An investigation of literacy and numeracy skills at lower primary phase in Namibian schools

NIED

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Acronyms and abbreviations

BETD  Basic Education Teachers Diploma
CPD   Continuous Professional Development
ESL   English Second Language
L1    First Language
L2    Second Language
LPE   Lower Primary Education
MBEC  Ministry of Education and Culture
MoE   Ministry of Education
MOI   Medium of Instruction
MPCC  Ministerial Planning and Coordinating Committee (Ministry of Education)
NELP  New England Literature Programme
NERA  Namibia Educational Research Association
NESE  National External School Evaluation
NIED  National Institute for Educational Development
SACMEQ Southern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality
USAID United States Agency for International Development
THE EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A: The statement of the problem

A number of studies done in Namibia have indicated low levels of literacy and numeracy skills among learners in the lower grades (grades 1-4). The low levels of literacy and numeracy are carried over to further phase levels. It is evident from this pattern that, the low literacy and numeracy skills negatively impact the teaching and learning and render the education system ineffective. Various approaches used in teaching literacy, such as phonics approaches in teaching reading, Montessori, and Molteno programmes, among many attempts, used in Namibia schools to improve reading, have proved ineffective bearing the test outcomes in literacy and numeracy. Apart from mere speculations and concrete evidences on the poor or low literacy and numeracy competency status among learners in Namibia, the root causes of low levels of literacy and numeracy skills among learners and the practices of various schools in teaching the two key areas has not been explored in depth.

B: Research Objectives

- To investigate and identify problems, discover the main factors that influence learners’ results and achievements in literacy and numeracy.
- To make appropriate and practical recommendations on the best practices and approaches to literacy and numeracy teaching and learning.
- To compare the best practices vis-à-vis the poor practices in teaching literacy and numeracy in Namibian schools.

C: The research questions

- To what extent does the curriculum for grades 1-4 promote literacy and numeracy skills?
- To what extent are the teaching methods/approaches/programmes for lower primary appropriate in accelerating literacy and numeracy skills?
- How adequate are the teacher education programmes in preparing prospective teachers with competencies in developing literacy and numeracy skills?
- Does the teaching through a particular medium of instruction influence attainment of competency in literacy and numeracy?
- To what extent do parents contribute to the development of literacy and numeracy skills?
- Are there any differences in teaching of literacy and numeracy among schools with best practices versus schools with poor practices in Namibia?

D: The population and sampling methods of this study

Methodological Approaches

This study adopts a research design that combines both qualitative and quantitative approaches. Semi-structured interviews were conducted mainly to triangulate and clarify some issues arising from the survey, as well as documents that were analysed. Similarly, a case study method was used to explore and compare practices and approaches used in teaching literacy and numeracy in best and poor schools. This provided an in-depth study of the best practices of developing literacy and numeracy skills and language of instruction in those schools.
Units of analysis
The target groups of this study comprised of long serving and novice lower primary teachers, lower primary advisory teachers, lower primary heads of departments (HODs), lower primary lecturers, principals, learners and parents.

Population and Sampling
Data were collected from all thirteen regions of Namibia. A total of 52 schools, 4 from each region were selected using convenient and purposeful sampling techniques. For the purpose of exploring the teaching of literacy and numeracy and further compare the best practices versus poor practices, 5 case studies were conducted. The schools included in the case study were purposeful selected by using self-evidence and popularity in literacy and numeracy teaching at lower primary. In each school, all lower primary teachers including the principals and the HODs of lower primary completed a questionnaire. In each school, achievement tests of literacy and numeracy were administered to Grades 2 and 5 learners.

Data collection methods
The following data collection methods were used:

1. Survey
2. Semi-structured Interviews
3. Document Analysis
4. Testing

Data collection instruments
The following instruments were used to collect data:

1. Survey questionnaire
2. Achievement Tests
3. Semi-structured Interview schedule

Data analysis
The quantitative data were entered, cleaned and analysed using the Statistical Packet for the Social Sciences (SPSS). The field notes were categorised into patterns and themes. Data from documents were analysed and categorised for reporting.

E: Findings

The Grade 1 Literacy Test

Grade 1 literacy assessment consisted of three tests, namely, reading words, reading phrases and a written test. The reading of words focused on word recognition, ability to read words particularly accurate pronunciation and fluency. The assessment of word reading was out of 30 marks. The benchmark was set at an average score of 15/30 on which national and regional averages and schools’ performances were measured against. The score below 15/30 was considered to be below the set benchmark and thus translated as poor and the above 15/30 rated as good performance
The phrase reading was based on fluent reading. The phrases were calculated out of 50 marks. The benchmark was set at an average score of 25/50 on which national and regional averages and schools’ performances were measured against. The score below 25/50 was considered to be below the set benchmark.

The last literacy assessment activity was a written test. The test activity assessed learners on vocabulary, spelling and writing skill. This activity was calculated out of 15 marks. The benchmark was set at an average score of 7.5/15 on which national and regional averages and schools’ performances were measured against. The score below 7.5/15 was considered to be below the set benchmark.

**The grade 1 literacy assessment outcomes**

Generally, the performance of learners was way below the benchmark in all three tests. However, some regions scored above the national average while some schools scored above the regional and national averages. Learners from urban schools performed well in the literacy test compared to semi-urban and rural schools. The assessment of reading skills shows that schools that had English or Afrikaans, scored higher in reading skills compared to schools using other medium of instruction. Furthermore, learners who were taught through Afrikaans followed by Khoekhoegowab did well in literacy assessment test compared to other remaining languages. Looking at the type and location of schools, the results show that private schools did well in word and phrase reading and test compared to semi-private and government schools. Schools in urban areas performed well compared to schools in semi urban and rural areas.

**The Grade 1 Numeracy Test**

Grade 1 numeracy assessment focused on number concept development, problem solving, computation, measurement, geometry and data handling. It should be noted that though the activity (test) was in English, questions and instructions were explained to learners in the language used as the medium of instruction in their respective classrooms. An average benchmark score of 12.5/25 was used to distinguish between good and poor performing learners in schools, region and national average scores.

**The grade 1 numeracy assessment outcomes**

The performance of the learners in numeracy was by far much better compared to literacy with a national average score of 19.7/25 which was above the set benchmark score. More impressing was that all 13 regions and schools scored above the average benchmark. There were no major differences observed in terms of the location of the school. There were only slight differences among rural, urban and semi-urban schools, with urban schools scoring slightly above the two. Similarly, the performance of learners did not differ much in terms of the type of school, however, private and semi-private schools were slightly above government schools. Although the numeracy results were slightly different between schools using different medium of instruction, it was apparent that instruction in numeracy was more effective in some language of instruction such as English and Afrikaans.

**The grade 4 literacy test**

The grade 4 literacy test comprised of a reading comprehension component and a reading exercise. The reading comprehension component tested learners’ understanding. This test was out of 20 marks, and the benchmark was set on 10/20, and a learner who obtained below 10 was rated unsatisfactory. And the reading exercise was done to test fluency and accuracy reading competencies among learners in Grade 4, and was out of 85 marks and a learner who scored below 42.5/85 was rated poor.
The grade 4 numeracy test
The grade 4 numeracy assessment focussed on number concept development, problem solving, computation, measurement, geometry and data handling. An average benchmark score of 20/40 was used to distinguish between good and poor performing learners in schools, region and national average scores, and a learner who scored below 20 was rated poor.

The grade 4 literacy and numeracy assessment outcomes
The results of literacy assessment outcomes showed that 60% of the learners in the sampled schools scored above the national average scores of 57 compared to 40% of the learners who scored below the national average. This implied that more than a third or close to a half of the learners experienced difficulties in reading accurately and fluently.

It was further found that learners who were taught through English as a medium of instruction were more competent in literacy and numeracy compared to those taught through other medium of instructions. Comparing the literacy and numeracy assessment outcomes based on school type, it was evident that learners in private schools were competent than those in semi private and government schools. In terms of school location, urban schools did well in literacy and numeracy assessment compared to semi urban and rural schools. It was furthermore observed, schools that used mother tongue instruction that was home language of the learners experienced less difficulties in literacy and numeracy compared to those that used a medium of instruction that was not the predominant language.

The effective use of mother tongue medium of instruction in teaching literacy and numeracy was boosted by the number of learners in the classroom. The fewer the learners are in the classroom the more effective the medium of instruction. Accuracy and fluency reading in English was influenced by the medium of instruction used and the child’s home language. There were fluctuated results on reading comprehension. More than half of the schools did well in reading comprehension. The remaining third and above of the learners in schools did not do well in reading comprehension; implying difficulties among learners in reading comprehension.

Causes of poor performance in literacy and numeracy
The differences in speech sounds or sounding of alphabets between English and mother tongue make it difficult for learners to spell, pronounce and read in English. Learners experienced difficulties reading words with two or more consonants and blended words. Those who were taught through mother tongue instruction from grades 1-3 experienced difficulties switching from the influence of the mother tongue in reading fluently and accurately certain words in English and understanding some terminologies in Mathematics. It was further found that some teachers were not competent to teach the mother tongue (L1) effectively or use mother tongue as medium of instruction as a tool to develop the second language (L2). In addition, the contact time of the first languages (L1) was more than that of the second languages (L2).

Learners could read individual letters phonetically but failed to read the whole word. This could be caused by overemphasis of phonics teaching without contextualising the whole word or using a combination of techniques used in teaching reading. As a result, learners recognised certain words and read any resembled word from the prior knowledge without analysing the content of the word. For example, learners could read the word ‘joy’ as ‘enjoy’ and ‘whose’ as ‘choose’. There were evidences of severe reading problems among learners who confused letters (m and w) and numbers (6 and 9). Lastly, lack of mental arithmetic, knowledge of multiplication tables, and the four basic operations hindered the attainment of competencies in numeracy.

Factors that promote the development of literacy and numeracy skills

Literacy:
It was found that learners did not have the culture of reading and that schools did not promote a reading culture. However, some schools encouraged learners to use English on school grounds. It was further noted that
allocating sufficient contact time for second language teaching, e.g. English, would have promoted literacy development compared to other languages taught as first languages in which much time was allocated. In addition, phonemic awareness among learners was noted as essential since knowledge on the sound of each letter of the alphabet and ability to sound them phonetically enabled learners to acquire literacy competencies. It was further noted that learners need to be exposed to print (posters, charts and other print materials on the walls of the class) to be able to acquire literacy competencies.

It was noted that the use of English as medium of instruction from grade 1, especially in acquiring literacy and numeracy skills, was more effective compared to mother tongue teaching. It implied, as opinion held, that the transition from mother tongue teaching to English should start as early as grade 2 or 3 to effect the development of literacy or practise bilingual instruction at lower grades. The teachers preferred subject teaching over class teaching in lower grades, most specifically in Mathematics and English.

**Numeracy:**
Knowledge of mental Arithmetic for example, the multiplication table, four basic operations (+, -, ÷, ×), mathematical concepts and terminologies promote numeracy competencies. It was noted that integrating literacy and numeracy skills across all subjects would boost the development of numeracy among learners at lower primary.

**Teachers and school managers:**
Continuous Professional Development (CPD) for teachers and managers of the schools, team work among teachers at school and cluster level whereby they plan together, practise team teaching, and model lessons to each other, provision of Lower Primary HOD to each school, and provision of learning support to struggling learners promote literacy and numeracy competencies among learners at lower primary.

Furthermore, quality teaching specifically whereby: teachers plan their lessons sufficiently and effectively; learners are engaged in challenging activities; teachers cater for different ability groups/ learning styles (approach, activities, methods and strategies); teachers use concrete materials; reading corners are provided/created in lower primary classrooms; fellow learners help one another; slow and struggling learners are attended to; teachers teaching at the lower grades are specialists, competent and committed; teachers have an acceptable command of English and or other languages; and teachers have appropriate knowledge (Subject Matter Knowledge and Pedagogical Content Knowledge) and can sound and teach phonics, provide compensatory and remedial teaching, handle learners with special needs, etc impact on the competencies in acquiring literacy and numeracy skills.

It was further found that repetition of grades with learning support was effective in enhancing competencies in literacy and numeracy. It was noted that doing away with the transfer of learners who did not achieve basic competencies boost literacy and numeracy skills by repeating. Of equally importance was doing away with the platoon system by building more classrooms.

**The shortcomings of the Lower Primary Curriculum in promoting literacy and numeracy skills**
Generally, teachers felt that to some extent the lower primary curriculum promoted the development of numeracy and literacy skills, however, they found it lacking in a number of areas. It was noted that the prescribed textbooks were too many while some did not correlate with the curriculum. The curriculum lacked the grammar component and the content was not relevant to all learners in different locations as it was relevant and familiar to learners in town schools. Some schools perceived that the amount of content was too much for grade 1. There were critics on the abolishment of handwriting as a subject. Abolishment of handwriting especially in government schools negatively affected the development of literacy and numeracy skills. Private school maintained handwriting as a subject despite the curriculum prescriptions.
The curriculum contained inconsistencies terminologies whereby in Grades 1 to 3 learners used different terminologies for the four operation signs and this makes it difficulties to make a switch at Grade 4. There were too many assessment tasks in Grades 1-4 making it difficult for teachers to concentrate on teaching. The absence of the School Readiness Programme and Pre-primary weakened the foundation on literacy and numeracy.

**The shortcomings of teacher education programmes in equipping teachers with relevant skills**

Although there was evident satisfaction among teachers on the extent to which teacher education programmes equipped teachers with relevant skills. It was evident according to teachers’ opinions that some training programmes were weak in a number of areas. The school managers indicated that some BETD In-set and Preset graduates experienced difficulties to teach phonics which was essential for promoting literacy and numeracy skills. Graduates lacked knowledge on letter sounds (phonics) and subject matter knowledge in addition to having low English proficiency skills. Due to the training being more theoretical, the graduates failed to apply what they had learnt at colleges.

Opinions held by the BETD Preset and Inset graduates about the programme were that the programme did not equip them with phonic knowledge, vocabulary and mother tongue teaching skills. Furthermore, the training was too theoretical and had shortcomings in specific areas. For example, it did not prepare them sufficiently regarding multi-grade and compensatory teaching, handling learners with special needs and emotional problems. The training programme did not provide teachers with an opportunity to specialise in a subject, as such lower primary teachers were not English and Mathematics specialists. Due to this the training programme did not equip teachers with in-depth subject knowledge in mother tongue, English and Mathematics.

**Best methods and strategies of developing literacy skills**

It was found that schools used different teaching approaches to literacy. The most popular approach was phonic method followed by “Look and Say”, a combination approach and whole language approach while Molteno and THRASS were noted in schools were the programme were piloted. Private schools used supplementary reading series such as ‘Letter Land’ and ‘Beehive’. To enhance teaching and learning teachers used supplementary strategies such as: games, rhymes, songs, storytelling, and poetry writing’ etc.

**Best practices of developing literacy and numeracy skills**

Schools held the opinion that the best practice in promoting literacy and numeracy competencies among learners at lower primary was integrating literacy and numeracy activities across the curriculum. While teaching, correcting learners’ pronunciation, engaging learners in vocabulary building exercises and spelling competitions were indicated effective too. In managing teaching and learning, schools set aside a period for teaching just phonics or sounding especially for grade 1, and the establishment of a reading week that was fully devoted to reading. For the purpose of motivating learners to read and develop a reading culture, some schools hoisted holiday reading adventures in clusters and made reading compulsory to all learners in a school.

**Determinants of school performance in order of popularity**

It was noted that schools that performed well in literacy and numeracy demonstrated knowledge on effective teaching approaches to literacy and numeracy, had a composition of experienced, competent and committed teachers. Other determinants of school performances were: availability of resources; support at home or parental involvement; school location; pre-primary education provision; good management; small class size; learners’ commitment; home-school proximity and target setting.
Case Studies

The summary of the results of key competencies in teaching literacy and numeracy in the case study schools showed that teachers demonstrated more weaknesses than strengths in lesson delivery, time management and learning support. On the other hand, teachers demonstrated more strengths than weaknesses in learners’ engagement, assessment and evaluation during lesson, teaching approaches and lesson conclusion.

Best practices in case study schools in literacy and numeracy

The findings pertaining to best practices in the case study schools showed that the management especially the principals were familiar with the approaches used in teaching literacy and numeracy at the lower grades. In addition, there were clear supervisory roles. The schools were comparably well-resourced. Teachers used appropriate and suitable teaching approaches. There were supplementary reading series and teachers had extensive knowledge on how to use effective reader series and text books. It was found that the continuum chain of monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning from the management, teachers, and parents at home had a positive effect on literacy and numeracy skill development among learners. The schools had internal CPD programmes that boosted teachers’ subject and pedagogic knowledge as such, teachers had impressive teaching knowledge, were innovative and highly motivated. The lessons planning, preparation and presentation were tangible and evidence of high level of learners’ and parental involvement.

Worst practices in case study schools in literacy and numeracy

Schools that did not do well in literacy and numeracy, the management had no knowledge on approaches used in teaching literacy and numeracy at the lower grades as such; they did not monitor teaching and the learning process. There was evidence of low level of participation among management, teachers, parents and learners in learning. The schools were poorly resourced. Teachers lacked innovation and motivation. The motto to compete among learners at school and beyond was low as schools did not have programmes that encourage competition among learners within the schools and outside. Learners in these schools did not take books home as they are kept at school by teachers.

F: Recommendations

There is urgent need of revisiting the language in education policy working document. If mother tongue instruction is used in the lower grades, English should be phased in as medium of instruction as earlier as grade 2 or 3. The use of English as medium of instruction from grade 1 will solve the complication that learners are faced with in grade 4 when transcending from mother tongue instruction to English. Due to the fact that not all mother tongues are offered, research on other languages that are widely spoken but not developed enough to be used as medium of instruction should be conducted.

It is strongly recommended that all lower primary teachers should be qualified to teach at this phase level and competent enough to lay a strong foundation in literacy and numeracy. In addition lower primary teachers should specialise in a language and mathematics. Furthermore, the two subjects should be conducted on subject teaching rather than class teaching basis. To enable learners to excel well in literacy and numeracy, pre-primary education is prerequisite. This goes hand in hand with teacher-learner ratio. It was noted that the smaller the number of learners in the classroom, the effective the teaching of literacy and numeracy. To enable effective teaching of literacy and numeracy, schools should be well and adequately resourced in terms of materials, human resources and physical facilities. Resources (textbooks, teachers’ manuals and guides, syllabi etc.) should be distributed to schools on time, and ensure that only up-to-date documents are in use.
Essential personnel such as school counsellors and lower primary advisory teachers should be increased to provide the necessary support to teachers at school. Furthermore, all schools should have lower primary head of departments who are conversant with the approaches in teaching literacy and numeracy at lower primary and capable of mentoring teachers at lower primary in all subject areas specifically literacy and numeracy.

The curriculum developers should ensure that second languages time allocation is at par with first languages and develop the two languages at the same time and level. This is in one way in line with the bilingual education philosophy. Importantly, handwriting should be re-instated as a subject, as the integration of this skill across subjects has proved ineffective as some schools ignored this component unlike the case when it was a subject.

In order to affect teaching and learning, the number of assessments in grades 1-4 should be reduced to allow teachers to affect the teaching and learning process rather than spending time on administration. Assessment outcomes should be used effectively to improve teaching and learning. Learners who have not achieved the basic competencies should be given learning support to address the learning backlogs.

