

Lessons from reviews of lifelong learning policies in Namibia

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ABSTRACT

This paper is a document analysis of students' assignments who studied a course on Policy Studies in Adult Education and Lifelong Learning offered at an undergraduate level, Bachelor of Education (Lifelong Learning and Community Education) at the University of Namibia.

The aim of the document analysis was to dissect if there is an answer to the research questions on whether Lifelong Learning policies in Namibia accurately translate what their legislations provide for.

The study was qualitative in nature as it interrogated eighty-one voices presented in assignments submitted for assessments over the period of three years (2019 – 2021). The analysis of cohorts' responses over the years was documented by the educators to find out if they demonstrate a deep-rooted insight into policy development, policy implementation and evaluation and the relationship between policies and legislations.

The findings from the three cohorts increased trustworthiness because of resource triangulation that enhanced the guard against bias.

The main findings were that in reviewing Lifelong Learning policies, the student developed the necessary understanding that policies derive from legislations and serve as the basis for operationalizing or translating those laws and rules into practice. Additionally, they learned about policy development and policy review as well as best practices in operationalizing laws into policies. However, they failed to see connections between some of the Enabling Acts that were from other sectors rather than education. In conclusions, it was understood that when the policy is developed without it being anchored onto an Act, it creates chaos and uncertainty. In reverse, when the Acts are not comprehensively operationalized through policies, procedures, and guidelines, it also creates chaotic environments.

Keywords: *policy development, policy implementation, policy analysis, policy evaluation, policy reviews, Adult Education policy, Lifelong learning policy frameworks, best practices*

1. INTRODUCTION

The review of lifelong learning policies is a global issue that has been under discussion for many years. In Namibia, lifelong learning is relatively a new concept. As such, issues of lifelong learning policy implementation and evaluation remain undocumented in Namibia. Many scholars have linked the concept of lifelong learning to the development of society (Lindqvist, 2020)

Birkland (2005; 2011) has long recognized that the aim of policy analysis is to permit improvements in decision making and policymaking processes. In line with what Birkland (2005; 2011) asserted, this paper is an analysis of student assignments that aimed at determining whether university students studying policy studies at undergraduate level understand that sectorial policy originate from acts, laws and rules developed nationally by parliamentarians.

Since the development of the Education Act, No. 16 of 2001 as amended and the Vision 2030 of 2004 based on Article 20 of the Constitution of the Republic of Namibia, two important policies have been developed by the Ministry of Education to ensure educational provision for adults. The National Policy on Adult Learning was enacted in 2003 to provide the basis for a comprehensive development of education and training systems for anyone above the age of 16. The draft Lifelong Learning Policy Framework for Namibia was developed in 2010 to enable the country to attain Vision 2030 goals of creating a “learning nation” among other things.

Lifelong learning policies are recognised as organising principles for quality education around which all the other pillars such as, access, equality, equity, quality and multiculturalism in education are centred to ensure that all citizens have access to, and make effective use of learning opportunities (UNESCO, 2012).

The review of policies is one of the teaching activities done in the course on Policy Studies in Adult Education in the first semester of a fourth year module taken over the course of 28 weeks (4 hours per week) by students registered for the Bachelor of Education (Lifelong Learning and Community Education). The course covers 10 units from defining policies, how they are developed and how national laws influence and shape lifelong policies influence and other educational policies. Over the three years period a total of eighty-one students registered and participated in the course through distance, full time and online modes.

