

## **Factors contributing to poor management and teaching of Life Skills Education in senior secondary schools in //Karas region**

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### **Abstract**

*The purpose of this study was to investigate the factors contributing to poor management and teaching of Life Skills Education in //Kharas educational region in Namibia. The explorative and descriptive design was used within a qualitative approach. The Social Cognitive theory was used as the theoretical framework of the study. The population for this study comprised 126 teachers, and four school principals from four senior secondary schools in //Kharas region. Nine teachers were selected from the three purposefully selected schools in //Kharas Education region. An in-depth semi-structured interviews on face-to-face with the aid of an interview protocol was used to collect data from the principals, HoDs and teachers. Data was analysed using themes which were discussed later. The literature and the theoretical framework were used to compare and contrast the study findings. The study found that the teachers in the //Kharas region did not have adequate resources to use in their teaching of Life Skills Education (LSE) and this was one of the greatest challenges being faced in the teaching and learning of LSE. Specifically, the inadequate resources ranged from books, qualified teachers and sufficient time. The study also established that the teachers in the //Kharas region were not qualified and did not have appropriate training to teach LSE. The study further established that stress was one of the factors that seemed to be affecting some of the learners in the //Kharas region and this was affecting their academic success. The participants indicated that lack of support from the ministry and unavailability of qualified teachers to teach Life Sciences were the main factor influencing poor management and teaching of Life Skills Education in the //Kharas education region. The participants recommended that the ministry needed to support the schools in Life Skills management and teaching and should provide the resources needed to support the teaching of Life Skills Education in the region.*

**Keywords:** *Life Skills Education, resources, curriculum, Social Cognitive Theories, secondary schools, teaching strategies.*

### **Introduction**

Life Skills Education is an important subject in the Namibian education schools even though it is not a promotional subject. This is a subject that prepares learners for the realities of life during and after school so that learners are in a position to manage the life calamities and other situations that may be unbearable in their lives. Some learners come from single parent headed families, some from child headed families especially in this era where most of the parents have died of HIV and AIDS. The Ministry of Education has introduced Life Skills Education as a school subject in schools with the purpose of developing support for learners who are faced with unbearable situations. Aiping (2007) stated that Life Skills Education helped learners to be in a better position to manage

life intolerable situations and requires that teachers are well prepared to disseminate Life Skills Education knowledge and practical management strategies to the learners when such situations present themselves in their lives (Brynard, 2006). The Ministry of Education (MoE) (2002) indicates that Life Skills Education prepared students on what to do and what not to do. This subject is part of the school curriculum and is managed within the school just like any other school subject. Life Skills Education should be treated as equally important as any other school subject even if it is not promotional (Bear, 2010).

Learners without appropriate life management skills are unable to stand the agonizing situations they may find in life when

they grow up (Bear, 2010). It is for this reason that the Namibian Ministry of Education makes use of the school to take this proactive role to prepare all the learners on the realities of what life may present to them as they live their lives. The researchers noted that the treatment which is being given to Life Skills Education as a subject is not the same as other subjects. Some schools in the //Kharas region did not even have this important subject in their schools because the schools and the directorate of education seem to be focused more on promotional subjects which are used to rank them in terms of school performances. Therefore, this study investigated the factors contributing to poor management and teaching of Life Skills Education with the purpose of findings everlasting solutions that can improve on the management and administration of the Life Skills Education (LSE) subject in //Kharas region schools in Namibia.

The Ministry doesn't seem to be putting much focus on the administration of Life Skills Education subjects in schools and they leave it to the schools to make arrangements to solicit for teachers who will teach life skills in their various schools. Since the performance of every school is based on the learner's performance on promotional subjects the focus of most schools is not on Life Skills Education but on promotional subjects like English, Mathematics, Geography, Business Studies and other related academic subjects (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO's), 2009). The schools have neglected a very important subject which prepares learners for the realities of life's unbearable situations and this has led to the graduation of learners who are not well prepared to face life's challenges. This study sought to answer the following research question:

1. What factors contribute to poor management of Life Skills Education in senior secondary schools in the //Kharas region?