Continuous Professional Development (CPD) should be the order of the day in improving lower primary teachers’ competencies in teaching literacy and numeracy. Adopt the existing workshop training model that is based on traditional cascade model to capacity building model whereby the training needs are based on the needs of the teachers at school grassroots. Regional CPD Co-ordination Committees should coordinate and facilitate training in collaboration with the trainers from the central institutions.

Teaching materials are essential tools in enhancing teaching and learning. It was found that the available text books were worrisome in terms of content and quality. Textbook evaluators should ensure that textbooks correlate with the curriculum. The selected or recommended text books should be comprehensive enough to include grammar and should be localised to benefit all learners. In addition, teachers should educate learners on how to handle books and allow learners to take books home.

Teachers should have appropriate subject matter knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge. Addition to that, teachers should have the ability to handle multi-grade classes, compensatory teaching and wider knowledge of learners with special needs. Teacher training institutions should pay particular attention to the development of English language proficiency among the graduates and provide CPD to those already in the field but lack competencies in teaching literacy and numeracy or using English and mother tongue in teaching other subjects. In addition to this, schools should promote the culture of reading and effective use of English all the time. It is further recommended that lower primary teachers should be specialists in English and Mathematics.

The inequalities that exist between urban and rural schools need to be known and addressed. There is a need to understand what makes private schools or other schools do better in literacy and numeracy. Schools that demonstrate good practices should model the practices to schools that are not doing well. This could be done through visits, exchange programmes and documentation.

School managers should supervise and monitor activities in the school to ensure that effective teaching and learning takes place and clear supervision roles are evident. Programmes that promote literacy and numeracy in lower grades should be encouraged in schools. The inspectors and advisory teachers should monitor and evaluate teaching and learning and render on-site support to schools.

Teachers should give attention to different speech sounds and phonemes that exist in English and other languages that are used as media of instruction at lower primary (1-3). Lower primary classrooms should be decorated with posters that expose learners to print to enable learners to experience text print every time and on
a daily basis. The four basic operations should be fully understood and attention should be given to mental arithmetic, e.g. multiplication tables and mathematical concepts and terminologies.

The teaching of literacy and numeracy should not only be limited to one or two particular approaches, a combination of approaches is encouraged while emphasizing on the most effective approach to yield better results. In implementing different approaches, the learners’ ability should be kept into consideration. Teachers should use different approaches and methods, design different learning activities in order to cater for different learners’ ability groups and learning styles. Teachers are encouraged to use concrete materials to enable learners to link with reality. Teachers are encouraged to create reading corners in every lower primary class.

Team work should be encouraged whereby teachers plan together, practice team teaching and model lessons to each other. Learners who experience difficulties in literacy and numeracy should be provided with learning support during class or after school. Parents should be educated on their role as primary partners in education and on how to assist their children at home. Parents’ participation in school should boost the development of literacy and numeracy among learners at schools.
SECTION ONE

BACKGROUND INFORMATION AND LITERATURE

1.1 Introduction
The political shift from apartheid to a new political dispensation in 1990 saw widespread changes on the Namibian educational landscape. Official texts such as *Towards Education for All* (Ministry of Basic Education and Culture, 1993) outline the key changes that were envisaged with a clear focus on high quality education intended to promote learning outcomes. However, despite the radical overhaul of the inherited education system, there is still a growing concern that too many children leave both the lower and upper primary education without the necessary skills in reading, writing and mathematics. As a result, a Ministerial Planning and Coordinating Committee (MPCC) of the Ministry of Education resolved to establish a task Force that would investigate and identify problems, discover the main factors that influence learners’ results and achievements in reading, writing and mathematics, and make appropriate and practical recommendations on the best practice and approaches to literacy and numeracy teaching and learning so that the quality of education at the primary level may be improved.

To be able to get a glimpse of literacy and numeracy development at lower primary, review of relevant literature exploring key factors that influence learners’ results and achievement in reading, writing and mathematics was necessary. The review of literacy and numeracy teaching and learning focuses on:

- Essential terminologies used in the study
- The role of literacy and numeracy
- Key factors that influence learners’ results and achievements in reading, writing and mathematics.
- Review of findings from prior studies on reading in Namibia

1.2 The essential terminologies used in the study
Numeracy is concerned with using, communicating and making sense of mathematics in a range of everyday applications; the ability to explore, hypothesise and reason logically and to use a variety of methods to solve problems (Booker, G.et al, 1997).

Literacy is the ability to read, write and use written language appropriately in a range of contexts for different purposes and to communicate with a variety of audiences. Reading and writing when integrated with speaking, listening, viewing and critical thinking, constitute valued aspects of literacy in modern life (MCEETYA Benchmarking Taskforce, 1997).

1.3 The role of literacy and numeracy
Research has shown that “if a student’s reading literacy level is low; in most cases it automatically implies difficulties in the acquisition of several other subjects, consequently obtaining education in general’ (Ozola, A.G.A, 2008). Similarly, in the school education, numeracy is a fundamental component of learning, discourse and critique across all areas of the curriculum. It involves the disposition to use a combination of:
- Understanding mathematical concepts and skills across the discipline which could be numerical, spatial, graphical, statistical, algebraic etc.
- Mathematical thinking and strategies
- General thinking skills, and grounded appreciation of context (Australian Association of Mathematics Teachers (AAMT), 1997)

1.4 Key factors that influence learners’ results and achievement in reading, writing and mathematics

1.4.1 Parental involvement in children’s literacy and numeracy skills development

Parental involvement entails the participation and amount of assistance a parent gives the child in his/her schoolwork either directly or indirectly. This includes verbal encouragement or assistance given to the child in doing his/her schoolwork, and direct reinforcement of improved academic performance by giving rewards. It also includes academic guidance and support, participation in learning activities, attending school functions, discussing future plans for tertiary education careers and punishing bad habits that may interfere with the child’s proper learning.

Researchers usually define parent involvement as preparing children for school, for example, teaching children the alphabet, talking and reading to children to promote language development, attending school events, for example, parent-teacher conferences and fulfilling any request teachers make of parents, for example, playing word games with their children at home. Others include providing children with a place to do homework and ensuring the completion of homework (Lareau, A, 2000).

A number of research studies done on parental involvement in education prove that parental involvement in the education of their children is very important. The literature suggests that there is a relation between parental involvement and success, high academic performance, greater cognitive competence, greater problem solving skills, greater school enjoyment, better school attendance and fewer behavioural problems at school.

Research into parental involvement in children’s literacy in the international context suggests that:

- Early reading experiences with their parents prepare children for the benefits of formal literacy instruction. Parental involvement in their children’s reading has been found to be the most important determinant of language and emergent literacy (Bus, A.G., Van IJzendoorn, M.H., & Pellegrini, A.D., 1995).

- Involvement with reading activities at home has significantly positive influences not only on reading achievement, language comprehension and expressive language skills (Gest, S.D., Freeman, N.R., Domitrovich, C.E. & Welsh, J.A., 2004) but also on learners’ interest in reading, attitudes towards reading and attentiveness in the classroom (Rowe, K, 1991).

- Parental involvement in their children’s literacy is a more powerful force than other family background variables such as social class, family size and level of parental education (Flouri, E. & Buchanan, A., 2004).

- Research also shows that the earlier parents become involved in their children’s literacy practices, the more profound the results and the longer lasting the effects (Mullis, R.L., Mullis, A.K., Cornille, T.A., Ritchson, A.D. & Sullender, M.S., 2004). In addition, of all school subjects, reading has been found to
be most sensitive to parental influences (Senechal, M. & LeFevre, J., 2002). In turn, research shows that success in reading is a gateway to success in other academic areas (Jordan, G.E., Snow, C.E. and Porsche, M.V., 2000).

- Although parental involvement has the greatest effect in the early years, its importance to children’s educational and literacy outcomes continues into the teenage and even adult years (Desforges, C. & Abouchaar, A., 2003). For example, Feinstein and Symons (1999) found that parental interest in their children’s education was the single most powerful predictor of achievement at age 16.

In Namibia, the importance of parental involvement in children’s literacy development was recognised through the launching in 1992 of the National Literacy Programme and in 2004 of the Family Literacy Programme. One of the driving imperatives that led to the launching of these programmes was the need to redress illiteracy among the adult community. Acquisition of appropriate literacy levels would then enable parents to actively participate in the literacy development of their children.

Scheffers (2005) notes that before launching the family literacy programme, the Ministry of Education commissioned a survey of one Lower Primary and community in each of the 13 regions. Scheffers further states that the survey was commissioned due to the strong belief that, supporting parents to help their children, would result in improved early literacy, coupled with an ability to do better at school. He further indicates that the main purpose of the study was to find out in what ways a family literacy programme in Namibia could enable parents and care providers to support their children in the first years of primary education. Scheffers argues that this study prompted the country’s Ministry of Education to address the problem of literacy levels in the home environment. This was done with the belief that parents remain the first teachers of their children (Hannon, P., 1995) and that if parents have a substantial input in the education of their children, they will be less inclined to sabotage educational decisions (Stouffer, B., 1992). Ways how parents can develop their children’s literacy include, among others: storytelling and reading aloud to their children.


- teach children to read and write;
- help children make sense of their inner and outer worlds;
- convince them that reading is worth doing;
- provide children with enjoyment;
- motivate children to explore literature;
- allow children to express themselves and communicate intimately with others;
- allow the child to experience, respond, reflect, understand, empathise, imagine, wonder, question, and create in thoughtful and feeling ways;
- allow children to imagine themselves as someone else and experience a reality than their own;
- Allow children to observe and then model another person’s behaviour, thoughts, or feelings.

Similarly, reading aloud with children helps children to read new words, learn more about the world, learn about the written language and see the connection between spoken and written words. According to Epstein et al (1997), parents should read to their children individually and in small intimate groups. She further indicates that parents should establish daily story times during which they read to children and listen as children read to them or to one another. Armbruster (2003) is of the opinion that reading times can be brief, about 5-10 minutes for younger children and still be of great value.
Parents’ involvement and participation in their children’s school activities is influenced by a number of factors. The common inhibiting factors include, among others: low educational levels of parents, high poverty levels in certain families, and lack of resources.

The foregoing discussion has illuminated how parents involvement can help facilitate their children’s literacy development. The next section explores how the management of teaching and learning impacts on the development of literacy skills among children.

1.4.2 Socio-economic status of parents

The personal attributes of learners such as gender, age, ability as well as motivation have an important role in the teaching/learning-process. Equally important are the learners’ home background characteristics including the parents’ economic status. Walberg and Paik (2000), argue that the home background characteristics have strong influence on learners because from early childhood up to the age of 18 years children spend about 92% of their time under the influence of their parents/home rather than the school. Home characteristics such as parental level of education, wealth, nutrition and health, possession of books and other materials, as well as parental interest on education of their children help create enabling conditions for learning (SACMEQ Report, 2000). In Namibia SACMEQ II (2000) reported 6.7% of fathers had no schooling. Of these, 45% were married to mothers with no schooling, 34% were married to mothers who had some primary but very few were married to mothers with higher levels of education. With such disparity in the academic status of parents, one would wonder that that this could be the reason for lower academic achievement in both literacy and numeracy. Lockheed, Fuller and Nyirongo (1989) in a cross-sectional study on Thai and Malawi children found learners with higher levels of achievement levels of achievement in 8th grade Mathematics had fathers who had more professional occupations, mothers with higher levels of education. Such parents could spend more time educating their children or motivate the intellectual potential within children that might lead them perform better in school and in return strive for further education (Haveman, R. & Wolfe, B., 1995). In a study, Reading among grade six learners in Namibia and Norway, by Wikan, G., Mostert, M. L., Danbolt, A. M. V., Nes, K. Nyathi, F. & Hengari, J (2007), found out 63% of the learners from low-income households had difficulties in learning to read, as opposed to 48% of learners from wealthy households. This finding is in accordance with the findings of the SACMEQ (2004) research where it was found that reading competence of learners from low socio-economic groups was much lower than that of learners from low socio-economic groups. Mbenzi (1997) similarly found that learners from low socio-economic groups have greater difficulties in learning to read than learners from higher socio-economic backgrounds.

Other aspects within the home environment that might influence learners’ reading literacy and numeracy are parent-child interaction related to reading or numeracy; help with English or any other language, or numeracy homework; educational resources in the home; family reading habits; and parental expectations for the child’s attainment.

1.4.3 Learners’ gender

It has been widely demonstrated that boys and girls tend to perform differently in certain areas of studies including literacy and numeracy in a co-educational schooling. Boys are generally perceived to do well in numeracy while girls do well in literacy in a co-educational school. But findings also show (Gilligan, C., 1982) girls perform as equally well as boys in numeracy if girls attend a single-sex school or single-sex class within co-educational school. Carpenter (1985) on the other hand reported gender does not play a role in the academic
achievement of learners. He reported that student achievement in a given type of school was influenced by a number of variables including curriculum, teachers’ encouragement and the social class background of the students. He found that “while single-sex schooling appears an advantage to the daughters of mothers who are white collar workers to avoid low marks and gain medium results, co-educational schooling offers such girls a small advantage in achieving marks”.

In Namibia, Wikan et al (2007) found out double the number of female learners repeated a grade than males. The reasons girls stated were “illness, help to the family” as reasons for repeating a grade, and most girls viewed reading and other learning difficulties as the reasons for repetition.

1.4.4 Attendance of pre-school

The current research by Magnuson, Ruhm and Waldfogel has found that children who were engaged in early literacy activities, such as attending preschool have demonstrated academic advantages over those who have not. The study has found out that that prekindergarten increases reading and mathematics skills at school entry (Magnuson, K., Ruhm, C., & Waldfogel, J., 2007). When children attend preschool, they engage in literacy activities, which expose them to print resources such as reading materials. However, research has shown that preschool classroom environments vary in the amount of reading materials and the engagement with them as well as the knowledge of teachers of early development and their ability to design literacy activities that are meaningful and enjoyable (Magnuson, K., Ruhm, C., & Waldfogel, J., 2007).

1.4.5 Management of teaching and learning and how it influences children’s literacy development

Various research papers in Namibia and elsewhere, as well as the National External School Evaluations (NESE) reports of 2007 and 2008, show that a serious lack of administrative management, lack of involvement and monitoring, bad leadership skills, low motivation and lack of professional and educational knowledge in principals are all factors that result in the poor performance of teachers and the teaching that takes place in schools, which again results in learners’ literacy and numeracy skills being very low.

In the NESE reports of 2007 and 2008, as well as individual comparisons between low performance and high performance schools, it is clear that the majority of negative factors that were pointed out are related to teachers’ poor performance in the classroom and principal’s lack of proper management. The factors related to teachers that get mentioned regularly in the reports were, amongst others, that teachers did not do proper daily lesson planning or year planning, had no or incomplete schemes of work, set no subject targets themselves and for the learners, gave insufficient priority to functional literacy and numeracy, predominantly used a teacher-centred methodology with learners in a passive role, and that assessment for learning, use of assessment data and learner self-evaluation practice were generally poor.

Key area 5 (Management and leadership of school and hostel) in the NESE reports also shows a serious lack in the area of management. Of the school which received one of the lowest evaluations, it is reported that:

The School managers are viewed with some serious reserve by teachers and learners equally, who do not think they are capable of running the school. The Principal is considered as unable to run a school of this magnitude and level, both by parents and some teachers. School management does not set a high ethical standard of hard work, commitment and competence as was evident from the class register, and the class visits to some senior staff. According to NESE reports, some senior staff does not monitor performance
of teaching staff regularly. Examples of preparations that were not submitted for weeks by teachers were seen.

Other factors mentioned in poorly performing schools were that principals don't monitor staff performance, have no internal policies, procedures and programmes in place, do not see that any records are kept with regard to textbooks or equipment, don't give teachers any recognition for good work, don't do class visits, lack the knowledge and skills necessary to lead and assist teachers, don't see that absenteeism of teachers are recorded, have a poor system of recording and retrieving data, does not always set a high standard of hard work, commitment and competence, and do not control resources affectively, so that boxes with new textbooks and other resource material pile up without teachers being aware that these books are available. It is clear that these in-competencies directly affect the quality of the teachers' work.

It is also significant to note that except for Key area 7 (Links with other schools and regions), schools received the lowest overall scores in Key areas 3 and 5, which cover teaching and learning, and management and leadership, respectively (NESE Annual Report 2007:12, NESE Annual Report 2008:15).

Ipinge (2003) studied a school in an area in Namibia where poverty and crime are widespread, but the learners performed better than other schools from similar environments. She did research on the role of management and leadership in this scenario, and found that the main reasons for the school's success lay in the leadership of the principal who had clear, strict rules, was very visible, would do unexpected class visits, expected teachers to provide proof that they carried out their tasks, gave feedback and guidance after classroom observations, etc. She also stresses the importance of the principal being a role model for their teachers in personal values and beliefs. This is confirmed in the studies of Bush (2008), in which he states that “leadership is centrally about values” (p. 228)

The results of a study by Wikan, et. al. (2007) showed that learners whose reading skills were inadequate actually considered their reading proficiency to be adequate. A reason for this might be because the standard or example set by the teacher was not adequate.

The SACMEQ survey of both 2004 and 2005 showed that Namibian learners’ scores in mathematics were the lowest of all participating countries, and the reading scores did not fare much better. The regions in the north showed the lowest scores in reading competency, and it is significant that Makuwa’s study (2004) shows that absenteeism of teachers in the north are extremely worrying, with school days lost out of 196 school days a year being, amongst others, 96.6 days (Oshana), 49.2 days (Oshikoto), and 49.2 days (Ohangwena).

Both the SACMEQ report of 2005 and the NESE Annual Reports of 2007 and 2008 recommend, amongst others, that training of school management should be a priority, and that "minimum academic and professional qualifications as well as years of experience for new appointments of school principals" should be considered (Policy suggestion32, SACMEQ 2005). In an Africa Region Human Development Working Paper Series (no 84, p.36) Marope states that MBESC senior officials also identified poor school management, low teacher commitment, and lack of discipline among teachers as some of the reasons for poor school performance". Sufficient research and field work have been done so far, both in Namibia and in other countries, to provide evidence that management of teaching and learning is a key variable in producing proficiency in literacy and numeracy. Unfortunately, as stated in the SACMEQ report:
Not all the recommendations of the first SAQMEC project, the Efficiency Report and the Presidential Commission Report have been implemented by the Ministry” (SACMEQ Report 2005:201).

The necessary follow-up procedures and implementation of recommendations by the SACMEQ, USAID EQUIP 1 Literature Review on Quality of Education and Teacher Learning, and NESE reports are now the next step to ensure that teachers, principals and regional officers are held accountable for the low literacy and numeracy results in their schools. Ample suggestions for a new 'deal' to be worked out with teachers and principals to hold them accountable are given in all the mentioned reports. Therefore, one can only conclude that this issue does not need to be researched any further, but that the numerous research and evaluation results available should be perused, and recommendations implemented, to ensure accountability.

In addition to the Management of teaching and learning, the school curriculum and the extent to which it lays down minimum requirements for reading competencies bears impact on learners’ literacy development. The following section explores this subject.

1.5 Review of findings from prior studies on reading in Namibia

1) Mechanical parrot like reading, mere decoding without understanding.

