprehension due to complex academic language, insufficient research analysis training, and time constraints. These factors create a utilization gap, widening the divide between research production and policy implementation. The literature also stresses the problem of academic exclusivity and dissemination challenges, which this study confirms. Taylor and Johnson (2017b) and Smith and Brown (2019) for example describe how closed academic networks limit the dissemination of research knowledge to policymakers. The findings of this study align with these observations, demonstrating that this exclusivity isolates policymakers from valuable research data, thereby hindering evidence-based policy development. This study also echoes Jones and Clark (2018) and Adams and Williams (2020), advocating for open access to research articles and capacity-building programs to bridge this gap of exclusivity. The results suggest that promoting open access and encouraging collaborations between researchers and policy makers are essential for effective policy formulation.

Digital literacy challenges, as highlighted by Rieckmann (2017) and Smith and Brown (2018), play a pivotal role in accessing online resources. This study found that inequalities in digital skills among education policymakers significantly hinder their ability to retrieve and utilize research articles. This finding is consistent with Johnson (2020), who points out that limited internet connectivity and inadequate access to computing devices worsen the digital literacy challenges, particularly in regions like Khomas. The results of this study support the need for interventions aimed at improving digital infrastructure and ensuring consistent internet access, as well as ongoing training programs to enhance digital literacy skills among policymakers, as suggested by Anderson (2021). Furthermore, the role of external research initiatives in Namibia, as discussed by the Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture (2022b), is confirmed by the results of this. While external projects provide valuable data, the lack of direct engagement with research articles by local policymakers hampers the depth of understanding necessary for evidence-based policy formulation.

This study supports the literature’s call for collaboration between external organizations and local academics to facilitate comprehensive access to research findings. This approach can enhance policymakers' ability to address context-specific educational challenges effectively. Therefore, addressing these challenges through informed and collaborative efforts between researchers and policymakers can lead to more effective educational policies and ultimately enhance the quality of education in the Khomas region.

**Conclusion**

The study revealed significant challenges faced by education policymakers in accessing and utilizing research articles, pointing towards a critical gap in their digital literacy skills and infrastructure availability. The findings highlighted the urgent need for targeted interventions, such as comprehensive digital literacy workshops, collaborative online platforms, and mentorship programs, to enhance policymakers' abilities to access and critically evaluate research articles. Moreover, the study emphasized the importance of bridging the gap between researchers and policymakers through collaborative workshops and knowledge translation networks, enabling effective communication and understanding between the two groups. These strategies are vital for promoting evidence-based decision-making, fostering informed policy formulation, and ultimately improving the quality of education policies in the Khomas region, Namibia. Addressing the identified challenges and implementing the suggested interventions might play a crucial role in building a dynamic, resilient, and forward-thinking educational environment in the Khomas region.

**Recommendations**

* The Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture and the Ministry of Higher Education, Technology and Innovation (MHETI) should initiate programs to digitalise educational resources and research articles, making them readily accessible in digital formats.
* Both ministries (MoEAC and MHETI) should explore prospects for institutional subscriptions to provide policy makers access to subscription-based journals and other paid resources.
* Both ministries (MoEAC and MHETI) should encourage translation services or support the publication of relevant research articles in local languages to overcome language barriers.
* The institutions of higher learning in Namibia should, organize digital literacy workshops tailored for education policymakers. These should cover basic computer skills, effective use of search engines, critical evaluation of research articles, and data analysis.
* In collaboration with the established institutions of higher learning experts in Namibia, the two ministries (MoEAC and MHETI) should create an interactive online platform offering Webinars, discussion forums, and courses related to digital literacy and research article utilization.
* The institutions of higher learning in Namibia should implement mentorship programs where experienced researchers would guide policymakers on how to conduct research and how to utilize research-based articles to formulate policies.
* The ministries of education should encourage policy makers to actively incorporate evidence-based insights from research articles into policymaking processes.
* Further research could focus on how to measure the impact of enhanced accessibility and digital literacy on the quality of educational policies in Namibia.

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