### **Theoretical framework and literature review**

The study adopted the Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) by Albert Bandura (Aguinis, 2009). Social Cognitivists believe that the functioning

of human beings is perceived as an interplay of various non-static environmental interplay of personal and environmental factors (Alderman, 2004). For example, how people interpret the results of their own behaviour informs and alters their environments and the personal factors they possess which in turn, inform and alter subsequent behaviour. This is the base of Bandura's (1986) notion of reciprocal determinism, the view that individual factors in the form of cognition, affect biological events, behaviour and environmental influences create interactions that result in a triadic reciprocal. In school for example, social cognitive theory contemplated that teachers have the challenges of improving the academic learning and confidence of the students in their charge. Teachers have the role to keep moulding the behaviours of the learners in their care for them to portray the right behaviours in their academic lives. Life Skills Education plays this pivotal role in preparing the learners for the realities of what life entails. If learners are not provided with the appropriate coping strategies to cope and manage stressful situations in their lives, they end up being wild and may not be successful in their academic endeavours.

Using SCT as a framework, teachers can work to improve their students' emotional states and to correct their faulty self-beliefs and behaviours of themselves (personal factors), cultivating their academic skills and self-regulatory practices (behaviour), and alter the school classroom structures that may work to demoralize students' success. Teachers at //Kharas secondary schools can therefore use SCT as a framework to combat any stress that might be affecting some of the learners in the //Kharas region to improve their academic success. SCT is deeply rooted in a view of human agency in which behaviours and personalities are agents proactively engaged in their own improvement and can make things happen by their engagements (Yang, 2009). If teachers at //Kharas secondary schools felt that the teaching of Life Skills is not their responsibility, they would not prepare relevant and suitable teaching and learning materials for Life Skills Education as they would feel that it is an extra work. It was anticipated that if teachers considered Life Skills to be serious, they would motivate the learners to like it and learners would acquire Life Skills to cope with

body changes for example skills for knowing and living with oneself, skills of knowing and living with others and skills of effective decision- making (Alderman, 2004). Students would learn skills such as self-awareness, self-esteem, coping with emotion, assertiveness, effective communication and negotiation skills and how to interact with others. The outcome of these skills would be the reduction of teenage pregnancies abortion, HIV and AIDs infections, school dropouts, poor performance, drug and substance abuse and strikes in schools. And on the other hand, if the employment is not effective, all these will be widespread. Thus, it was important to finding out the factors contributing to poor management of Life Skills Education in senior secondary schools in the //Kharas region.

The teaching of Life Skills Education is influenced by several factors. Teachers who teach Life Skills should have a positive attitude towards Life Skills Education (LSE). If their attitude is not positive, they will not see the need to teach this subject and are likely not to put any effort in it. Berber (2012) argued that attitude plays a crucial role in pushing individuals to embark on any responsibility. Attitude is also built on perception and how one perceives that responsibility as being relevant or not. Teachers who have great respect for the future of their learners will always have a positive attitude in teaching learners LSE because they know how important such a subject is in the lives of the learners they teach (Aipinge, 2007). Another important aspect that influences whether or not LSE will be offered is the availability of the relevant skills in teaching it. Every teacher who is in secondary schools has specialised in a particular subject which he can teach with ease. If a teacher is not trained to teach a particular subject his competence in teaching that subject will be poor and may not want to teach it or else he/she will embarrass himself by not delivering to the expectations of the learners being taught (Berber, 2012). Most of the teachers in the Namibian schools are not trained to teach LSE and yet most schools entrust them with the responsibility of teaching it. They are likely to use the time for teaching LSE for their own subject of expertise.