A joint study of the Namibian school language policy by NERA and the NIED Research Unit (RU) revealed that a number of approaches to the teaching of reading and writing were being applied in literacy lessons of teacher graduates of the BETD programme. The reading approaches observed in the majority of classes were: Whole Word, Phonics, or a combination of the two; Combined Method (NERA, 2000). However, despite utilization of specific methods and approaches the study observed the lack of or absence of a holistic approach that emphasises understanding rather than mere decoding (NERA, 2000, p. 7). The study maintains further that reading was observed to be not more than mere mechanical reading aloud:

The researchers also observed that learners often ‘read’ parrot like, while the meaning of what they read is not established by the teacher. Furthermore, many teachers use the technique of merely repeating if a learner ‘gets stuck’, rather than finding out why a learner makes a mistake and using the mistake as a learning opportunity (NERA, 2000, p. 110)

It is interesting to note that despite exposure to approaches for the teaching of reading BETD teacher graduates chose to abandon these and resort to the parrot like approach. While this resorting to parrot like reading is definitely a major problem that needs attention, there is, however, a gap to be observed in the findings of the NERA study in the sense that no probing was made so as to dig deeper and investigate what led teachers to choose the parrot like strategy.

2) Structured reading programmes

While findings available “do not provide sufficient evidence that learners who are presently exposed to the structured reading programmes (e.g. NELP and SIMs) perform better in reading and writing (NERA, 2000, p. 107), the NERA study rightly suggest that in a structured reading programme – learners spent ‘focused time on task’, reading materials are more accessible and more copies can be made available. The study also observed that interactive and participatory methods were followed in the structured reading programmes.
Thus, structured reading programmes would help solve problems such as the lack of reading materials in some schools. As learners are more focused on time, this might also help solve disciplinary issues and time management issues in many schools.

3) Whole language instruction vs. explicit code-based instruction

There is interest and controversy that exist for a long time which could be termed best instructional approaches in the literacy teaching. For several decades, whole language instruction has been the prominent teaching approach for early literacy learning (Goodman in Purdie, N; Ellis, L, 2005)

Essentially, the whole language approach reflects a constructivist philosophy in which students are viewed as inherently active, self-regulating learners who construct knowledge in developmentally appropriate ways. In context of the classroom, students read and write self-selected whole texts in a dynamic atmosphere, with very little explicit decoding instruction (Goodman in Purdie, N; Ellis, L, 2005).

The code-based approach, in contrast, focuses on an awareness of language structure and function that allows learners to reflect on and consciously manipulate the language. It includes an awareness of phonemes, syllables, and morphology. It usually requires a high degree of teacher-centred presentation and evaluation of learning materials, with an emphasis on explicit instruction, scheduled practice, and feedback (Westwood, 2001c).

In Namibia, it is not clear which of the reading teaching approach does the Ministry of Education ascribe to in teaching literacy. Since the education Reform in the 1990s, there were a number of reading approaches teachers were introduced to by various Projects that assisted the Ministry during the Reform process. However, up to now, there is little empirical research that supports the effectiveness of the different language approaches as majority of the learners fail to acquire the basic literacy and numeracy skills at the end of their lower primary schooling. Although whole language is widely used, there is mounting concern that this approach may not be the only best in teaching learners to read and write. In spite of this, there is ample anecdotal account by teachers and parents of positive outcomes of the whole language approach.

4) Lack of strategies to deal with learners who struggle with decoding

According to the NERA study (2000, p. 108) “little evidence was found of teachers using approaches or strategies to deal with learners who struggle with decoding”. The study observed that teachers resorted mainly to two strategies, namely:

(i) to verbalise the correct word and ask the learner to repeat it;
(ii) to ask another learner to give the correct answer

No attempts were being made ‘to find out why a learner ‘gets stuck’ and to use strategies to support learners to overcome the problem” (NERA, 2000, p. 108)

1.6 The statement of the problem

A number of studies done in Namibia and on Namibia have indicated low levels of literacy and numeracy skills among learners in the lower grades (grades 1-4). The low levels of literacy and numeracy are carried over to further phase levels. It is evident from this pattern that, the low literacy and numeracy skills negatively impact the teaching and learning and render the education system ineffective. Various approaches used in teaching
literacy such as phonics approaches in teaching reading, Montessori, and Molteno programmes among many attempts used in Namibian schools to improve reading, have proved ineffective bearing the test outcomes in literacy and numeracy. Apart from mere speculations and concrete evidences on the poor or low literacy and numeracy competency status among learners in Namibia, the root causes of low levels of literacy and numeracy skills among learners and the practices of various schools in teaching the two key areas has not been explored in depth.

1.7 Research Objectives

- To investigate factors that influence learners’ results and achievements in literacy and numeracy.
- To compare the best practices vis-à-vis the poor practices in teaching literacy and numeracy in Namibian schools.
- To suggest appropriate and practical recommendations on the best practice and approaches to literacy and numeracy teaching and learning.

1.8 The research questions

- To what extent does the curriculum for grades 1-4 promote literacy and numeracy skills?
- To what extent are the teaching methods, approaches, and programmes for lower primary appropriate in accelerating literacy and numeracy skills?
- How adequate are the teacher education training programmes in preparing prospective teachers with competencies in developing literacy and numeracy skills?
- Does the teaching through a particular medium of instruction influence attainment of competency in literacy and numeracy?
- To what extent do parents contribute to the development of literacy and numeracy skills?
- Are there any differences in teaching of literacy and numeracy among the best versus poor practices schools in Namibia?
SECTION TWO

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

2.1 The population and sampling methods for this study

2.1.1 Methodological Approaches

This study adopts a research design that combines both qualitative and quantitative approaches. Semi-structured interviews were conducted mainly to triangulate and clarify some issues arising from the survey, as well as from documents that were analysed. Similarly, a case study method was used to explore and compare practices and approaches used in teaching literacy and numeracy in well performing and underperforming schools. An in depth study of selected schools based on their best practices of developing literacy and numeracy skills and language of instruction was done.

2.1.2 Units of analysis

The target groups of this study comprised of long serving and novice lower primary teachers, lower primary advisory teachers, lower primary heads of departments (HODs), lower primary lecturers, principals, learners and parents.

2.1.3 Population and Sampling

Data were collected from all thirteen regions of Namibia. A total of 52 schools, 4 from each region were selected using convenient and purposeful sampling techniques. For the purpose of exploring the teaching of literacy and numeracy and further compare the best practices versus poor practices, 5 case studies were conducted. The schools included in the case study were purposeful selected by using self-evidence and popularity in literacy and numeracy teaching at lower primary as criteria for selection. In each school, all lower primary teachers including the principals and the HODs of lower primary completed a questionnaire and achievement tests of literacy and numeracy were administered to Grades 2 and 5 learners.

Teachers teaching Grades 1 and 4 took part in an interview. In each school, 15 Grades 2 and 5 learners were randomly selected using the class list of all classes in the sampled grades. These grades were targeted because, grade 2 learners have completed grade 1 work and so are grade 5 learners, who have completed grade 4’s work last year. The expected population of learners was 1560. In each school, 4 parents were interviewed. At regional level, a lower primary Advisory Teacher was selected. Lower Primary lecturers in the 4 UNAM campuses namely Khomasdal, Hifikepunye Pohamba, Rundu and Katima Mulilo completed a survey questionnaire and were interviewed.

2.1.4 Data collection methods

The following data collection methods were used

5. Survey
6. Semi-structured Interviews
7. Document Analysis
8. Testing

2.1.5 Data collection instruments

The following instruments were used to collect data.

4. Survey questionnaire
5. Achievement Tests
6. Semi-structured Interview schedule

2.1.6 Data analysis

The quantitative data were entered, cleaned and analysed using the Statistical Packet for the Social Sciences (SPSS). The field notes were categorised into patterns and themes. Data from documents were analysed and categorised for reporting.
SECTION THREE

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

3. Literacy assessment outcomes for Grade 1

3.1 Introduction

Grade 1 literacy assessment consisted of three tests namely reading words, reading phrases and a written test. The reading of words focused on word recognition, ability to read words particularly accurate pronunciation and fluency. Each of the selected learners was asked to read the 30 words whereby 1 mark was allocated for each correct word read. The assessment of word reading was calculated on average of 30 marks. Words were taken from Grade 1 English syllabus. It should be noted that for Grade 1, learners were required to at least be able to read 40 sight words (Integrated Planning Manual Grade 1). Hence, the reading activity emphasis was on words recognition. Out of 30 marks the benchmark was set at an average score of 15/30 on which national averages, regional averages and schools’ performances were measured against. The score below 15/30 was considered to be below the set benchmark and thus translated as poor and the above 15/30 rated as good performance.

The phrase reading was based on fluent reading. Each selected learner was asked to read ten short sentences. Each sentence was allocated 5 marks whereby the awarding of marks depended on the individual learner’s reading skill ability (whole sentence read correctly=5, unable to read=0 etc). The ten sentences were formed up of common words used in grade 1 to fit the level of understanding and vocabulary. The phrases were calculated on the average of 50 marks. On phrases, the emphasis was on fluency reading rather than on recognition of letters and words. As per Grade 1 Curriculum, the basic competency on reading states: By the end of Grade 1, the learners can read words including all single sounds and sentences of 4-5 words from various types of text. Ten short sentences were given to the selected learners.

The last literacy assessment activity was a test. Learners were given a short writing test which had three questions of 5 marks each. On question 1, learners were asked to look at the picture (of a cat, dog, bed, house and sun) and write the name of each. The first letter of each picture was written next to the picture. On question 2, learners were asked to copy the 5 sentences. The last question (3), learners were asked to fill in the missing letters in the given words (he_d, nos_, ey_s, l_g and ha_d). As per Grade 1 level, those words were put in simple sentences and clearly pointed out for learners to know which word they should complete. The test activity assessed learners on vocabulary, spelling and writing skill. This activity was calculated on the average of 15.
3.2 Schools, regions and national word reading assessment outcomes for Grade 1

![Diagram showing word reading assessment outcomes for Grade 1 by school, with schools, regions, and national averages highlighted.]

Figure 1: Word reading assessment outcome in Grade 1 by school
The findings in figure 1 show that the national average was 10.7 which was way below the benchmark. Some regions scored above the national average while some schools scored above the regional and national averages. These results imply that some schools and regions do well in literacy and that there are more schools and regions that did not do well in reading, thus lowered the national average. These findings further inferred that the emphasis in teaching reading within and between schools in the region differed to an extent that it affected the national literacy outcomes.

Out of 13 regions, Khomas, Kunene, Erongo, Hardap, Oshikoto, and Ohangwena performed above the benchmark and national average. The remaining regions performed above the national average but below the set benchmark.

There were impressive performance in Holy Cross Convent and Otjikondo, of which the average scores were above the regional and national average scores, thus implying that some schools placed more emphasis on literacy teaching than others.
3.3 Schools, regions and national phrase reading assessment outcomes for Grade 1

The average of 25/50 was set as benchmark to which the national average, regional average and school average were measured against. A school or region that scored below the 25/50 average indicated that the performance was not satisfactory. The national average was 20/50 which was below the expected reading level. This implied

Figure 2: Phrase reading assessment outcomes by school, region and national averages
that necessary intervention was needed to improve reading competencies among learners in the region in order to positively affect the national average. The findings in figure 2 show that only four regions, namely Khomas (38) and Kunene (35) recorded the highest regional averages followed by Erongo (26) and Hardap (26). Contrary to these findings learners in Caprivi, Kavango, Omusati and Otjozondjupa were unable to read the sentences with fluency. These findings correspond to the school assessment outcomes in these regions specifically at Otjikondo PS (Kunene) and Holy Cross Convent (Khomass).

3.4 Schools, regions and national written test assessment outcomes for Grade 1

![Figure 3: Grade 1 test outcomes by school, region and national averages in a written test](image-url)
Figure 3 indicates the national, regional and school assessment outcomes in the written English test. The analysis of the results were based on a benchmark of 7.5/15 average scores. The performance above the benchmark was considered to be good and the scores below the benchmark were considered to be a weak performance. The national average score was 7.2/15 which was below the average benchmark score indicating that the test outcomes nationally were slightly weak. Figure 3 shows that 6 regions recorded an average score of above the benchmark compared to the remaining 7 regions. Few schools scored above the average benchmark score of 7.5/15.

3.5 Words, phrases and written test assessment outcomes in Grade 1 by school location

![Graph](image)

**Figure 4: Words, phrases and test average score outcomes in Grade 1 by school location**

Figure 4 presents words, phrases and test assessment outcomes by school location. The finding reveals that urban schools scored an average of 16.2/30 on reading words, 31/50 on reading phrases and 9/15 on test outcomes. Learners from urban schools demonstrated good reading skills compared to semi-urban and rural schools. Urban schools scored above the set benchmark of the words, phrases and test assessment outcomes.

3.6 Grade 1 Words, phrases and written test assessment outcomes in Grade 1 by medium of instruction

![Graph](image)

**Figure 5: Assessment outcomes by schools’ medium of instruction**
Figure 5 shows the average learners’ scores in schools by medium of instruction. The findings on word assessment outcomes show that schools that had English (16.7) as medium of instruction scored above the set benchmark average of 15/30. The lowest score was from schools taught through Rumanyo (0.4) and Jühiasi (1.2). The reading phrases assessment outcomes show that out of 50 scores, English and Afrikaans medium of instruction schools scored above the average benchmark score of 25/50. The results further show English (32/50) scored the highest, followed by Afrikaans (26/50). The results from the remaining medium of instruction schools were below the total average score specifically Rumanyo and Portuguese. The assessment of reading skill shows that schools that had English and Afrikaans scored higher in reading skills compared to schools using other medium of instruction. The test results show that Afrikaans scored 10.5/15, Khoekhoegowab (9.6/15), English (9.1/15) and Juihasi (7.6/15).

3.7 Words, phrases and written test assessment outcomes of Grade 1 by school type

Figure 6: Words, phrases and test assessment outcomes of Grade 1 by school type

Figure 6 presents the word reading, phrase reading and tests assessment outcomes. The results show that private schools did well in word and phrase reading and test compared to semi-private schools and government schools.
3.7.1 The assessment of numeracy skills among Grade 1 learners

Grade 1 Mathematics is concentrating on key components, namely: number concept development, problem solving, computation, measurement, geometry and data handling. Those were also the components the numeracy test focused on. It should be noted that though the activity (test) was in English, questions and instructions were explained to learners in the language used as the medium of instruction in their respective classrooms.

3.7.2 The Grade 1 numeracy national, regional and school assessment outcomes

Figure 7 shows the average performance for each school, region and also the national average. An average benchmark score of 12.5/25 was used to distinguish between good and poor performing schools, region and national average scores. The national average of 19.7/25 which was above the set benchmark score inferred that learners did well in numeracy. More impressing was that all 13 regions and schools scored above the average benchmark.
Figure 7: School, region and national numeracy assessment outcomes in Grade 1

3.7.3 Grade 1 numeracy assessment outcomes by school location
The results in figure 8 indicate that urban schools scored higher compared to semi-urban and rural schools. The slight differences between the schools are contrary to the findings on literacy skills among learners in the rural, semi-urban and urban schools of which urban schools were comparably impressive; contrasting the notion that the higher the literacy is the higher the numeracy skill.

### 3.7.4 Grade 1 numeracy assessment outcomes by school location

![Pie chart showing numeracy assessment outcomes by school location](image)

**Figure 8: Numeracy assessment outcomes in Grade 1 by school Location**

### 3.7.5 Grade 1 numeracy assessment outcomes by school type

![Pie chart showing numeracy assessment outcomes by school type](image)

**Figure 9: Numeracy assessment outcomes in Grade 1 by school type**

Figure 9 shows that there were slight differences between the school types on numeracy assessment outcomes.

### 3.7.6 Schools numeracy assessment outcomes in Grade 1 by medium of instruction
Although the results on numeracy assessment are slightly different between schools using different medium of instruction, it was apparent that instruction in numeracy was effective in some language of instruction such as Portuguese, Otjiherero, Afrikaans and Silozi.

3.8.1 Introduction

The grade 4 literacy assessments tested the fluency and accuracy reading and reading comprehension. Fluency and accuracy assessment had 85 scores and the reading comprehension assessment had 40 score marks. The average assessment outcomes of the accuracy and fluency reading in a school were gauged against regional and national averages. The national average for fluency and accurate reading was 57. The total numeracy assessment scores were 40. The average national score was 23. The school and regional assessment outcomes were gauged against the national score of 23.
3.8.2 School, Regional and National average reading assessment results for Grade 4

Figure 11: School, regional and national average scores on Grade 4 reading test (Total score=83)

Figure 11 presents Grade 4 learners’ average assessment outcome scores at the national, regional and school on literacy test. The results show that 60% of the learners in the sampled schools scored above the national average score of 56 compared to 40% of the learners who scored below the national average.

In observing the regional assessment outcomes, it was amazing noting that Kunene region obtained an average score of 77 compared to Khomas region which obtained an average score of 76 out of the total score of 85. The slight differences in scores between Kunene and Khomas were notable and of interest specifically if we consider the assumptions or hypothetical stand that the school location, types and medium of instructions have an influence in literacy skills attainment.
3.8.3 School, Regional and National average scores on numeracy assessment test for Grade 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Name</th>
<th>Average Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Holy Cross</td>
<td>37.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vrede Rede</td>
<td>37.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Otjikondo</td>
<td>37.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amazing Kids</td>
<td>36.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chris Junior</td>
<td>32.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ben van der Wath</td>
<td>31.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Danie Joubert</td>
<td>31.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Schools that obtained high numeracy scores were Holy Cross Convert 37.4, Vrede Rede 37.2, Otjikondo 37.1, Amazing Kids, 36.8, Chris Junior 32, Ben van der Wath 31, Etanga 31 and Danie Joubert 31. These schools shared common characteristics such as being private, former advantaged schools or mission schools. Etanga primary school had exceptional characteristics such as a low teacher learner ratio of 1/11; mother tongue used as medium of instruction was used as home language, a government school and a remote rural school. The low numeracy competence level among schools raises concern on the quality of teaching and learning at lower primary.
3.8.4 Literacy and Numeracy assessment for Grade 4 by medium of instruction

The results in figure 13 and 14 contradicted the beliefs that learners taught through mother tongue at early grades promote competencies in literacy and numeracy. Learners taught through English as a medium of instruction obtained 74 scores on average followed by Afrikaans 63, Oshindonga 59, Otjiherero 58, Khoekhoegawab 58, Oshikwanyama 55, Rumanyo 50, Silozi 49 and Portuguese 49 in literacy assessment test.

The impact of the medium of instruction in the attainment of numeracy competences is displayed in figure 14. The results show that learners who were taught numeracy through English were competent in numeracy compared to those taught in indigenous languages. There were slight differences between the learners competencies in numeracy attained from teaching through mother tongue as a medium of instruction. Learners in schools that had three media of instruction classes, namely, English, Oshindonga and Afrikaans were
competent in numeracy compared to those taught through other indigenous languages. It was noted that schools with three distinct language classes were common in urban areas than rural schools.

The replication results of numeracy and literacy assessment test outcomes showed the same trend of which learners taught through English medium of instruction scored higher compared to those taught through other medium of instructions. These results should be interpreted with caution since it was noted through observation and interviews that, in some schools especially in the south, learners were taught through a medium of instruction that was not necessary the learner’s home language.