According to Cole (2000), in Namibia and elsewhere, teachers teach their learners to

pass the exams and be promoted to the next grade. Teachers do not enjoy teaching just for the sake of teaching since they want to assess their own successes and weaknesses. LSE is a non-promotional subject in Namibia and teachers teach it just to prepare learners for the life to come without an immediate feedback of their efforts in the teaching process (Becker, Bruhs, Harrings, & Massdorp, 2005). Teaching strategies in LSE make teachers fail to commit themselves to the noble goal of teaching LSE. In most schools that offer LSE, there is no appropriate curriculum which teachers need to follow, and there are no appropriate objectives that have to be achieved in the teaching of LSE (Chilenje & Mwanza, 2012). This makes teachers feel that the subject is not relevant and will not give their maximum effort in teaching it. Teachers need to be supported by the Ministry in providing the relevant teaching resources for any subject. If such needed support is not forthcoming, whoever is entrusted with the responsibility of teaching any subject will not give his/her best (Cole, 2000). Most schools in Namibia are not well supported with the resources to teach LSE and yet they are supposed to teach it with enthusiasm (Bear, 2010). This makes these teachers fail to treat LSE as an important subject in the school curriculum. The support needs to come from the Ministry, the district, circuit and the school. In most cases the Ministry does not provide experienced teachers, and the relevant books and other materials to use in the teaching of LSE in Namibia (Chilenje & Mwanza, 2012).

### **Methodology**

The study adopted a descriptive and exploratory research methodology and a qualitative approach. Qualitative research designs are associated with words, language and experiences and refer to inductive, holistic oriented methods (Soeters, Shields, & Rietjens, 2014). By utilizing this approach, the researchers were able to comprehend and explain the factors contributing to poor management of Life Skills Education in the various senior secondary schools in the //Kharas educational region. A qualitative research approach which was used in this study allowed the researchers to explore and describe these factors. The exploratory research study

allowed the researchers to investigate a phenomena (the factors contributing to poor management and teaching of Life Skills Education in //Kharas educational region) in order to identify its variables (Yin, 1989). In this study, exploratory and descriptive qualitative research designs were used whereby the factors contributing to poor management of Life Skills Education was explored and described through in-depth face to face interviews. In- depth face to face interviews were found to be more suitable as the researchers was able to obtain rich information about issues that a participant might be reluctant to describe on paper (Taylor, 2009). The population for this study comprised of all teachers (they are 126 in total) in senior secondary schools of //Kharas Region, all school principals (they are 5 in total) from all 5 senior secondary schools in the //Kharas region. In this study stratified purposeful sampling strategy was used to select two social sciences teachers and one principal from each of the three senior secondary schools in the //Kharas region. Therefore, the sample comprised 9 participants (since once school did not grant the researchers the permission to conduct the study).

One research instrument was used to collect data for this study. This was an in-depth face to face interview. The in-depth face to face interviews were carried out and the estimated duration of one interview session was 5-10 minutes. In other words, the participants for the study provided first-hand information regarding the various factors contributing to poor management of Life Skills Education in the concerned four Secondary schools in the //Kharas region. Most importantly, this instrument allowed for clarification of both questions and responses clearing out the possibilities of misunderstandings and misinterpretation of both questions and responses. In addition to that the use of face-to-face interviews allowed the researchers to probe for more information from the participants and also to record the body language of the participants. The audiotape recordings were transcribed verbatim for the purpose of data analysis.

### Findings and discussion

Based on the interview results of this study, the researchers developed some themes. Table 1 presents the themes which emanated from the interviews with the participating members.

**Table 1: Emerging themes with their explanations**

Theme	Explanation
1.0 Inadequate resources	Schools lacking the necessary resources to support the teaching of LSE
2.0 Children failing to cope with life challenges	Lack of support for the children's' wellbeing
3.0 Need for support from the ministry	Lack of support from the Ministry affects effective teaching that should take place in schools

Any teacher who embarks into teaching requires the necessary resources to use in their teaching. Without resources there is no meaningful teaching that can take place. Inadequate time and material resources inhibit teachers from performing their work effectively (Chilenje & Mwanza, 2012). Teachers need books, posters, etc. to support their teaching. To make an employee highly productive and efficient, it is important to prepare them with the right tools (Hamukoto, 2016). Ignoring the potential benefits of resource availability in the school may affect the performance of the learners. Most of the participants in the study indicated the lack of

resources as one of the factors inhibiting their management and administration of LSE in the //Kharas region. The following statements substantiate this theme:

*“We have no proper materials to use that are meant specifically for Life Skills Education in our school. The textbook which is there doesn't seem to have much information needed to teach the subject”.* (Teacher D).

*“The schools don't have enough resources to support the teaching and learning of Life Skills Education”.* (Teacher B).

The findings above agree with the findings by Aiping (2007) who stated that schools need to have adequate resources e.g., books, classrooms, libraries or other academic materials etc. for them to do their work. If teachers do not have adequate material resources, they will not be able to be productive in their work. This will impede the way they deliberate on their work. Teachers at //Kharas region did not have appropriate training to teach LSE. They were just appointed to teach it based on their own experiences with teaching in general. The following quote supports this assertion:

*“I specialized in the teaching of languages but not LSE but I have been teaching LSE for several years now but I don’t seem to see the purpose of teaching this subject which is not even examined”.* (Teacher A).

*“I’m teaching Mathematics but there are teachers at my school who have specialized in other subjects who are responsible for teaching LSE. What I have discovered is that if they are teaching another subject which is promotional they may use the LSE time to advance the teaching of their subject and neglect LSE”.* (Teacher F).

The above findings concur with the earlier findings by Wolfaardt (2015) who stated that schools should deploy teachers according to their areas of specialisation for them to produce good results in their teaching. This will help the teachers to apply the appropriate pedagogical aspects and content in the right way. The introduction of LSE is the Ministry of Education’s response to the challenges facing school going children (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO’s), 2009). Children face numerous challenges in their wellbeing. They face the effects of HIV and AIDS, joblessness, poor sanitation, non-supportive family networks etc. Schools are being used as agents of change to narrow the gap of challenges facing children today (Brown, 2009). Families need to provide a safe and nurturing environment for children; families need to be resilient; strong and equitable relationships need to exist within the family that are based on respect for diversity; the

spiritual well-being of the family’s needs to be nurtured; and families need to sustainably manage and protect their natural assets (World Health Organisation, 2002).

The current environment doesn’t seem to provide enough of the most needed support for the children’s’ wellbeing and the school has to play a role in mitigating on the children’s challenges (Ministry of Education (MoE), 2002). The MoE is also rendering its unwavering commitment to this noble goal by providing LSE (Ministry of Health and Social Services (MoHSS), 2016). It has been noted that children are engaging in the taking of drugs and alcohol abuse, ultimately drop out of school, as they succumb to the calamities and catastrophes facing life today (World Vision (WV), 2003). These challenges continue to erode, and derogate the lives of children in the //Kharas region. The schools have become overburdened by such challenges and teachers are now assuming a proactive role in helping learners with coping strategies. Participants in the study indicated that there has been an increase in challenges facing children today- a situation that has affected the school environment. The following thought supports this statement:

*“Most of our learners are dropping out of school in //Kharas Region as they indulge in drugs and alcohol uptake”.* (Teacher D).

*“There are more than hundred learners who have dropped out of school today as a result of drug and alcohol”.* (Teacher G).

These findings corroborate with the earlier findings of the MoHSS (2016) who stated that life challenges facing children today require dynamic solutions from various role players e.g., the school, the church and the family. Previously it was the family’s role to teach children morals but with the incessantly breaking down of family networks other role players have to intervene to rescue the plight of the children (World Health Organisation, 2002; Namibian National Planning Commission, 2005). Stress was one of the factors that seemed to be affecting some of the learners in the //Kharas region and this was affecting their academic success as stated by the participants

in the study. To validate this claim, the following emanated from the participants:

*“Some learners are stressed in their home environment and some at school by other learners and they have no coping strategies since they are lacking the most needed LSE that equips them with coping mechanisms”.* (Teacher G).