### 3.8.5 Literacy and Numeracy assessment outcomes for Grade 4 by school type

![Pie Chart]

**Figure 15: Average literacy test scores of Grade 4 by school type (Total score=85)**

The results of literacy and numeracy tests in private, government and semi private schools are presented in figure 15 and 16. There were marked differences between the private, semi private and government schools on the attainment of competencies in literacy and numeracy among the Grade 4 learners. The literacy and numeracy competence levels were high in private schools. The literacy assessment results showed that private schools had an average score of 85 followed by semi private 68 and government schools scored 59 being the least.
Numeracy assessment results followed the trend of results of the literacy assessment outcomes. Private schools scored 37 out of 40 scores, semi private an average score of 27 and government schools an average score of 24. Given the advantage of resources, competent school managers and teachers, teacher learner ratio, school location, parental involvement and support and staff commitment, private schools provide effective environment for promoting literacy compared to semi private and government schools, hence the higher score in literacy and numeracy assessment test.

### 3.8.6 Literacy and Numeracy assessment for Grade 4 by school location

Figure 17 and 18 present the outcome of the literacy and numeracy assessment by school location. The results of the literacy assessment showed that urban schools scored 75 average scores out of 85 total scores in literacy compared to semi urban schools which obtained 63 average score and rural schools which obtained 56 average scores.

![Graph showing literacy scores by school location](image)

Figure 17: Average literacy test scores of Grade 4 by school location (Total score=85)

The numeracy assessment results show that urban schools outperformed the semi urban and rural schools in numeracy competence. These results infer that effective teaching of literacy in addition to other contributing factors that enhance the teaching of literacy, takes place effectively in urban schools compared to semi urban and rural schools.

![Graph showing numeracy scores by school location](image)
3.8.7 Assessment of accuracy and fluency reading among Grade 4 learners

The assessment of learners reading skills was done to attain two purposes. The first was to test fluency and accuracy reading competencies among learners in Grade 4 and the second was to identify specific reading difficulties learners experienced in Grade 4. While learners read the passage, the assessor marked the words from the passage that a learner could not read accurately and fluently and jotted the error or difficulties that learners experienced during reading. A five point scale was used to mark the competence of which 1 indicated learner could not read or read only a word in a sentence or phrase, 2 learner read at least two words, 3 learner read three words, 4 learner read all except one word and 5 learner read the whole sentence fluently and accurately.

Figure 19 presents the results of the assessment of reading. Overall, except for P1 where 50% of the learners read the sentence fluently and accurately, P16 48%, P2 47%, P7 45%, P9 45%, P13 45% and P14 45% more than a third of the learners read the sentences and phrases accurately and fluently. Slightly, a quarter and close to one third of the learners could read fluently and accurately specifically P4, P8, P11, P15, P17, implying that many learners experienced difficulties reading specific words in these sentences.
3.9 Analysis of the difficulties in accuracy and fluency reading skills in Grade 4

While testing accuracy and fluency reading among learners in Grade 4, records on the difficulties that learners demonstrated were taken. In recording the difficulties in accuracy and fluency reading, the researchers considered the mother tongue influence, the medium of instruction and the location of the school. The records formed the in depth analysis of the reading difficulties among learners in Grade 4.

In spite of influences of mother tongue, the medium of instruction and the location of the school, it was noted that the most frequently reading errors in terms of accuracy and fluency were observed in the following words, smile, give, joy, thirsty, bright, soaks, drying, whose and benefit. Errors were attributed to the following factors:

**Phonics**

Since phonics recognition and teaching forms the basis for teaching reading, learners tend to comprehend that in English a sound of a certain phoneme changes when blended with another phoneme. These differences are affected into the different letter sounds that mother tongue, for example, letter sound ‘w’ in English and Afrikaans are sounded differently. As such learners articulated ‘w’ as ‘v’ in world or ‘i’ sounds in English as they had learned even when used in a combination of other letter sounds (consonant) such as in a word ‘smile’.

Learners read the word ‘smile’ following the phonetic principles and not phoneme application; thus inaccuracy reading or pronunciation occurs.

**Phonetics and phonemic relations between the English and mother tongue**

The phonetics or sounding of alphabets in mother tongue used as a medium of instruction and the formulation of small elements of the word or phoneme has implication on reading competence of the English being taught as second language. The pronunciation of certain small elements of a word in mother tongue differs to the pronunciation of certain English phonemes. Learners who were taught in mother tongue experienced difficulties pronouncing correctly and reading fluently English words compared to those taught in English. Words such as ‘smile’ ‘whose’ were good example of difficulties learners experienced.

Furthermore, a letter sound is pronounced differently when used to formulate an element of a word thus making it difficult for learners to read the combination correctly and fluently. A typical example of different phonetic and phonemic relation and the influence they have on reading were noted on the word ‘benefit’ where many learners read it ‘binifit’.

**Difficulties in blending**

Blends in words such as ‘thirsty’ and ‘bright’, were inaccurately read and pronounced. ‘Thir’, ‘ght’ forms a combination of phonetic features when read while ‘r’ and ‘g’ are slightly phonemically articulated as ‘i’ sound specifically in ‘gh’. This combination challenged learners.

**Mother tongue teaching**

The letter sounds and phonemes in indigenous languages differ from the English phonics and phonemes. Learners who were taught through mother tongue as medium of instruction from grade 1-3 experienced difficulties switching from the influence the mother tongue had in reading fluently and accurately certain words in English. This problem emanated specifically on phonetic differences used between the two languages. Secondly, when English was taught as a second language no emphasis was given in noting the similarities and differences in phonics of the two languages. As such learners mixed the sounds of the two languages thus impacted negatively on accuracy and fluency reading.

**Bilingual approach in teaching literacy**
A major problem lies on the competencies among teachers to use first language (L1) in teaching the second language (L2) or to use a method whereby the two languages are developed at the same level termed as bilingual approach in language teaching (L1=L2). The inability among teachers to teach the mother tongue (L1) affects the growth and strength of mother tongue as tool to develop the second language (L2).

**Reading by spelling**

Learners spelled, phonetically, phonemes in words rather than reading. Reading by spelling was accurate to those who attempted or mastered this approach. These learners failed to read the whole word or phoneme. This shortcoming might have been caused by teaching of phonics without using a combination of techniques used in teaching reading such as combining synthetic and analytic approaches or using bottom- up and up- bottom approaches in teaching reading.

**Word recognition**

Word recognition as a technique in reading was not used concurrently and correctly. It might have been possible word recognition was very over emphasised during teaching as such learners often used the technique without analysing the content of word when reading. In a number of occasions learners could read the word ‘joy’ as ‘enjoy’ and ‘whose’ as ‘choose’. It was evident that learners failed to analyse the combination of syllables that formed the word. Learners used prior knowledge and site relation of one word wrongly to read the other word.

**Dyslexia**

Severe reading problems were evident among learners who could spell correctly but were unable to merge different speech sounds into syllables and words. These learners failed to analyse the components of the site words such as ‘girl’ or ‘boy’

**3.10 Reading comprehension assessment outcomes in Grade 4 by school**

Figure 20 presents results of reading comprehension in grade 4 in the sampled schools. The reading comprehension assessment paper comprised two passages. Each question had five questions, 2 marks per question, 10 marks per passage and totaling to 20 marks for two passages. The marks were categorised on a 5 point scale per question, of which 1=0-2 marks, 2=3-4 marks, 3=5-6 marks, 4=7-8, 5= 9-10 marks. All questions were in multiple choice format. Should we take 2 as an average score, only Muyako, Uisib and Nossob performed below average; implying that learners were competent in reading for understanding.

There were fluctuations on the results of the reading comprehension when compared to the reading tests in some schools except for Holy Cross Convent, Amazing Kids, Otjikondo, Dan Joubert and Vrede Rede. Some schools that did well in reading that assessed fluency and accuracy competencies among learners, had lower scores in reading comprehension implying that reading comprehension was challenging.
Figure 20: Reading comprehension in Grade 4
SECTION FOUR

FACTORS AFFECTING LITERACY AND NUMERACY DEVELOPMENT

4.1 Introduction

This section presents factors affecting the development of literacy and numeracy skills among learners at lower primary from the perspectives of the school principals, heads of departments for lower primary (HOD), lower primary teachers, lower primary advisory teachers, UNAM campuses lecturers (former lower primary BETD lecturers) and parents. These stakeholders implement policies and are directly involved in teaching and learning processes. In order to explore factors affecting development of literacy and numeracy, the following issues are investigated: factors promoting literacy and numeracy; best approaches in teaching literacy and numeracy; best practices of promoting literacy and numeracy, medium of instruction, relevancy of teacher training programmes and the lower primary curriculum, effect of mother tongue in promoting and determinants of school performance as far as the development of literacy and numeracy skills are concerned. Hence, these issues are explored.

4.2 Factors that promote the development of literacy

Knowledge of phonics: Educators felt that, for learners to develop literacy skills, learners should know the sounds of each letter of the alphabet phonetically. Participants believed that, if learners know the sound of each letter, it would be easier for them to read any word or syllable. However, there were differences in opinion on how this could be best achieved. Some teachers taught the letters of the alphabets while others grouped them into vowels and consonants. In each instance, teachers had their reasons of doing so, particularly, because they found it working for them and their learners.

Exposure to print: Many educators found the display of printed materials on the walls of the class very useful. Some teachers had observed that, in most cases, a class that had posters, charts and pictures enriched learners’ ability to read and count, as it kept them busy and engaged as they attempt to read what was on displays.

Promoting a reading culture: Although, not common in many schools, some educators recommended that learners should be encouraged to read. Some schools had a practice of rewarding learners who read more books than others.

4.3 Factors that promote the development of numeracy

Knowledge of mental Arithmetic: Educators found mental arithmetic as a major prerequisite. Many of them felt that, if learners knew and mastered mental arithmetic skills such as the multiplication table, they would not have problems they encounter today of relying solely on counters. This concern was raised by parents too. Schools,
and teachers in particular, were blamed for not paying attention to mental arithmetic, learners were no longer required to master the multiplication tables as it had been the case in the past.

Knowledge of the four basic operations (+, -, ÷, ×): Participants found it imperative for learners to be able to recognise a sign, what it stands for and the meaning of it. This according to participants, should be preceded by learners first able to count, and to have knowledge of numbers and number patterns, as they felt that, if this skill is not mastered, learners tend to confuse numbers or even numbers with letters (6/9, 7/L).

Teaching mathematical concepts and terminologies: Teaching of mathematical concepts and terminologies was one of the ways that some teachers found useful. Some mathematical terms are complex and difficult and teachers argued that, if such concepts are not understood by learners, not much learning would take place.

4.4 Factors that promote the development of literacy and numeracy

Early learning: Attending pre-primary and engaging in early literacy and numeracy activities that would expose learners to letters and numbers was considered highly by the majority of the educators. This included listening to television (TV) and radio at home, as well as computers and children’s TV games/cartoons.

Parental involvement: Teachers felt that, as long as parents do not show interest and contribute, teachers would always fail, as they strongly believed that parents have a role to play at home and at school. They strongly believed that, the poor literacy and numeracy skills among learners were a result of, among others, parents not contributing as expected, as in most instances, learning only occurred at school. Teachers had the following expectations from parents: help with homework, attend family literacy sessions, attend parents’ meetings, and parents’ days to check learners’ books, expose children to literacy and numeracy activities before school, sign school work when requested (report cards, homework, tests etc), create conducive environments at home for learners to do their school work and to motivate learners.

However, some educators were concerned that, as long as nothing is done to address this lack of parental involvement, the situation would remain unchanged, and hence suggested the following as solution:

1. **Literacy promotion for parents who are illiterate:** It was strongly felt by some participants that parents who were illiterate needed to join literacy promotion programmes. However, it was noted that, before that happened, parents needed to be educated on why there was a need for them to do so, as most of them did not seem to take such opportunities for their own benefit.

2. **Educating parents on how to assist their children at home:** It was revealed through these interviews that some parents faced problems on how to go about assisting their children. So many situations were cited, and the first one being that of parents actually doing homework for their children instead of explaining the homework and assisting accordingly. This made it impossible for teachers to know the weaknesses as in most cases homework was done satisfactorily. Secondly, some teachers were concerned that some parents were not well versed with what was going on at school, for example, instead of helping learners to sound letters of the alphabet, they would teach them the names of the letters. This, teachers claimed, confused learners. And lastly, teachers blamed some parents especially grade 1 parents, for not using the opportunities provided in some schools of attending family literacy classes that focussed on how they would go about assisting.
3. **Educating parents to understand their role as partners:** According to some participants, the role of parents was misunderstood by some parents, as they felt that, it was the duty of a teacher to teach and not a parent. This perception made some parents reluctant and not willing to assist. Again, due to this perception, no learning or school work should be carried home, and thus, some parents did not allow their children time to work on their school work, but instead to do home chores. Hence, education is needed to make them understand this.

4. **Improving the economic status of parents:** Poverty seemed to be an issue of concern. Some participants attributed lack of parental contribution to the economic status of some parents. They claimed that learners who came from well to do homes performed much better as they were supported, and had all necessary materials, unlike those from low income households who could not even afford a pencil.

**Availability of Resources:** A number of participants argued that, as long as schools are not well resourced, the problems would persist. Lack of electricity, photocopying machines, computers, appropriate reading books (children’s story books), libraries, textbooks and workbooks, English dictionaries, chairs and desks were among the many resources mentioned. Teachers with photocopying machines complained about the black and white copies, which would no longer appeal to young learners.

**Policy issues:** Two policies were attributed to the poor performance experienced by schools: transferring learners without having met the basic competencies, and strongly recommended repetition with learning support. The issue of subject teaching also raised concerns. Teachers were discontented about class teaching, instead they preferred subject teaching, a practice that was observed in some of the sampled schools. Subject teaching was regarded because each subject in the lower grades would be handled by specialists. If this is the way to go, then teacher education programmes needed to attend to issues of specialization.

**The quality of teaching:** The quality of teaching included, among other things, the teacher, the strategies and methods and the learning support materials. Educators in this study acknowledged that, literacy and numeracy skills could be accelerated if:

1. There are different activities for different ability groups
2. Teachers are engaging learners in challenging activities
3. Teachers use a combination approach (phonics, look and say, etc), various methods and strategies to cater for different learning styles (games, rhymes, stories, songs, poems etc).
4. There is usage of concrete materials that learners can manipulate such as counters as well real life situations or simulations
5. Reading corners are provided in each lower primary class
6. Fellow learners help one another
7. Slow and struggling learners are attended to
8. All teachers teaching at the lower grades are specialists, competent and committed
9. Teachers have an acceptable command of English (proficiency in English)

**Integrating literacy and numeracy skills:** Educators in this study had realised that the reason why some learners’ literacy and numeracy skills were undesirable, was because some teachers did not make every lesson a literacy and numeracy lesson. According to them, if learners are engaged in more writing and reading activities
whether at home or at school, literacy and numeracy skills are enhanced. They highlighted the following writing skills to be stressed in all subjects until perfection is reached, especially grade 1: spacing, punctuation, sitting position, hand and eye coordination, how to hold a pencil, writing from right to left etc. In addition, spelling, pronunciation and dictation activities were also recommended across subjects.

**Continuous Professional Development (CPD) for teachers:** The majority of the participants were concerned that teachers needed to keep abreast with new changes, hence there was a need for workshops, in-service training and short courses to enable them to teach effectively, especially assistance on how to sound and teach phonics. Some of them suggested that the best mode of workshops for lower primary teachers should be that of focusing on a specific area or skill, e.g. teaching reading, and not a workshop that addresses a lot of issues in few days.

**Appropriate knowledge:** On this factor, participants felt that, as long as teachers did not possess appropriate knowledge of teaching literacy and numeracy skills, nothing would change the situation. They believed that, if a teacher lacks knowledge about something, it would be very hard to teach it. What came out clearly from the interviews was the concern about some teachers who could not sound correctly and hence could not help learners with phonics, some had low numeracy skills, and could not therefore handle Mathematics confidently. There was therefore a suggestion that teachers be empowered with the necessary skills and methodologies needed.

**Background of learners:** The majority of the participants popularly complained about some learners who were enrolled in grade 1 without attending pre-school. According to participants, it was not easy dealing with a child who came straight from home without any exposure to literacy and numeracy activities. In such instances, teachers were forced to spend time on pre-grade activities, and that took most of the time, meanwhile, in situations where all learners attended pre-primary, a teacher would start straight away with the syllabus.

**Class Size:** A lot of concern was raised that, if there are a lot of learners in a class, it became very difficult for teachers to provide one-to-one basis assistance, let alone to identify struggling learners. Participants suggested that, at least the class size for lower primacy should range between 20-25 learners. They also argued that, in most cases, schools that were doing well were because of this factor, they had fewer learners and offering learning support was less strenuous, unlike in most schools were classes became too small due to the number of learners, no space for the teacher to move around and observe.

**The Medium of Instruction:** Using English as a medium of instruction from grade 1 was suggested by many teachers, particularly grade 4 teachers who always encountered problems when learners reached grade 4, as in most cases, such learners whose language of instruction was mother tongue lagged behind their fellow classmates. Some teachers described teaching such children as a nightmare, whereby, a teacher had to start with the basics in both English and Mathematics, especially in Mathematics as all mathematical terminologies in English would be new to them. Still on this issue, some complained that using mother tongue as medium of instruction confused learners especially with sounds. They claimed that learners confused mother tongue and English, and this negatively influenced their performance in English. However, to some teachers, especially grade 1, mother tongue instruction worked for them.
**Prescribed Textbooks/grammar books:** This should have been part of resources, but due to the intensity of the problem, it stands alone. Participants, specifically teachers wanted prescribed textbooks to be comprehensive and to correlate with the curriculum. They wanted a full package comprised of a textbook inclusive of grammar, learners’ workbooks, teacher’s guide and teaching materials (cassettes, videos, posters etc). This, according to some teachers, still made Molteno series the best, as it almost had everything a teacher would need.

**Team Work:** One other factor was team work. This was mentioned by many as a way of improving teachers’ skills and learning from each other. Some teachers acknowledged the fact that no one is a master of everything, some lower primary teachers might be better in one area or subject than others. And due to this, working closely with each other, planning together, team teaching, teachers modelling lessons to each other would enable teachers share ideas and improve on their skills. This was the reason why in some schools, class teaching was replaced by subject teaching to some extent. Especially in grades 3 and 4, a teacher confident to teach English would teach it in the two grades, the same applied to Mathematics, while the status quo was retained in other subjects.

**Management of the Lower Primary Phase:** The absence of a head of department for lower primary was mentioned by a number of teachers. They felt that, an upper primary or junior secondary head of department would not give the needed and necessary assistance, as lower primary was a different phase level, with different teaching approaches and programmes. The suitable head of department would help them plan and assist when they get stuck.

**Assistance of the Advisory Teachers:** While advisory teachers also advanced their problems for not providing the needed support, teachers felt that, a lot would change if advisory teachers visited schools to render support. Some teachers claimed that they struggled with sounding and teaching phonics, but no help came from the regional office, particularly the advisory teachers.

**Interaction between rural and urban teachers:** So much could be learnt from each other if teachers had an opportunity of visiting and sitting in each other’s class. Teachers acknowledged what was happening at clusters, but they felt, it was not enough. What was needed was a cross breed of what went on in rural and urban schools, most specifically, rural schools learning from urban schools.

Other factors, not that popular, but mentioned by a sizeable number of participants. These are not arranged in any particular order.
1. Working with disciplined learners
2. Training of pre-primary teachers
3. Teachers with appropriate teaching experience
4. Provision of learning support to struggling learners
5. Equal distribution of resources to all schools
6. Doing away with multi-grade classes
7. Doing away with the platoon system
8. Doing away with the automatic transfer of learners
9. Teacher’s knowledge of remedial and compensatory teaching and how to handle learners with special needs
10. Reinstatement of the School Readiness Programme in the absence of pre-primary

4.5 The influence of the medium of instruction (MOI) in literacy and numeracy skills development

Figure 21 displays results on educators’ opinions on the extent to which the medium of instruction influence the attainment of literacy and numeracy skills.

![Pie chart showing the influence of medium of instruction on literacy and numeracy skills]

**Figure 21: The influence of the medium of instruction**

**Influence of medium of instruction on literacy**

More than half (54%) of the educators carry the opinion that English should be taught as a medium of instruction from Grade 1 to effect the development of literacy and numeracy.

The reasons behind the preferences of English as medium of instruction were:

1. Learners who did English as medium of instruction (MOI) from Grade 1 outperformed those whose medium of instruction was mother tongue most especially in grade 4;

2. Using English as medium of instruction made it easier to learn mathematical terminologies and handle problem solving, and generally such learners possessed good numeracy skills.
3. Learners who did English as medium of instruction at kindergarten, and encountered mother tongue as medium of instruction when they began grade 1, as claimed, were confused and this affected their literacy and numeracy skills development.

About a third of the teachers (34.9%) were in favour of the mother tongue instruction at Grades 1-3 as stipulated in the language policy discussion document. In supporting the use of mother tongue as medium of instruction, Grade 1 teachers argued that using mother tongue as medium of instruction helped learners to understand better, laid a foundation for developing literacy skills and learning English. It was equally argued that most of the speech sounds or phonics in mother tongue was similar to English thus made transition from mother tongue to English easier. This view was challenged by grade 4 teachers who conceived that learners who were taught through mother tongue were just like mere beginners when English was introduced as medium of instruction at that level. The proponents of mother tongue as medium of instruction argued that, using a language that was not spoken at home was ineffective as it had little exposure at home; only used at school. This concern also applied to indigenous languages used a MOI but not the mother tongue of the learners.

As seen in figure 2, 4.8% of the teachers contended that Mathematics should be taught in English from Grade 1, other subjects could continue being taught in mother tongue. About 3.6% felt that, it was a bit late to begin using English as a medium of instruction at Grade 4, thus suggested that transition from mother tongue as a medium of instruction to English should be phased in from grade 3. 1.2% of the teachers preferred phasing in of mother tongue to English as early as grade 2. Another 1.2% of the teachers conceived a different approach of bilingual where both mother tongue and English are developed at par and used in teaching at grades 1-3; implying a code-switching system.

4.6 The adequacy of the Lower Primary Curriculum in promoting literacy and numeracy skills

Educators were asked to comment on the adequacy of the lower primary curriculum in promoting literacy and numeracy skills. Although there were satisfactions on the adequacy of the lower primary curriculum in promoting literacy and numeracy, a number of issues on the shortcoming of the lower primary curriculum were raised:

Assessment: Assessments tasks in Grades 1-4 were too many in such a way that teachers spent little time teaching. Teachers no longer taught for understanding but rather work hard to complete the assessment requirements. Teachers conceived that the number of assessments should be reduced to allow sufficient time to teach and attend to struggling learners thus improve learners’ literacy and numeracy skills.

Prescribed books: The prescribed books did not have sufficient grammar or that grammar was not explicitly ‘given’. Grammar was clearly presented in out-dated old books which were according to their opinion, the best. Teachers coincided that curriculum should be precise on how assessment of grammar or language structure could be conducted. This concern emanated from the fact that teachers were expected to assess language structure that was not part of the content or basic competencies.

The educators were concerned about the number of prescribed textbooks. There were too many prescribed books making it difficult for teachers to choose the best. There were teachers who preferred many textbooks to being bounded to one. With the conception that many books provided rich source to information. Another
major concern was that some prescribed textbooks did not correlate with the curriculum. The advantage of having many prescribed books lied as contented was that if one book fell short of one aspect, other books could be consulted and fill the gap.

Teachers especially in rural schools contended that, learners’ inadequate literacy and numeracy skills development was caused by low content coverage within the prescribed books. They viewed that most of the content in textbooks favoured learners in urban schools compared to those in rural schools. They strongly conceived that there should be considerations on making the content familiar or localised to accommodate all learners.

**The curriculum:** A major short coming of the lower primary curriculum and its impact on the development of literacy and numeracy fell on the fact that some teachers found it very difficult to interpret the curriculum. Some did not understand the role of the syllabus guide and the teacher’s guide. This shortfall led to teaching from the textbook. The inability among teachers to deduct information from the curriculum and develop schemes of work or year plans and later lesson plans impacted negatively on quality of teaching literacy and numeracy at lower primary.

**Amount of content:** There were different opinions on the amount of literacy and numeracy contents within the curriculum required to be covered in Grade 1. Some schools contended that the Grade 1 curriculum specifically on literacy and numeracy was too shallow while others were of the opinion that the content for Grade 1 was overloaded. There were concerns that the requirement in English second language to read a specified number of words and speak English by the end of grade 1 was set too high specifically for rural schools. It was difficult in most cases for a Grade 1 learner who had no exposure to English before school to meet this requirement.

**Contact time:** There were concerns about the allocation of periods to English Second Language. Some educators indicated that English Second Language was allocated less periods compared to First Languages. Similarly, some also commented that that multi-grade set ups affected the contact time, because instead of 40 minutes being used fully for teaching, the periods were reduced to thirty five minutes. The reduction of teaching time negatively affected teaching and learning in general and the development of literacy and numeracy in particular.

**Handwriting as a subject:** The educators linked the handwriting skills to literacy. They raised concerns that the abolishment of handwriting as a subject within the curriculum has detrimental effect on literacy development. The diminishing handwriting skill among learners consequently affected the spelling skills. Integrating handwriting in all subjects as stipulated in the lower primary curriculum and subject policy was perceived not working, as not all teachers would consider or focus on handwriting; hence the need to re-instate handwriting as a subject. It was noted that in private schools as opposed to public schools handwriting both printing and cursive were taught emphatically. Learners from private schools had neater work and were competent in spelling in particular and literacy in general terms.

**Inconsistencies in terminologies:** While some teachers appreciated the terminologies used in Grades 1 and 2 when imparting numeracy skills, some found it confusing for learners. They felt that instead of using terminologies such as ‘double’ to mean multiplying, ‘take away’ to mean subtraction, etc, it would be easier for learners as early as Grades 1 and 2 to be introduced to the terminologies they would use in future grades.
4.7 The adequacy of teacher education programmes in equipping teachers with relevant skills

The teacher’s competency and experience in developing literacy and numeracy skills among learners were seen as determinants of school performance. Subsequently, teacher education and its impact on literacy and numeracy skill development were eminent factors in developing literacy and numeracy skills. Thus this section explores the adequacy of the teacher education training programme in developing literacy and numeracy skills among learners at lower primary and the extent to which teacher education programmes fully equipped teachers with relevant skills of developing literacy and numeracy.

**Inadequacies:** Due to the phase level under investigation, most of the teachers had Basic Education Teacher Diploma (BETD Preset and Inset), Education Certificate Primary (ECP), and Lower Primary Teacher Certificate (LPTC). It was noted that most of the sampled educators were not satisfied with BETD In-Set graduates most specifically the school managers. In some instances, the BETD Inset programme graduates acknowledged that the programme did not fully equip them with skills to develop literacy and numeracy skills at lower primary. The BETD Pre-Set graduates, although some participants were satisfied with the programme, some found it lacking in a number of areas:

*Teaching literacy and numeracy activities:* some BETD graduates struggled to teach literacy and numeracy skills, most specifically, phonics. They lacked knowledge on letter sound and subject matter knowledge. Some graduates’ had low English proficiency to be able to teach English efficiently and correctly to promote literacy skills. Some educators blamed some graduates for failing to apply what they learnt at the colleges into practice.

On the other hand, some BETD graduates conceived that the programme did not sufficiently equip them with phonic knowledge (sounding of letters), vocabulary teaching and mother tongue teaching. There was a feeling that the training was too theoretical, and did not relate directly to classroom situation, teaching and learning and to learners who are the focus of interest. The real situations in schools such as handling disciplinary issues, multi-grade teaching, compensatory teaching, and handling learners with special needs where not emphasised during the training period. Some educators were dissatisfied with class teaching and argued that they were not equipped sufficiently to handle different subjects. Class teaching at lower primary did not provide them with an opportunity to specialise in a subject as such teachers were not English and Mathematics specialists. Lack of in-depth subject knowledge in languages, be it mother tongue or English and Mathematics among the lower primary teachers suggested that the teaching of literacy and numeracy could have been negatively affected.

4.8 The nature and extent of learning support provided to struggling learners

Research has shown that, when appropriate learning support is provided, many learners would not have faced learning backlogs as was the case when no support was given. Hence it was imperative to find out from teachers what sorts of programmes or learning support activities were carried out in schools or classrooms. It was evident that some schools, although not that common, had a teacher who assisted learners who experienced difficulties learning different skills. Apart from afternoon programmes, teachers provided support to learners during class by targeting individual learners. Some schools sought the assistance of volunteers to provide support to struggling learners.
While these activities ran smoothly in some schools, it was a challenge in others. One of the obstacles was the platoon system. Schools with a platoon system did not have facilities for afternoon programmes. The other reason cited was the lack of knowledge on how to go about assisting, as some teachers claimed that they were not trained, and could not offer the necessary support.

4.9 Best approaches/methods of developing/ teaching literacy and numeracy skills at lower grades

Figure 22 displays quantified interview results of educators’ opinion on the best approach or method of developing literacy and numeracy skills. It was evident as figure 22 shows, the majority of the teachers (53%) ranked the phonic method as the best method by believing that once a learner knows the sounds of the letters (vowels and consonants), it is easier to read by putting sounds together into syllables and words.

Figure 22: Best methods of developing literacy skills

The next popular method was look and say (22%). The proponents of this method believed that, since both the word and the picture were included, a learner could associate a word with a picture while the opponents of the method found limitations with this method by arguing that, once the picture was removed, learners ended up failing to read the abstract concept or failed to recognise the word without a picture.

A small percentage (9%) of the teachers indicated that the use of combination of methods was effective in promoting literacy skills. Proponents of this view believed that, no one method was good, and supported an idea of using one or more methods in developing learners’ literacy and numeracy skills. A fraction of the teachers (5%) conceived that Molteno, whole word approach and THRASS were effective in teaching language and thus promoted literacy skills among learners. The percentages for especially Molteno and THRASS were low because Molteno was piloted in the Northern regions and THRASS was piloted in few schools nationwide.

4.10 Best strategies used to promote literacy skills among learners
Figure 23 presents best strategies used to promote learners’ literacy skills at lower primary. The results show the following order of preference of the best strategies for promoting basic literacy skills, namely writing, speaking, reading and listening among learners. Top on the list are games (17%), rhymes (15%) and songs (15%), storytelling (8.4) and poetry writing (8.4%). As seen in the figure, other strategies were not that popular.

![Chart showing the percentage of supporters for various literacy strategies.]

**Figure 23: Best strategies of developing Literacy skills**

4.11 Best practices of developing literacy and numeracy skills in lower grades

Schools differ on practices and strategies used to promote literacy and numeracy since the practices might be influenced by the nature and type of the school and management of teaching and learning. In order to establish the similarities or differences in terms of best practices of promoting literacy and numeracy skills, educators were asked to describe existing school practices in promoting literacy and numeracy skills. Figure 24 displays the quantified outcomes answering the question ‘what are some of the best practices of developing literacy and numeracy skills at your school?’
First and foremost, it was shocking that 16% of the sampled schools did not have any programmes or practices aimed at improving learners’ literacy and numeracy skills. This was disturbing since learners in those schools performed poorly in the literacy and numeracy assessment tests specifically the reading component.

However, different practices were recorded in different schools. The most common was focussed on literacy and numeracy (19%) and consisted of different activities. The activities are presented in table 1.

Table 1 Literacy and numeracy focus activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Literacy and numeracy across the curriculum</strong></td>
<td>The practice whereby literacy and numeracy are focus in all subjects, not necessarily English and Mathematics only.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pronunciation</strong></td>
<td>The practice of correcting and helping learners pronounce words correctly. In schools where this was practised, teachers would not let a wrongly pronounced word go uncorrected. However, this practice requires teachers who are proficient in English.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Vocabulary building</strong></td>
<td>At the beginning of a week, a teacher gives a list of words to learners to practice reading and to know their meaning, and in most schools, it culminated in a test on Fridays.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Spelling competition</strong></td>
<td>This is mostly at a classroom level whereby, learners from time to time do spelling tests and compete against one another.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Phonics/Sounding period</strong></td>
<td>A period is set aside for teaching just phonics or sounding especially for grade 1.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reading week</strong></td>
<td>A week is devoted to reading. Learners would be encouraged to read on anything and share what they have read. Teachers were at the helm of this, as they borrowed books from the library to read for learners, and later do all sorts of follow up activities with the learners.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Holiday reading</strong></td>
<td>The school selects learners to take part in the competition. One school in a cluster is</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
adventure selected each year to host the event. During this event, learners do a lot of literacy related activities. Teachers borrow books from the library and share what they read with the learners. Learners are expected to borrow the same books and read stories in more detail. This event involves parents too, they share cultural experiences with the learners e.g. the naming of a child ceremony.

Making reading compulsory This practice forces learners as early as grade 1 to read books or anything. This practice helps learners to develop the culture of reading. However, this practice needs to be facilitated by teachers, or else, it becomes worthless.

In addition to literacy and numeracy focus activities, other practices existed in some schools visited.

About 9% of the sampled schools practised debate and drama though this was meant for upper grades, and not lower grades, 7% of the schools practised Readathon which was a week-long reading and book festival held annually in schools, culminating in the National Readathon Day on the Fridays, 6% teamwork among teachers, 4% used the library as a tool, 4% public speaking, 4% promoted English through mandatory speaking and use of the language at school, 4% set targets to boost the promotion of literacy and numeracy and 4% of the schools emphasised on assessment of literacy and numeracy skills. The remaining practices were not very common in schools though could have played an important role in promoting literacy and numeracy.

4.12 Determinants of school performance

Figure 25 presents the determinants of school performance responding to the question ‘are there any differences in teaching literacy among schools that are known to be doing well in reading and those that are not?’ The results show that close to a third of the teachers in schools contended that teacher related factors determine learners’ high performance in literacy and numeracy, 20% on availability of resources, 19% on support at home or parental involvement, and slightly location and pre-primary education (9% each). The remaining determinants were not significant.
4.13 The best reading series and materials

Figure 26 shows more than a quarter (28%) of the teachers found the Friendly Earth Series very useful since it relates to the curriculum, covers all topics and skills very well, the vocabulary and pictures are suitable, activities are good and clear to the learners, the content is localized, better in grammar and sentence structures, easier for teachers to plan, has structured assessment activities, and good in phonics.
A quarter of the teachers viewed Day by Day Series useful because it has good pictures that accelerate vocabulary development, easier words, and has a teacher’s guide. There were comments that Day by Day series do not have all the skills, lacked grammar or do not focus on grammar and that do not match well with the curriculum.

A fraction of the teachers (10%) found English for All for Namibia, Molteno and NAMPEP series useful. It was amusing finding out that, teachers specifically in schools that Molteno project took place continued using Molteno series despite being phased out. The reasons given were: Molteno had many activities for learners (songs, poems, reading and writing activities), it had prepared teaching aids, integrated all skills, easier for teachers to use, gave clear guidance on how to do activities, and recommended a reading corner.

There was preference of combination of readers among 4.5% of the teachers implying that using more than one series enrich teaching and learning thus promote high literacy and numeracy skills. The remaining results indicate that readers that were not used specifically in public schools but popular in the few sampled private schools: Beehive, Betty and Ben at Home and in Town, English for you, English Second Language, Jill readers, Phonics for Namibia, New Adventures in English and Letter Land. Library books supplemented skills contained in the readers especially in schools that had libraries.

### 4.14 Parents’ views on learners’ literacy and numeracy skills

**Teaching of literacy and numeracy skills**

Parents’ views on how children in lower grades were taught to read, write and Mathematics were diverse. More than a third (38%) of the parents was satisfied on how their children were taught literacy and numeracy skills at lower grades. Contrary, more than a half (62%) of the parents was not satisfied with the teaching of literacy and numeracy skills at lower primary. Parents’ dissatisfaction was based on the ground that many learners could not read, write or speak English fluently and their inability to do simple mathematical tasks after being at lower primary for a while. The parents’ satisfaction of on how literacy and numeracy skills were taught was based on the type and quality of learners’ homework, learners who could count up to 100 or 1000 depending on the grade, learners who could read, and spell simple words and simple sentences, and learners who excelled well in Mathematics.

**Preferences of a medium of instruction**

Teachers especially in rural schools used vernacular instead of English especially in grade 4 where the medium of instruction should be English. There was dissatisfaction among parents on the teaching through Mother Tongue as a medium of instruction. Some parents in rural schools envied children in town schools who could speak English fluently, attributing this to the medium of instruction being English in urban schools. Parents who valued the mother tongue specifically Afrikaans speaking were uncomfortable with English. They preferred their children to be taught in mother tongue to be able to assist their children at home...

**Difficulties children faced in acquiring specific numeracy skills**
Parents indicated that learners experienced problems with word sums, mental arithmetic as they could not multiply mentally. Children relied too much on using objects like stones, sticks or their fingers. Thus children lacked knowledge of the multiplication table. Parents observed that the children confused some numbers like ‘6’ and ‘9’, letters ‘t’ and ‘j’, ‘b’ and ‘d’ and lastly, children struggled with operational signs such as minus (-), multiplication (x) and division (÷), in exception of addition (+). It was equally observed that some children had difficulties pronouncing some words, for example, ‘and’ would be pronounced as ‘ande’. Such difficulties also affected the ability to spell words. Spelling and pronunciation difficulties were attributed to mother tongue interference, as in most cases, children spelt according to how they are sounded in mother tongue. Parents ascribed children’s lack of spelling skills to gadgets like cell phones; they claimed that cell phone text messaging, that mainly use shorthand, had influenced, misled and lowered children ability to spell. The other difficulty cited by some parents was reading two or three consonants words such as ‘mother’, or ‘birth’ etc. Parents had observed that some learners copy and write down words without understanding what they have written.

**Difficulties in handwriting**

Parents noted that children experienced difficulties in handwriting. Children could not punctuate accordingly, use capital letters correctly, full stop, comma etc. Parents observed that some children could use capital letters in the middle of a word. Children faced difficulties in applying spacing between words and sentences especially among children who were in lower grades. Furthermore, parents commented that not all children could write on lines as were expected. Parents argued that the removal of handwriting as a subject had a detrimental effect on the children ability to write correctly. In addition teachers did not take handwriting seriously as it was in the past. Parents, who went to school in the past, had the opinion that the system of small writing boards that were used by children at school was effective since it provided an opportunity for children to practise handwriting. Due to this, parents who could afford, bought small writing boards for their children to use at home, and claimed that it really improved their writing skills.

**Teachers’ style of teaching**

Parents blamed teachers on the style of teaching based on the following:

1. Not being serious and committed to their work;
2. Using vernacular as medium of instruction other than English as per policy especially in grade 4;
3. Not giving homework to learners;
4. Not being patient with learners whose mother tongue was not English or who did not do English from grade 1;
5. Not allowing learners to take books home for parents to follow on their children’s progress;
6. The removal of handwriting;
7. The ineffective promotion requirements for Namibian school specifically the transfer of learners who had not met the basic requirements.