*“There are learners from other tribes who have suffered tribalism and discrimination for a long time and such learners are failing to cope well with their studies and a few of such have long since dropped out of school”.* (Teacher C).

The above findings agree with those from Wolfaardt (2015) who indicated that one of the roles of LSE was to teach learners on strategies to handle stressful situations in their lives. If learners are harassed, this makes them feel unloved, and uncared for. This greatly affects their lives and may end up dropping out of school. The ministry needs to support all the public schools and to monitor all the teaching and learning that takes place in the schools (Aipinge, 2007). If the teaching and learning is not carefully monitored teachers will not deliberate their duties the way they should. Clusters managers need to visit schools and work together with the Head of Departments to assess if there is meaningful learning taking place in the Namibian classes for LSE. The ministry needs to provide well qualified teachers for LSE and should always make sure that these teachers are well supported in terms of the teaching materials to use such as books, and proper curriculum and syllabi to follow. Participants in the study felt that they needed more support from the Ministry of Education so as to improve the teaching and learning of Life Skills Education. The following quotes support this claim:

*“We need high level ministerial support in the teaching of LSE in our //Kharas regional School”.* (Teacher A).

*“There is poor supervision of Life Skills Education teaching and learning in our schools. The Ministry need to do more in*

*supporting the schools in //Kharas region”.* (Teacher G).

These findings corroborate with the previous findings by Aipinge (2007) who indicated that lack of support from the ministry of education affects effective teaching that should take place in schools. The ministry needs to support schools in all aspects if the education system is to be sustained.

### **Conclusion**

The study found that the factors that were contributing to poor management of Life Skills Education in senior secondary schools in the //Kharas region included; inadequate resources, children failing to cope with life challenges and a lack of support from the ministry. The study revealed that teachers in the //Kharas region did not have adequate resources to use in their teaching of LSE and this is one of the greatest challenges being faced in the teaching and learning of LSE. Specifically, the inadequate resources ranged from books, qualified teachers and insufficient time. The study also found that teachers in the //Kharas region were not qualified and did not have appropriate training to teach LSE. They were just appointed to teach it based on their own experiences with teaching in general. The study also unveiled that poor management and teaching of Life Skills Education in //Kharas region is making children fail to cope with the challenges of life in //Kharas region. The study further discovered stress as one of the factors that seem to be affecting some of the learners in //Kharas region and this is affecting their academic success as stated by the participants in this study. The study further found there is need for the ministry to support the teachers in the //Kharas region in the teaching and learning of Life Skills Education.

### **Recommendations**

#### ***Recommendations to the Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture***

The Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture is the one responsible for managing and supervising all educational proceedings in //Kharas region. Therefore:

- There is need to fully support the schools in //Kharas region by providing well

qualified teachers for Life Skills Education.

- There is a need to make Life Skills Education a promotional subject so that it can be treated just like any other promotional subject in the schools.
- There is need to collaborate with the family and church networks to assist children to cope with life challenges.
- Life Skills Education teaching should be the responsibility of all teachers in the schools and there is need to have an in-service training for teachers in the field on how to teach Life Skills Education.

#### **Recommendations to the school principals**

The school principals need to:

- Improve their supervision of the teaching for Life Skills Education that transpires in their various schools.

#### **Recommendations to the parents**

Parents are the custodians of all the children in schools. Therefore:

- There is need for parents to be educated on ways to help children cope with life challenges rather than leaving this responsibility in the hands of the school alone.

#### **Recommendations for further research**

This study was done in //Kharas educational region, in Namibia. Therefore, studies need to be done in other Namibian regions to:

- Make an evidence based comparison of how other schools in other regions are managing and teaching Life Skills Education.
- Investigate how learners who are victims of poor management and administration of Life Skills Education can be assisted in their lives.

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