**Reasons for lack of parental involvement in school**

Interestingly enough, parents advanced a number of reasons amounting to the lack of parental involvement such as:
1. Low literacy and numeracy levels of some parents, parents especially in rural areas claimed they could not support their children as they could not read or write;
2. Lack of knowledge of syllabus requirements;
3. Not being made aware of what was required of the learners;
4. Inconsistencies in knowledge between teachers and parents especially with regards to phonetic sounds and terminologies used at school for example the use of letter sound of the alphabet versus the names of letters;
5. Use of numerical terms for instance, at school, learners were helped to understand the operational sign minus by using the phrase ‘take away’, whereas, parents would use for example ‘move ‘.
6. Parents’ lack of proficiency in the language used as the medium of instruction;
7. Parents especially working parents in urban areas claimed that they did not have enough time to assist due to their work commitments and busy schedules;
8. Some homes did not provide environments that were conducive for children.

4.15 Parental and home support

There are assumptions that children who are supported at home excel well in literacy and numeracy compared to those not receiving parental support. In order to establish the relevance of the aforementioned retrospective parents were asked to describe the extent and nature of support they provided to their children in lower grades and the extent to which it contributed to acceleration of literacy and numeracy skills. The interview outcomes revealed the negative and positive dispositions:

1. Parents encouraged older siblings to assist young ones with school work;
2. Older siblings motivated young ones to focus and to take school seriously;
3. Practices in some homes derailed children by asking them to do house chores thus depriving them time to do school work;
4. Parents not attaching value to education;
5. Parents supervise, explaining the homework, and ensuring that the homework was done and completed;
6. Parents read to their learners as early as the child could sit still and listen or as early as pre-school age (4-5 years);
7. Parents read bible, bible story books, children’s story books, school books, magazines, newspapers, library books, hospital health passport cards, and anything around homes;
8. Some parents taught sounds and syllables;
9. In some homes, learners were helped with writing skills such as handling of books, shaping of letters, writing on lines, punctuation marks, use of upper and lower case, imitated or copied handwriting and spelling;
10. Although not a common practice some parents registered their children at public libraries;
11. Teaching children to count using objects, computation skills (addition and subtraction), and teaching the children the multiplication table;
12. Buying school materials for their children to use at home. This included small writing boards, magazines, children story books, digital video discs (DVDs) etc;
13. Parents checked their children’s school books regularly.

4.16 School support to parents
Addressing the illiteracy levels of parents and also enabling parents to assist their children at home, schools are expected to set up strategies that will enable parents to assist their children with reading, writing, and do Mathematics. It was observed that few schools had set mechanisms to accomplish this practice while the majority of the schools did not have the mechanism in place making it difficult for parents to assist. Schools that had mechanisms in place involved parents in school activities such as family literacy especially for parents of learners in grade 1. However, the majority of the parents neither attended such classes at school nor literacy classes in the communities. Parents that attended literacy classes in the communities were happy that they could read, write especially understand their children’ health passports which was a hassle in the past, as they required someone to tell them the name on the passport.

4.17 School – home rapport

The school – home rapport was explored in order to establish the sort of relationship that existed between the school and home or more precisely the dialectical relationship between parents, teachers and children. It was noted that parents acknowledged schools’ efforts in involving parents. Parents admitted that there were avenues such as ‘parents meetings’, ‘parents’ days’ on which parents were invited to check their children books, invitations to parents’ whose children were struggling, term reports, a leeway to visit the school anytime, and some schools sent test schedules to parents. But despite all this, some parents confirmed, only few parents reacted positively to the teachers’ calls, the majority turned a deaf ear and never visited the schools, nor attended meetings, much less, attending parents’ days. This was found surprising because information for meetings was disseminated to all parents through letters, cell phone text messages; message books etc, depending on the school. Some parents were dissatisfied that the progress reports of their children were not that informative, and the absence of the platforms to discuss children’s report. This relationship was undesirable and affected the development of literacy and numeracy at lower primary.

4.18 General Issues raised by parents

During the discussions, parents were concerned about a number of issues, which they felt, generally had an influence on learners’ performance.

1. Lack of emphasis on the multiplication tables;
2. Some ‘don’t care’ attitudes of some teachers;
3. Lack of commitment to work;
4. Teachers who did not seem to plan their lessons sufficiently.
5. The high failure rates in English and mathematics;
6. Shortage of textbooks and other materials such as calculators especially for learners in upper grades;
7. Lack of assistance with pronunciation and spelling;
8. Inadequate assistance from the government to learners who cannot afford to register with NAMCOL (Namibia College of Open Learning) due to financial constraints.
9. All teachers should specialise in mathematics in order to teach all subjects in the lower grades.
SECTION FIVE

CASE STUDIES

5.1 Introduction

The purpose for conducting case studies was to document practices in teaching literacy and numeracy in schools. It was further envisaged that case studies would give a holistic picture on the management of literacy and numeracy teaching and the shortcoming thereof in schools that are excelling in literacy and numeracy compared to those experiencing difficulties in developing these skills among learners at lower primary. Data for the case studies was collected following a guided checklist containing seven sections namely: 1) school profile 2) medium of instruction used at lower primary 3) textbooks and teaching materials and equipment, 4) teachers profile 5) teaching approaches of literacy and numeracy 6) classroom description and 7) learners’ profile. Details of this instrument are in the annexure.

5.2 School ‘A’

School Management, composition and responsibilities

School ‘A’ was a private school situated in urban area. The school followed Christian principles of caring, nurturing, teaching and guiding learners to focus on their studies during and after school time. Teachers called each other sister or brother in a typical Christian fellowship manner. Learners equally followed the examples of the teachers but more on cultural and traditional approach where male teachers were uncles and female teachers were aunties. It was observed that the combination of these approaches enhanced discipline among the learners.

The school had a director who is also a principal, deputy principal, four Head of Departments for Infancy department, Grades 1-3, 4, and 8-9. Head of Departments were part of the school management and were fully involved in decision making. The head of departments foresaw or supervised the class teaching throughout the phase as opposed to subject teaching.

The duties of the management were planned ahead of time yearly comprised of overseeing the running of the schools by observing the academic progress by checking promotion schedules, social committee reports, Chaplin committee reports, term reports, folder or file information and sport committee reports. The management did class visits. The principal reviewed the class visit reports and book inspection. A follow up was done on learners who experienced academic and social problems. The parents of learners experiencing academic or social problems were contacted.

School Popularity

The school performed very well in literacy and numeracy. It was competing with the well-established and long standing private schools in terms of the quality of teaching and so were the graduates from the school who were competent in literacy and numeracy. The number of learners moved from the well-established and long standing private schools to this school because of the high quality of teaching and the level of literacy and numeracy competencies among learners. The school’s high achievement in literacy and numeracy was well known by members of the community. The school is not in a position to accommodate the influx of learners from other schools seeking for provision of the quality input from the school.

Academic targets and underachievers
The school targeted at achieving 60% pass rate in numeracy and literacy. Learners who failed to achieve above average of 50% in literacy and numeracy repeated. Support was given to learners who experienced difficulties achieving the basic competencies of the grade. Rules regarding repetition were discussed with parents.

**Approaches in literacy and numeracy teaching**

English, French and Afrikaans were taught at 1st language level. In teaching literacy the school used a reader series called ‘Letter Land’ from Scotland. The series contains phonics, spelling, grammar, dictionary work, composition, comprehension, poems and rhymes. The teaching of phonics starts at pre-primary. In supporting learners and enhancing literacy and numeracy, the school provided remedial classes, meteoric to grade 1-3. More importantly, the school used software called Cairo Software for enhancing mathematics and English skills. Other support materials used to support learners were E-learning, Wise Eye a test used to assess learners’ level of reading. Spelling ton competition was used to assess the knowledge of sounds (phonics) spelling and the semantics. Learners were encouraged to read one book in two weeks. The school conducted competition in mathematics.

Numeracy poses a challenge to many learners. To enhance numeracy skills, the school practices mental and number concepts every day. Learners were given books and allowed to take them home. The school used ‘Hyneman’ mathematics books and Just maths, Number Wise and Big Boet.

**Assessment and examination modes**

The school believed in testing and examination. Learners write cycle tests and examination from day one. In literacy, there were key comprehension paper 1 and 2 whereby paper 1 was ordinary and paper 2 was extended version. Learners were required to write, spell and pronounce the words correctly and fluently. Oral examination comprised of two papers. Paper 1 was prepared reading and paper 2 was unprepared reading. Tests were conducted twice a term. Mock examinations were conducted for the purpose of preparing learners for the final examination.

To enhance reading, parents were advised to encourage their children to spend more time reading than watching television. The dialectical support and relationship between school and home enhanced reading and numeracy skills development among learners.

**Staff composition, literacy and numeracy development programmes**

The teaching staff composition has implications on literacy and numeracy competencies. Should this be taken as a yard stick to determine the school’s performance in literacy and numeracy, this school articulated it well enough. The teaching staff was composed of 2 teachers who had a diploma in primary education, 12 had high education diploma, 4 had Bachelor degrees in education, a Bachelor of education honours, and a Master’s degree in education, 3 pre-primary, and two educators at the diploma level.

In spite of the high qualification and competency in teaching literacy and numeracy at lower primary the school placed more emphasis on staff development specifically on updating teachers on new trends in literacy and numeracy teaching. The staff development programme was composed of reading with edu-news, mathematics teaching updates and Plato class group. The school believed that teachers continuous development was essential to all teachers and those teachers need to be updated on the new trends in teaching literacy and numeracy. These updates enhanced teaching and bring good academic performance among learners. As a private school continuous professional development was at heart since competent teachers produce good academic results. The school stressed that good academic results increased the school popularity and competitive to other private schools.

**Classroom observation**
The classroom observation was done in Grade 1 with learners who have been in school for six months. There were 25 five learners in a small spaced classroom. The teacher held a master degree in education and had taught at lower primary for more than 20 years.

The lesson
The topic of the lesson presented was ‘BLENDS’. The teacher taught a combination of words with blend such as pretty, fry, play, fly, beautiful, etc. The teaching emphasis was on spelling, sentence construction and word building and semantics. Blends were written on the chalk board. Learners read the words and the teacher assisted where learners had difficulties reading the new words. The meanings of the words were later explained to learners. Each learner was asked to spell the words while looking at the written word and then later without looking at the word. Sentence construction followed was first done orally and later learners were asked to write five sentences using the blends. It was impressing to note high competencies among the learners in spelling and oral sentence construction and writing using the presented blends bearing the fact they had been at school for only six months. Faster learners were given extension work. It was evident that learners developed the spirit of completion among each other at an early age.

Classroom management and administration
The teacher had an up-to-date scheme of work, lesson preparation, administration files, assessment files, subject objective file, observation and disciplinary files. All the files were checked by the management team comprised of the principal and the head of department. The principal, head of department and the teacher monitored learners’ performances, behavior, and progress. Furthermore, it reiterated that this data provide information on school performance and teachers’ work.

Enhancing the literacy competencies among learners
The school uses Letter Land and Beehive Schemes or Programmes in enhancing literacy skills. Learners were introduced to dictionary work, reading books, word power foundation at the beginning of the school year. Each learner had a reading card indicating the number of words read. Learners started with one word at the beginning of the year, the number of the words increased in every reading lesson. The format of the reading card used is presented below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Pages</th>
<th>Difficult words</th>
<th>Parent’s signature</th>
<th>Teacher signature</th>
<th>Teacher comment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

The card was monitored by parents. Parents were obliged to help their children at home and ensured that their children read on everyday basis and difficult words that the child encountered at school were communicated and parents helped the children. The teachers’ efforts were strengthened by the two way relationship between the teacher at school and the parents at home.

Assessment
Learners wrote tests even at lower primary. The assessment file comprised of the following information: supervisor report, progress record, afternoon book, copies of progress reports, and mark schedule. Reports were shared with parents and follow-ups as a result of monitoring learners’ progress were done by both parents and the teacher.

5.3 School ‘B’

School Management - composition and responsibilities
The school consisted of three phases - lower primary, upper primary and junior secondary. Each phase had a head of department. There were subject heads for each subject in a phase. Upper Primary phase had more subject heads. The management met at the beginning of each semester to discuss and share issues they had observed during the previous semester.

Promoting reading culture

The school supposed that the lower primary syllabus provide sufficient content that guide the promotion of literacy and numeracy if fully and effectively implemented. In supporting the syllabus, the school had a library where teachers borrowed books on behalf of the learners. Parents were asked to help their children with reading. The upper and junior phases had a reading period that used to assist learners with reading. There was a register period and learners were asked to read in addition to the reading period.

Approaches in literacy and numeracy teaching

The medium of instruction at the school at lower primary was Afrikaans. The school used phonics as an approach in teaching literacy. In terms of books used to support the teaching of literacy, teachers and the principal uttered that the old Afrikaans books were the best to use in teaching literacy compared to the new readers especially in Grade 1. Phonics in old books was more elaborate and easily helped learners to have a better understanding on what they were being taught, e.g. the vocabulary. But now the teacher had to find readers that can support the teaching on literacy because the old books were no longer available in schools.

All the lower primary teachers were Afrikaans speakers so they were qualified grade 1 teachers. Afrikaans was the medium of instruction from Grade 1-3. Grade 4 was a transition year to which learners were taught through English as medium of instruction and English was taught as subject while Afrikaans was the second language. The principal commented that it was difficult for learners coming from different ethnic groups beside Afrikaans or English to develop literacy skills sufficiently through a language that was foreign or not used at home. The schools saw it wise to teach learners at lower primary in the mother tongue.

Teaching materials in supporting literacy and numeracy

Due to insufficient resources from the government the school bought reader books, had a computer laboratory though not used effectively for the promotion of literacy and numeracy but rather for developing keyboard skills. The keyboard skill could have improved the spelling abilities among learners. To support efforts towards improving learners’ literacy and numeracy competencies at school, the school had a volunteer who assisted grade 1 learners with literacy and numeracy. Tape recorders and video machines were used to promote literacy and numeracy skills among learners. The school fund obtained through fund raisings was used to buy additional resources that were essential for promoting literacy and numeracy competencies and thus uplift the school image.

Parental involvement in promoting literacy and numeracy skills

The school presupposed that literacy and numeracy competencies among learners could not be achieved if parents do not work consistently with teachers at school. It was evident that parents of some learners were very much involved in the education of their children but some did not care much. Learners of well to do families were more competent in literacy and numeracy compared to those who had limited participation at school of which most came from poor social economic families. The principal conceived that the level of participation in promoting literacy and numeracy competencies among the children depended on the level of education among the parents. The higher the level of education, though not always the case, the higher the involvement in education matters of the children and positive learner’s school progress in both literacy and numeracy.

The school popularity

There were evidences regarding the school popularity. There mere fact that the scramble for space at the beginning of each year was high, it is an indication of the fact that the school was popular among the local
community. In addition, the school had been a former advantaged school. Its name and reputation had been maintained despite the change of administration and orientation over the years. The school results had been very impressing, thus proving the school’s achievements.

*The medium of instruction*

Due to the fact that Afrikaans was a medium of instruction at Grade 1-3, a learner coming from different ethnical groups to which Afrikaans was not the home language experienced problems at the beginning learning through a foreign language. Despite this shortcoming, the school received feedback about the performance of learners who joined secondary schools, especially in high school, on how well the learners from the schools were performing. In several occasions, the last two years being in particular, the elected Junior Parliament Speakers hailed from this school.

*Staff composition, literacy and numeracy development programmes*

The professional staff was composed of 7 BETD, 5 BED and 13 HED teachers. Teachers had 5 to 30 years of teaching experience. The staff composition and the teaching experience among them were evident in implying that the school performance was attributed, among other factors, to the competent, qualified staff members. The main predicament that the staff members were concerned about was the lack of continuous profession development programme for teachers geared at improving teachers’ competencies in teaching literacy and numeracy at lower primary in order to improve literacy and numeracy skills at lower primary.

*Classroom observation*

The classroom observation was done at Grade 1. The classroom space was small to accommodate learners though they were slightly above the recommended teacher learner ratio. There were about 35 learners instead of 30 recommended numbers of learners. The desks were so close to each other. The teacher was not able to move around the classroom whilst teaching and assisting learners individually. The teacher lamented that the large number of learners makes it difficult to give individual attention to each learner, especially those who experienced difficulties learning or attaining literacy and numeracy competencies at a normal or an expected pace.

There were seven files specifically for lower primary. The files were well kept and organised. The learners were disciplined throughout the lesson. Teachers tried to involve all the learners during the lesson and encouraged them to take part in all class activities. Learners were given books to read and given homework. The home work was marked and corrections were done and learners adopted the corrections. The teacher gave class work after teaching and attended to those with learning backlog.

5.4 School ‘C’

*School Management - composition and responsibilities*

The management was comprised of a principal and a Head of Department who is a full time teacher. Due to shortage of second language teacher in Afrikaans, class teaching was practised. In order to strengthen the management of the school, the head of department used Mathematics and Physical Education periods assigned to the principal to do administrative work. The control of assessments conducted was done weekly and entries controlled.
The principal had a hidden year plan that was used for conducting class visits. The management was responsible for managing teaching and learning. The tasks of managing the school were divided among the management team. The Head of Department was responsible for grade 2 and the Principal was responsible for 3 and 4. The principal had a monthly schedule of work ‘programme to which all teachers were managed’. The programme was divided into A) early preparation before the school reopens, B) academic programme, C) planning, D) staff issues, E) learners issues, F) maintenance, G) administration, and H) new matters.

Approaches in literacy and numeracy teaching

The approaches used in teaching literacy were phonics and learning the site or frequently used words. Teachers used ‘look and say word’. Each teacher set up test on Friday on phonics, comprehension and creative writing. In addition to phonics and look and say approaches, the schools used the whole language method. The schools believed that phonics and whole language approach helped learners to read fluently and correctly, formulate words and critically analyse the contents of the word.

Improving literacy and numeracy skills

In spite the effort and strategies the school had set in promoting literacy at school, the lack of library hampered development of literacy and growth of the reading culture among learners. To further enhancing teaching and learning of literacy skills teachers used English Alive and reading comprehension materials by Jack Northman and Mark Fletcher. In grade three the school used ‘Let’s read and write’ as supplementary material to ‘English Alive’. For the purpose of encouraging a reading culture, learners were encouraged to borrow reading books from a public library nearby.

Availability of technical equipment and teaching materials

The school experienced shortage of technical equipment and materials that are essential for enhancing literacy and numeracy. The most recently acquired computers were stolen. There was however, few equipment that were used for enhancing numeracy skills specifically in counting and measurement. While flash cards. TV, CD players were used to display visual materials in promoting literacy and numeracy skills.

Learners’ social economic background and school location

About 116 out of 452 learners were from poor social economic families. The remaining learners were mixed but between low and middle class. Learners coming from impoverished conditions spared little time for home work because the conditions at home such as lack of electricity, parents work late, etc. do not allow continuity of school work at home. As such learners don’t do homework. Thus, literacy and numeracy development was hampered by shanty houses that were not electrified or runs a shebeen business. The management commented that shanty houses did not provide friendly environments for developing literacy and numeracy.

The school was located at mixed suburb of which most to the inhabitants were casual workers, fisherman and conducting informal trade. This disposition implied that learners come from a low social economic environment. The school location slightly negatively implicated on literacy and numeracy competencies among learners.

Parental involvement

Parents contributed immensely into literacy and numeracy development. Parents attended parents meetings and parent evenings. Many parents attended these meetings because there were strict mechanisms set by the school to ensure that parents participated in school activities. Each parent had a cord and signed the attendance register
when called to school or attended a school function. As in many situations, parents whose children experienced problems in literacy and numeracy did not normally attend the parent’s meetings.

*The medium of instruction*

The medium of instruction at school was English. To many learners, English was not a mother tongue or home language. English was a third language. Teaching through a medium of instruction that was a third language hampered the development of literacy and numeracy. It took time for learners to understand different concepts.

*Staff composition and competence in promoting literacy and numeracy skills to learners*

There were four teachers teaching at lower primary who had BETD, BED BA + BED, and HED. The teaching experience at lower primary ranged from 4 years to 32 years implying that most of the teachers were long serving teachers.

Most of the teachers were competent but the problem was the use of tenses and the use of English as medium of instruction. Assistance was sought from one school to upgrade the teachers’ competencies in English language. Most of the teachers were trained lower primary teachers and not language or mathematics teachers. The lack of expertise in teaching English and mathematics had had negative consequence on teaching literacy and numeracy at lower primary.

There was no evidence of continuous development programme offered to teachers to improve teaching and learning literacy and numeracy at lower primary. This fact had negative consequences on teaching of literacy and numeracy.

*Literacy and numeracy competence among Learners*

The principal commented that most of the learners were doing well in literacy compared to numeracy. However, many learners experienced difficulties in reading comprehension. The difficulty in reading comprehension negatively affected learners’ ability and numerical competencies specifically in problem solving. It was noted that about 10% of the learners in lower primary experienced difficulties in reading. The 10% of learners experiencing difficulties in reading were slow learners and transferred cases within school or transferred to the school from other schools that make 9% of the learners. This testimony implied that learners transferred from other schools were a burden to the school since they had a backlog in literacy and numeracy skills.

*Classroom observation*

The classroom observation was done in Grade 2. There were 33 learners in the classroom. The class space was big enough compared to the number of learners. It was an English lesson. Learners were taught in groups while others were engaged in other activity. There were four groups. All learners participated in teaching and learning. Order was maintained throughout the teaching and learning process.

The teacher used the whole language approach of which learners were presented with a story in pictures and text. Flash cards of new words were later presented. Flash cards containing syllables were present to enable learners to analytically understand phoneme that comprised the words. Another exercise was building new words from the syllables and association of the word (abstract) to picture presentation of the concept (semi concrete).
It was observed that learners had cumulative record cards containing learner’s profile. Learners coming from other schools did not have complete profile making it difficult for the teacher to plan or develop intervention strategies specifically to those experiencing difficulties in literacy and numeracy. Records from the home work exercise books showed satisfactory standard and quality of class work and homework.

5.5 School ‘D’

School Management - composition and responsibilities

The school was a government school situated in an urban area but with a character of a rural school due to the quality of its buildings and the majority of the learners were from rural settings. It was a primary school comprising of grades 1 to 7. The management of the school consisted of one principal and one head of department for lower primary. The principal was the overall leader of the school, and the HOD was the assistant, but most specifically responsible for the department of lower primary, a very rare situation in almost all schools sampled in this study.

School Popularity

The school was classified popular due to the reason that many parents in the school vicinity wanted their children to be in the school and in most cases, whenever there was space; they usually moved their children from other schools to this school. It had a learner population of 700 +, whereas some schools within the same location had fewer learners. At one time, a learner of this school scooped a 2nd price in the science fair competition.

A number of reasons can be attributed to this: the size of space in the classrooms allowed teachers to use different grouping strategies, there was a department of lower primary in the school headed by a Head of Department where all lower primary issues were handled, the school set targets and these were constantly reviewed for progress, the principal observed teachers’ lessons and checked the grading system as well, there was a functional library, although the space was not enough, grade 1 learners had workbooks, it had resources such as dictionaries and encyclopaedias, continuous professional developments for teachers existed, sought assistance from advisory teachers whenever there was a need, etc.

As in most schools, this school had challenges too: some of the teachers, especially the lower primary teachers lacked proficiency in the English language, some parents were not involved in the education of their children, only a handful assisted and attended parents’ meetings, the majority of the learners were from rural settings and this had a negative effect on their literacy and numeracy skills development.

Approaches in literacy and numeracy teaching

Resources and methods used in this school were not that different from other schools. This was not a THRASS school, and therefore, the possibility of it adopting the approach was out of question. However, as was the case in other schools, the phonic method was popularly used in grade 1. And books commonly used were Phonics for Beginners, The Friendly Earth, and English for al Namibia as well as supplementary readings such as magazines and newspapers. The usage of newspapers should be encouraged because, this resource is readily and common almost everywhere in Namibia and some are distributed free.

The approaches in Mathematics were not clearly defined, but it became very clear that the grade 4 teacher paid more attention to the four operation signs, assisted by the usage of real things such as counters, abacus etc. Textbooks such as: The Friendly Earth, The Boffins, Maths for Life, and Day-by Day were used, and no one textbook was ranked better compared to the other one, and in most cases all books were used depending on the nature of task.

Staff composition, literacy and numeracy development programmes (qualifications)
The school consisted of twenty three teachers including the principal, 4 males and 19 females. All teachers teaching in the lower grades had relevant qualifications and their experiences ranged from 5 to 39 years, and three of them had been teaching for most of these years in the lower primary. And some of the teachers had opportunities of attending workshops and CPD programmes, an added advantage to the school.

*Classroom observation*

*Grade 1 lessons*

In this school, two lessons were observed in a class teaching set up, Mathematics and English. The Mathematics lesson was on number concept development. It included activities such as counting in 2s up to 20, counting in reverse order from 8 to 1, arranging numbers in ascending order, recognizing and reading numbers on a number chart (16, 50, 66, 73, 88, 90), marking either the smallest or biggest number between two given numbers, a writing exercise, and a homework on counting in 5s up to 20.

A number of aspects were noted in this lesson that enhanced numeracy skills. The teacher correcting and helping learners whenever they faced difficulties, one example was when learners confused numbers 1, 0 and 10, and at times involving learners in the correction, confirming the correct answers with the learners, integrating literacy with numeracy by asking learners to write their names and surnames, bilingualism (the teacher used both the mother tongue and English especially in counting), each learner was given an abacus to help them count, and motivating learners by asking fellow learners to applaud whenever a correct answer was given. However, there are times when the class went out of control, like blowing the whistle in class and no teacher intervention was observed.

The English lesson was not that successful as the Mathematics lesson because the time allocated elapsed before the teacher completed her lesson. Nonetheless, the lesson was on phonics/ letter sounds and word formation as well as vocabulary building. The letter in focus was ‘h’, with the following words: hut, hug, hair, hen, and hat. This was preceded by an activity on traffic lights colour recognition and their meaning in relation to road safety. The teacher used pictures in both activities. Recognising some of the things on the picture was a challenge to some learners, for example instead of hat, they would confuse it with cap, hut for house etc. However, as was the situation with the Mathematics lesson, the teacher corrected the learners instantly. Almost all learners had problems identifying the picture on hug, and the teacher had to demonstrate by hugging one learner in class. They as well struggled with the matching activity, as most learners could not match the word to the corresponding picture, however, the teacher assisted. The teacher did also no give a matching written activity as intended due to time.

*Grade 4 lessons*

The Mathematics lesson was on the measurement of length. A number of skills were incorporated in this lesson: reading, speaking and writing. As a matter of fact, the concept length as it relates to measurement and distance should have been explained, but instead the teacher just concentrated on the units that measure length (metres and kilometres), followed by some activities of telling the distance between towns, done individually and in groups. What was remarkable in this class was how the teacher identified four learners who experienced difficulties and assisted them; meanwhile others were given an enrichment task to do. This teacher did not use a single vernacular word and she discouraged learners to use vernacular. It was clear that, this was the practice and the routine in that class. However, the learners’ books did not give a promising picture as there were some inconsistencies, some learners did corrections, and others did not. And the few that did corrections were in most cases not marked. A similar pattern was observed on the number of activities done, some had fewer activities while other had more.
English was taught by another teacher, implying that grade 4 in this school was not class teaching. The day’s lesson was on language structures: singular and plural. The teacher had the following singular words written on the chalkboard: chalk, wife, boy and thief and took some time to explain how each of them changes to plural. The main written activity required learners to change the following into plural: man, mouse, tooth, elephant and tooth (tooth appeared twice). The outcome of this activity clearly indicated that the majority of the learners experienced problems with the following: tooth, man and mouse, as they take on different formats in plural, and the teacher did not explain such words. This teacher did not also monitor learners’ work, and some of the learners did not seem to understand the activity. What was really disturbing in this class was the usage of the vernacular in an English lesson. The majority of the interactions between the teacher and learners were done in the vernacular, including explanations and clarifications. From this observation, one can clearly understand how some learners’ literacy development was compromised.

**Enhancing the literacy and numeracy competencies among learners**

In an effort to develop the learners’ literacy and numeracy skills, the school had the following practices, resources and facilities in place. First and foremost, the school had a small library, but not sufficiently stocked. The school had one photocopying machine, which the teachers found useful in terms of making copies of supplementary reading materials such as newspapers and magazines, it had two computers but had no printer. As already mentioned in earlier sections, the school had dictionaries and encyclopaedias for learners to use, and develop their vocabulary and expand their general knowledge.

In addition to the resources and facilities, the school had extra classes in the afternoon for 30 minutes that targeted specific skills. However, the school did not teach about the multiplication table as they claimed that it was not easy to do it in the mother tongue. Now, if learners do not know the multiplication table, it means solely relying on the counters, which some schools found limiting. Lastly, although it was no longer the practice, they school had carried out Readathon activities organised by the region.

**Assessment**

In English the grade 1 teacher assessed one skill per day, for example listening and each assessment task was out of 5 marks and in Mathematics, almost a similar pattern, but the approach was a bit different as other skills were integrated. As for grade 4, assessment included formal and informal assessment comprising of structured and less structured activities, and two tests per year as part of the structured assessment.

**The medium of instruction**

The language used as medium of instruction in grades 1-3 was spoken by the majority of the learners, if not all, in the school, making it easier for learners. However, some teachers were not happy, instead wanted English to be used as from grade 1. But what was disturbing was some teachers’ low proficiency in English, making one to wonder how the same teachers could support English as medium. A clear connection was observed between the teacher’s philosophy and his practice in class. The grade 4 mathematics teacher mostly used the local language instead of English as required for he believed that learners think properly in their mother tongue and that it also culturally identifies them. But, one could as well understand because the teacher was not competent in English.

5.6 School ‘E’

**School Management - composition and responsibilities**

The school was a government school situated in the rural area. It was classified as a combined school as it ran from pre-school to grade 10. Due to a lack of space, a platoon system existed whereby grades 1 to 3 learners attended classes in the afternoon. The school’s vision was ‘to support and improve teaching and learning to attain quality education for all’, and the motto was ‘we aim high’.
The management of the school consisted of one principal and two heads of department, one lower primary and the other one for the junior secondary section. Following in rank were three senior teachers, for lower primary, upper primary and junior secondary.

**School Popularity**

The school’s vision and its motto showed that the school had goals to achieve, however, in terms of performance in literacy and numeracy; the school was not doing well, some of the teachers attested to this. There were a number of reasons attributed to this: learners had negative attitudes towards learning, absenteeism due to home chores and commitments, long distances between homes and the school, lack of resources such as reading materials, as the library was not well resourced, their only computer was sent for repair, the photocopying machine was out of order and as was the case with many schools, lacked textbooks.

**Academic targets and underachievers**

The school set its target at 65%, 5% higher than the regional target. This target clearly explained it all, if the target is 65%, it means what the school was achieving should be much lower. It was not made very clear on how the school intended to achieve its target. However, some attempts were done in this school. One of them was subject meetings that were scheduled, and in such meetings, teachers found ways and strategies of improving the learners’ performance in the subject. The school had a remedial teaching programme, but according to some teachers, this was not happening as supposedly because some learners were not cooperative and for some, the proximity between the school and their homes was making it impossible for them to attend afternoon programmes.

**Approaches in literacy and numeracy teaching**

The approaches and resources used in this school were not that different from other schools. In Mathematics, like in many schools, the usage of counters was very popular, and the books in use were Day by Day, The Friendly Earth Series, supplemented by Maths for life, The Boffins and NAMPEP. The teachers found ‘Look and Say’ and the ‘Phonic’ methods effective in terms of accelerating literacy development. Teachers used both the prescribed books and supplementary readers and these included Day by Day, Go for English, NAMPEP, All of Us and Quick Shoes. Some of the reading materials were designed by teachers in the form of charts. However, it was disturbing that grade 4 learners could only use books during class, and not take them home.

**Staff composition, literacy and numeracy development programmes (qualifications)**

The school consisted of eighteen teachers, 5 for the lower primary phase, 4 for the upper primary and 9 for the junior secondary phase. There were two school secretaries and one cleaner. Like most schools in Namibia, it had a school board. All in all, including the principal, there were ten female and nine male teachers. 10 of the teachers had the BETD qualification, 2 B-Tech, 2 BA +HED, 1 Bed, 1 DEAL, 1 BESD (further diploma in management), and 1 ECP. All teachers teaching at the lower primary were specialists in lower primary, which should have been an added advantage, compared to some schools. The longest serving teachers had been teaching for 25 years and the teacher with the shortest experience has been teaching for only two years. In terms of literacy and numeracy development programmes, nothing as already indicated, apart from subject meetings.

**Classroom management and administration**

The grade 1 had a well written lessons for the two subjects observed, but did not have the schemes of work as she claimed were with the other teachers. Apparently, the school’s photocopying machine was out of order; hence teachers shared the scheme of work. The teachers in this school did not compile their own schemes of work, but received them from the regional office, and I find this forfeiting the purpose of a scheme of work. Similarly, the grade 4 teachers had a lesson plan for each lesson, but did not have a scheme of work. One teacher was responsible for all subjects (class teaching) in each of the two grades observed. This practice has been replaced by subject teaching in some schools, especially for English and Mathematics.
Classroom observation

Grade 1 lessons

Two lessons, Mathematics and English, were observed in a class teaching set up. The English lesson was on vocabulary development, and this involved objects in the classroom namely, chalk, duster, chalkboard, window, book, door, chair, desk and pencil. The teacher drilled through the list of words written on the chalkboard and learners read after the teacher in chorus. Despite, the number of times the words and objects were drilled, some learners, failed to identify the objects. It was clear that, learners could not sound the letters, and each time a learner failed, the teacher assisted.

The approach in the Mathematics lesson was more interactive and learners were actively involved. The lesson included: counting from 1 to 20, counting in reverse from 10 to 1, introducing and explaining the plus sign ‘+’ using counters, writing numbers 1 to 5 on the chalkboard, and addition sums ranging from 1 to 5. Some learners encountered difficulties shaping some numbers correctly, and giving the correct answers to some sums. It was disturbing that the teacher did not assist such learners, but instead moved on. Failing to give the correct answer to the sums could be attributed to learners’ inability to use counters as almost all learners had counters, hence there was no way they could fail to get the correct answer.

Grade 4 lessons

The two lesson observed in grade 4 were also English and Mathematics. The English lesson focused on prepositions: under, between, behind, on top of, and in front of, and objects (teaching aids) such as tennis ball, Bible, calculator and measuring tape. The activities involved the explanation of the meaning of prepositions, learners reading through the list of prepositions, and the names of objects as well as a written exercise. The teacher spent time explaining and demonstrating the meaning of each preposition, involving the majority of the learners. However, it was disturbing that when a follow up activity was given, the teacher expected learners to have memorised the correct preposition because the sentences were written on the chalkboard without any picture or drawing showing the relation between the objects, e.g. ‘The duster is….. The Bible’. How could learners decide whether the correct preposition is ‘under’, ‘behind’ etc?

The grade 4 Mathematics lesson was on Number Concept Development and Measurement. The activities included learners counting in 5s up to 100 and in reverse, from 100 to 5, measuring length in centimetres and explaining their answers. The teacher used a ruler to explain the meaning of centimetre (cm). He then demonstrated to learners on how to measure. A follow up group activity was written on the chalkboard.

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<thead>
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<th>Object</th>
<th>Estimates</th>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rubber</td>
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Learners did not experience problems with counting in 5s up to 100, but had difficulties counting in reverse from 100 to 5, and the teacher asked learners to practice at home for the next day. The activity on measurement was poorly performed by most of the groups. Instead of estimating first, learners measured, and therefore, coming up with the difference did not make sense to them. When asked to explain their answers, one could see that the instructions were not understood, and the teacher did not monitor the learners to detect this. However, it was a good thing that the teacher asked learners their answers, a stage that is always overlooked in most classes.

Enhancing the literacy and numeracy competencies among learners
Not so much was observed in this school on how they enhanced learners’ literacy competencies. The only evidence observed was in the print on the walls of the classroom environment. In grade 1, there were a lot of literacy and numeracy posters and charts on word building on letters of the alphabet with pictures from A to Z in both English and the mother tongue, counting from 1 - 20, sounds, letters of the alphabet, modes of transport, time clock, and almost all learners had counters. The teacher marked the learners’ work on loose sheets of paper as learners did not have exercise books in term 1, and in term 2, each learner only received one exercise book for all subjects. However, no corrections were done, and most of the learners’ work that was checked was very untidy, and some of them could not shape letters and numbers correctly. Nonetheless, the space was enough to accommodate 34 learners.

The pattern in grade 4 was not that different. As was the situation in grade 1, the only evidence was in the classroom. The following were observed under materials and objects: clock designed from cartons, different shapes (circles, triangles, squares, and rectangles), means of transport, map of Namibia, learners made materials and a fractions chart. Each learner had three books, one book for Mathematics and Environmental Studies, the second one for Mother Tongue and English and the last one for Religious and Moral Education (RME), and Arts, including class work and homework. The space was too small to accommodate 52 learners, and grouping learners was problematic.

From the exercise books checked, one could see that some learners could not write legibly and neatly. The teacher marked the learners’ books; however, not all activities were marked. It was also observed that corrections were not consistently done, and the teacher did not control or check the corrections to ensure that learners were on track. Comments in the learners’ books were spontaneous and very rare. The number of activities in the learners’ books done each month was very few. In Mathematics, 9 were done in March, 2 in April and again 2 in May. In English, no written task was evident in the learners’ books in March, 2 in April and 4 in May. It is very clear from this pattern that little in happening in this class in terms of enhancing literacy and numeracy skills.

Assessment

As the policy states, learners were continuously assessed in various skills and employing different approaches and modes. For diagnostic purposes, learners were assessed on a daily basis, but some of the activities such as less structured and more structured ones, including tests especially in grade 4, were either done weekly or biweekly.

The medium of instruction

The majority of the learners in the school spoke Simbukushu at home, and Silozi as the medium of instruction (MOI) in lower grades (pre-school to grade 3). Hence, despite difficulties grade 1 learners encountered with Silozi, one would have expected Silozi in a grade 1 Mathematics class. This was not the situation at this school; the teacher used English instead, but confessed that all other subjects in exception of English were taught in Silozi. The grade 4 teacher suggested that English as medium of instruction should start as early grade 1 or at least from grade 2.
SECTION SIX

CLASSROOM OBSERVATION

6.1 Classroom observation schedule in the case study schools

Classroom observation was conducted for the purpose of exploring teachers’ competencies in managing teaching of literacy and numeracy. The results in figure 27 show that there were severe shortcomings in the use of the latest lower primary syllabus, planning based on the stipulated basic competencies and lesson objectives and whether the lesson plan contained the necessary components in Danie Joubert (B), Oniipa and Kongola. There were impressive performances in Amazing Kids (A) followed by Kuisebmond (B) on these competencies.

![Bar chart showing classroom observation outcomes in the case study schools](image)

**Figure 27: Classroom observation outcomes in the case study schools**

The lower results of Oniipa and Kongola were replicated in the remaining competencies specifically provision of learning support and the standard or quality of learners’ work implying that since the two schools are rural and semi urban, rural and perhaps semi urban schools do not offer maximum attention to learning support and
standard or quality of learner’s work. These shortcomings affected the attainment and development of literacy and numeracy skills among learners at lower primary.

6.2 An overview of lesson planning and preparation in the case study schools

Figure 28 presents teachers’ competencies in the lesson planning and preparation. The results show that the majority of the teachers in the case study schools where lesson classroom observation was conducted had lesson plans that contained all necessary components, and lesson plans clearly based on the basic competencies and learning objectives in the syllabus. And, the majority of them used the latest lower primary syllabus to plan their lessons.

6.3 Summary of classroom observation schedules in the case study schools

Summary of the observation results shown in figure 29 in the case study schools were not impressive in lesson delivery (45%), Management of teaching (45%), learning support (45%), evidence of learning (45%), and the quality of learners work (63%).
Figure 29: Summary of classroom observation

The results show that more than three third of the teachers in the observed schools demonstrated lack of competency in these core areas of teaching literacy and numeracy. The impressive results on assessment and evaluation of learners during the lesson (36.4%) and lesson conclusion (36.4%) of which teachers demonstrated strength in all aspects of teaching and the use of teaching approaches (63.6%) and learner engagement (45.5%) where teachers demonstrated more strength than weakness, would have had minimal impact on the standard of teaching literacy and numeracy at lower primary.
SECTION SEVEN

TEACHERS’ RESPONSES ON LITERACY AND NUMERACY RELATED ISSUES

7. Introduction

The main purpose of the teachers’ questionnaires was to investigate and discover the main factors that influence learners’ results and achievements in both literacy and numeracy in the lower primary phase. Teachers responded to a set of questions by indicating the extent of their choices on 5 scales: 5 denoting strongly agree with the statement; 4 partially agree; 3 not sure; 2 partially disagree; and 1 strongly disagree.

7.1 School contribution to the development of literacy and numeracy

Figure 30: Factors influencing the development of literacy at school

Figure 30 presents teachers’ views on school related factors that promote literacy among learners. The majority of the teachers agreed compared to those who disagreed that a relevant curriculum promotes the development of literacy in schools (65.6%), 50.8% support provision of learning support programmes, 46.8% strongly agreed that provision of a supportive learning environment that addresses the diverse needs and abilities of learners is essential, 42.4% envisioned that availability of resources promotes literacy, 39.6% viewed that support to parents contributes to literacy development and 36% conceived that setting targets for literacy is essential.
Figure 31: Factors influencing the development of numeracy

The results on numeracy show that more than half of the teachers (56.7%) indicated that numeracy across the curriculum was essential, 53.6% supported the effective learning environment, 41.6% supported the whole school approach to numeracy, 43% backed the Continuous Professional Development (CPD) for teachers, 48.4% backed the home, school and community partnerships and 42% conceived pre service teacher education as essential in promoting numeracy.

7.2 Teachers’ contribution to the development of literacy and numeracy

Figure 32: Teacher-related factors promoting Literacy

Figure 32 portrays teachers’ views on teachers’ factors that affect the development of literacy among learners. More precisely, 55.6% of teachers supported effective and appropriate teaching approaches and methods as a contributing factor, 53.2% rated teachers’ qualifications, 51.2% perceived the quality assessment practices of literacy, 50.8% reasonable number of learners or class size, 9.9% of the teachers conceived that effective and
efficient teaching literacy skills, 48.8% supported the additional in-class support to individual learners, 44.4% parent/teacher partnership and 37.6% conceived that learners’ attitude towards literacy activities have a positive impact on learners’ acquisition of literacy skills.

**Figure 33: Teacher-related factors promoting Numeracy**

The findings in figure 33 infer that the effective use of materials to assist learners to understand a concept would positively contribute to the development of numeracy skills among learners at lower primary (63.6%). The quality of assessment practices of numeracy skill development (54.8%); effective and efficient numeracy teaching skills (54.4%), continuous professional development (47.2%) for teachers and catering for individual differences, 45.6% constructivist mathematics classroom and 40.8% of the teachers conceived that comprehensive information to parents enable them to assist their children at home and thus promote numeracy.

**7.3 Learners’ influences on literacy and numeracy development**

**Figure 34: Learner-related factors promoting Literacy**
The results in figure 34 show that, 48.8% of the teachers conceived that learners who went through pre-school or kindergarten attained literacy skills, 42.8% found learners who had literacy experiences such as knowledge of alphabets, vocabulary, phonological awareness, spelling or decoding, better in terms of the development of literacy skills, 39.2% regarded learners’ engagement with reading activities outside school, 37.2%, of the teachers conceived learners’ attitude towards literacy, 33.2% viewed that teaching through home language versus a second language influences the attainment of literacy skills and 29.2% perceived that learners’ reading self-concept develop literacy skills.

![Bar chart showing learners' factors promoting numeracy](image)

**Figure 35: Learners’ factors promoting Numeracy**

It was evident according to the results in figure 35 that 54.8% of the teachers viewed that the way learners were engaged in numeracy activities in the classroom influence the development of numeracy, 39.2% conceived that learners’ attitude towards numeracy influenced the attainment of numeracy skills, 73.2% viewed that learners’ numeracy experience contribute to numeracy development; 36% supported engagement with numeracy activities outside the classroom; 32% teaching through home language versus other language as a medium of instruction and 30% conceived that learners’ numeracy concept attributed to numeracy development.

7.4 Parents’ contribution to literacy and numeracy development
The results on parents’ contribution to literacy development as shown in figure 36 shows that 42.8% of the parents conceived that parents were involved in the education of their children. More than a third (39.6%) of the teachers concurred that positive attitude of parents towards reading positively impact on the children’s literacy development, 36% viewed that a home environment that supports more literacy activities promoted literacy development, 32.8% supported early home literacy activities, 28.8% on parents’ literacy level and 26.4% believed that parents’ socio economic status had an impact on children literacy development.

7.5 Parent influence on the development of numeracy

The findings on figure 37 show that there were minimal parental contributions to numeracy development. The percentages of the teachers’ responses were below half in all the items.
7.6 Effective approaches in teaching reading at lower primary

In comparing the agree versus disagree responses of teachers on the effective reading teaching approaches as shown in figure 38, teachers preferred phonics approach (67.3% agreed), Look-and-Say (59.6%), sight words (51.2%) combination approach (51.2%), whole language approach (42.4%), and incidental reading (30.8%)

7.7 The preferred reading series

The results on the best or the preferred readers show the preference of combination of series (53.6% agreed), Day by Day (46% agreed), NAMPEP (37.6% agreed) and Molteno (34%).

7.8 Effective methods in teaching literacy at lower primary
Figure 40: Effective methods in teaching Literacy at lower primary

Observing the strongly agree responses in figure 40, 72.4% supported pictures and words, 72.4% phonics, 53.6% guided reading and writing, 47.6% use of readers and big books, 45.6% group teaching, 44% shared reading 41.2% independent reading and 37.6% reading to our learners.

7.9 Emphasis required in developing reading skills

Figure 41: Emphasis required in developing reading skills

The results in figure 41 show that majority of teachers felt that emphasis required to develop reading skills should be placed on phonics 74.4%, picture and words 72.8%, reading corner 64%, sentence strips 59%, and using syllables 55.6%.

7.10 Emphasis on developing writing skills
Figure 42: Emphasis on developing writing skills

Figure 42 presents the results of two areas of writing. Considering the outcomes on the guided writing, 88.4% of the teachers found it useful and 87.2% supported modelled writing. Generally, teachers placed more or less equal emphasis on the two approaches to writing.

7.11 Difficulties learners experience in learning reading competency

Figure 43: Difficulties learners find in learning reading competency

Teachers’ responses show that the majority of learners encountered difficulties in learning in comprehension (72.8%), spelling (70.4% agree), and speed and fluency competencies (71.2% agree). Learners did not seem to have difficulties in learning syntax (55.6% agree) and 66% agreed that learners experienced difficulties in punctuation.

7.12 Materials mostly read by parents to their children at home
Figure 44: Materials mostly read by parents to their children

The results in figure 44 show that close to half of the parents (43.6%) do not read to their children. More than a third of the parents (39.2%) do read Bibles to their children. This view holds similar truth to what was found in the study carried out by SACMEQ. The Second well-read material was hymn book (32.4% agree), newspapers (36%), magazines (31.2 agree), story books (44.8% agree), school textbooks (38.9%) and anything readable (30.4% agree).
SECTION EIGHT

RECOMMENDATIONS

Findings 1: Schools whose medium of instruction was English from Grade 1 scored higher in literacy and numeracy assessment tests compared to those using mother tongue as a medium of instruction from Grade 1. In addition, schools that used mother tongue as a medium of instruction that was not the learner’s home language experienced problems in literacy and numeracy.

Recommendation: The language in education policy working document needs to be revisited and special consideration should be given to all Namibian languages that are not yet developed to the level of being used as medium of instruction. This should enable all learners to be taught initially through original mother tongue. Should mother tongue instruction be used in the lower grades, English should be phased in as early as grade 3 and used to teach all subjects. For Mathematics, the medium of instruction should be English from grade 1 as the teaching of mathematics terminologies proved to be complicated in the mother tongue and difficult to learners in grade 4 should this remain as transition year from mother tongue to English.

Findings 2: It was found that schools, especially in rural schools were under resourced. The scarce resources in some schools hindered the development of literacy and numeracy. Reallocation of teachers from Upper Primary Phases who do not have the expertise in teaching lower Primary because of non-performance affects literacy and numeracy skills development at Lower Primary.

Recommendation: Resources be equally distributed to all schools specifically rural remote schools to avoid the existing discrepancies in literacy and numeracy attainments between and within learners in schools, regions and nationally. Equal distribution of resources should be applicable in locating qualified Lower Primary teachers in rural schools. In essence Lower Primary teachers should be qualified to teach at Lower Primary Phase level and be competent enough to lay a strong foundation in literacy and numeracy.

Findings 3: Learners who experienced difficulties in numeracy and literacy skills were not provided with learning support as some teachers claimed they lacked skills to support struggling learners.

Recommendation: The number of schools counsellors and Lower Primary advisory teachers should be increased to provide the necessary support to teachers.

Findings 4: Some schools did not have heads of departments for lower primary, and this affected the management at this phase level, as the head of department, either for upper primary or junior secondary did not have knowledge of lower primary issues especially literacy and numeracy teaching.

Recommendation: Lower Primary Heads of Departments should be teachers who specialised in lower primary, have wider knowledge of lower primary and capable of mentoring the novice and practised teachers at schools.

Findings 5: The absence of school readiness programme and pre-primary negatively affected the development of literacy and numeracy skills at lower primary.

Recommendation: Pre-primary should be speedily introduced in all primary schools. School readiness programme be reintroduced in all school.

Findings 6: It was found that the fewer the number of learners in the classroom the more effective the teaching of literacy and numeracy.
**Recommendation:** The teacher-learner ratio should be reconsidered and more teachers and classrooms be built to reduce the over crowdedness in some schools.

**Findings 7:** The time allocated to second language teaching was far too less compared to first languages and this affected the development of literacy skills.

**Recommendation:** Contact time for second languages should the same to the first languages to enable learners to master two languages at the same level parallel to the concept of bilingual education.

**Findings 8:** Some teachers needed help on how to teach literacy and numeracy skills, and specifically on how to sound and teach phonics.

**Recommendation:** Continuous Professional Development (CPD) should be provided to teachers.

**Findings 9:** The cascade workshop training model in use has proved not effective in enhancing teachers’ competencies in teaching literacy and numeracy at lower primary.

**Recommendation:** The existing workshop training model be revisited and consider a model that will directly benefit all teachers. Regional CPD committees should be strengthened to be able to coordinate and facilitate training of teacher at grassroots that is in line with teachers training needs. Trainers at the regional level should co-facilitate training with trainers from a central institution such as NIED.

**Findings 10:** Some of the prescribed textbooks for lower grades did not correlate with the curriculum. There was a lack the grammar component in most of the prescribed books. It was further found that the content was not localised particularly to rural school learners as such learners in rural schools found difficulties comprehending the contents.

**Recommendation:** Textbook evaluators should ensure that textbooks correlate with the curriculum. Prescribed text books should have grammar. The contents should be localised to benefit all learners.

**Findings 11:** The abolishment of handwriting as a subject negatively affected the development of writing skills of learners.

**Recommendation:** Handwriting should be re-instated as a subject. The integration of handwriting skill across subjects has proved to be effective in promoting literacy skills.

**Findings 12:** The number of assessment tasks in Grade 1-4 was too many, making it impractical to teach for understanding.

**Recommendation:** The number of assessments in grades 1-4 should be reduced to allow teaching for understanding to take place.

**Findings 13:** Class teaching in the lower grades has negative impact on the attainment of literacy and numeracy skills. Some teachers did not have the necessary expertise and time to focus on literacy and numeracy development.

**Recommendation:** Subject teaching should be introduced specifically in English and Mathematics as from grade 1.

**Findings 14:** Teachers were discontented with the transfer of learners who had not achieved basic competencies.

**Recommendation:** Learners who have not achieved the basic competencies should receive intensive learning support to address the learning backlogs and enable learners to progress with others.
**Findings 15:** Some teachers lacked knowledge to develop learners’ literacy and numeracy skills.  
**Recommendation:** Teachers should have appropriate subject matter knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge. In addition to that, teachers should have the ability to handle multi-grade classes, compensatory teaching and knowledge of how to handle learners with special needs.

**Findings 16:** Some teachers had low English proficiency skills and this had negative impact on the development of literacy and numeracy skills. Lower primary teachers are trained in using mother tongue as medium of instruction. They are not language specialists specifically indigenous languages.  
**Recommendation:** Training institutions should provide in-depth knowledge in local languages that are used as medium of instruction at lower primary.

**Finding 17:** Teachers were not versed in teaching methodologies and approaches of developing literacy and numeracy skills among learners at lower primary.  
**Recommendation:** Training institutions should place emphasis on different approaches and teaching methodologies of literacy and numeracy in the training programme. Teacher training institutions should pay particular attention to the development of English language proficiency skills to enable graduate student teachers to reach a particular level of language proficiency. Practicing teachers should be trained to acquire competence in English language and other languages of instruction at lower primary grade 1-3.

**Findings 18:** Some lower primary teachers were not comfortable teaching some of the subjects in grades 1-4, as they had no opportunity to specialise in a particular subject.  
**Recommendation:** Lower primary teachers should be specialists in the subjects, most important, in English and Mathematics.

**Findings 19:** Urban schools scored above the regional and national average scores on literacy and numeracy assessment tests compared to semi urban and rural schools.  
**Recommendation:** The inequalities that exist between urban and rural schools need to be known and addressed.

**Findings 20:** Private schools did well in literacy and numeracy assessment tests compared to government schools. Equally urban schools performed well compared to semi urban and rural schools. Schools that used English as medium of instruction did well in literacy and numeracy compared to those using other languages as medium of instruction at lower primary.  
**Recommendation:** Identify reasons as to what makes the differences between the private versus government, urban vis-à-vis semi-rural and rural schools and between the different medium of instructions.

**Findings 21:** The assessment outcomes of literacy and numeracy showed a higher percentage of learners performed below the set regional and national average benchmarks. There was a satisfactory assessment outcomes on numeracy compared to literacy.  
**Recommendation:** Emphasis should be placed on the development of literacy skills at lower primary.

**Findings 22:** Schools that paid attention to literacy development performed better in the assessment outcomes.  
**Recommendation:** Schools should promote the culture of reading and the use of English effectively in teaching and learning.
Findings 23: Some resources sent to schools did not reach schools on time and ended up gathering dust in regional offices.  
Recommendation: Resources (textbooks, teachers’ manuals and guides, syllabi etc.) should be distributed to schools on time, and ensure that only up-to-date documents are in use.

Findings 24: Lack of on-site monitoring and support from the inspectorate/advisory teachers had a negative impact on the performance of schools.  
Recommendation: The inspectorate/advisory teachers should visit, monitor and render on-site support to schools.

Findings 25: The ineffective monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning at the lower grades negatively affected the development of literacy and numeracy skills.  
Recommendation: School managers should supervise and monitor activities in the school to ensure that effective teaching and learning take place and clear supervision roles should be evident.

Findings 26: The non-existence of programmes that promote literacy and numeracy skills at school level had a negative impact on the development of literacy and numeracy skills.  
Recommendation: Programmes promoting literacy and numeracy and lower grades should be encouraged in schools and among schools.

Findings 27: Schools with libraries did not fully utilise the facility.  
Recommendation: School managers should ensure that existing services and facilities are put to good use.

Findings 28: The practice in some schools of learners not taking books hindered learning to take place at home.  
Recommendation: Teachers should educate learners on how to handle books and allow learners to take books home.

Findings 29: The non-existence of continuous professional development programmes (CPD) at school level specifically at lower primary hindered the development of literacy and numeracy skills.  
Recommendation: Continuous Professional Development (CPD) at school level should be established in all schools.

Findings 30: Mother tongue influence contributed to the problems that learners experience in learning spelling, pronounce and read in English.  
Recommendation: Teachers should give attention to different speech sounds (phonemes) that exist in English and other languages and enable learners to recognise the differences or similarities of speech sounds in mother tongue and English.

Findings 31: A classroom that exposed learners to print provided an opportunity for learners to practice reading and counting every time and on a daily basis.  
Recommendation: Lower primary classrooms should be decorated with posters that expose learners to print.

Findings 32: The majority of the learners experienced problems differentiating the four basic operations and there were evidences of lacking mental arithmetic.  
Recommendation: The four basic operations should be fully understood and attention should be given to mental arithmetic, e.g. multiplication tables and mathematical concepts and terminologies.
**Findings 33:** Approaches used to develop literacy and numeracy skills differed from teacher to teacher, but the most popular one was phonetics. This in some cases had limitations as learners could sound individual letters but not able to read the whole word.

**Recommendation:** The teaching of literacy and numeracy should not only be limited to one or two particular approaches, a combination might yield better results. Consider learners’ ability when opting for an approach.

**Findings 34:** Learning support was not evident in many schools, hence learners who struggled in literacy and numeracy were not provided with extra help.

**Recommendation:** Learners who experience difficulties in literacy and numeracy should be provided with learning support, during class or after school.

**Findings 35:** When the quality of teaching is poor, literacy and numeracy skill development is compromised.

**Recommendations:**
Teachers should plan their lessons sufficiently and effectively; learners should be engaged in challenging activities; teachers should use different approaches and methods, design different learning activities in order to cater for learners with different abilities and learning styles; teachers should use concrete materials to enable learners link with reality; teachers should be encouraged to create reading corners in every lower primary class; all teachers teaching at the lower grades should be specialists, competent and committed; teachers should have an acceptable command of English.

**Findings 36:** Lack of parental involvement negatively affected the development of literacy and numeracy skills.

**Recommendation:** Parents should be educated on their role as partners in education and on how to assist their children at home.
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