For the analysis of students’ assignments submitted for marking discussed in this paper, students were required to demonstrate their understanding of four (4) Namibian legislations and their knowledge of how laws influence other educational policy formulation and implementation. These laws included Article 20 of the Constitution of the Republic of Namibia, Part XII of the Educational Act (No. 16 of 2001) as amended to include the Basic Education Act No. 3 of 2020), Articles 28 and 29 of the Child Care and Protection Act (No. 3 of 2015) and Vision 2030 of 2004. Students were expected to refer their analyses to relevant national and sectorial policies such as the draft Lifelong Learning (LLL) Policy Framework for Namibia of 2010, draft Open and Distance Learning Policy of 2007, Namibia National Housing Policy as revised, National Youth Policy, National Agricultural Policy of 2015, Harambee Prosperity Plan I (2016 – 2020 and II (2021-2025), the Policy Guidelines for Basic-Literacy and Post-literacy Programmes as revised and the 2021 Vocational Education and Training TVET Policy. All these laws and policies were

made part of the discussions and references during the teaching of the course over the three years period.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The concept of lifelong learning is best described by Jarvis (2014: 54) that *learning across one's lifetime is captured in the phrase lifelong learning* - a process where individuals of any age and with broad interests acquire knowledge and skills.

Given that societies are increasingly dynamic, globally connected, and socio-economically complex, there is a need to foster lifelong learning capabilities among societal members. Several policy documents have various motives for emphasizing lifelong learning, social development, global competition, employability and so on (Jaldemark, 2020). Remarkably, what they have in common is the aim to create opportunities for lifelong learning. Therefore, transnational organizations and countries all over the world have included the concept of lifelong learning in their policy documents and Namibia is no exception.

Furthermore, policies that enable development of opportunities for lifelong learning and any other emerging trend, like digital literacy, create new conditions for all citizens in any country. At the same time, it is one of the many reform requests laid at the academic doors of higher education institutions. Established higher education institutions can play two roles in the lifelong learning space. They can ensure that graduates of formal, credit, and accredited programmes are empowered with skills required to be lifelong learners. Those same institutions can also offer continuing and extension education courses and programmes designed for the needs of prospective and current lifelong learners. The delocalization of education programmes through the affordances of digital resources and technology-enabled learning applies when designing for lifelong learning as well as traditional programmes. This fact alone positions higher education institutions to be central, if not the only, suppliers of lifelong learning (Jaldemark, 2020).

Against this background, this study was worth pursuing in order to determine how the students understand the analysis of policies and the relationship between policies and legislations.

3. METHODOLOGY

The study is of qualitative nature, done through document analysis. The study analyzed and scrutinized the lifelong learning policies and their relationship with legislations through the voices of university students. The students were registered for a Policy Studies in Adult Education and Lifelong Learning course offered at an undergraduate level in the Bachelor of Adult Education and Community Development at the University of Namibia where they also signed a consent form for their policy review assignments to be used for further studies on policy analysis. The study interrogated eighty-one voices of students presented in assignments submitted for assessments over a three years period, 2019 – 2021; namely: 25 students in 2019; 37 students in 2020 and 19 students in 2021.

4. RESULTS

The findings are presented according to the three cohorts of each year.

The 2019 assessment had two parts, with Part 1 requesting students to design educational policy guidelines for a programme that adult educators/community developers can use to address urban poverty. Part 2 required students to analyze and evaluate available options to implement the goals of laws from which the 2003 National Policy on Adult Learning was derived from, making sure to stipulate the specific parts, articles, sections and/or clauses.

For part 1 and in constructing the guidelines only one student referred to Article 20 of the Namibian Constitution and 17 students of the registered 25 students referred to Part XII of the Education Act 16 of 2001 (clause 67), which mentions adult education and the role it plays in enabling communities to participate in programme development for adults to alleviate poverty and illiteracy. They also referred to the 2003 National Policy on Adult Education Section 5 on Programme Development which was relevant to poverty reduction. Although there is a Namibian National Agricultural Policy which covered food production for self-sufficiency in greater details and providing guidelines for poverty alleviation among rural and urban communities, none of the students made references to such a policy or its stipulations.

One student in this cohort elaborated on his submission *‘that to develop effective guidelines that would not infringe on the rights of citizens, such guidelines must be based on the country laws that are approved by Parliament. Without elaborating much he said that ‘Article 20 of the Namibian Constitution must be considered in its entirety’.*

Another student argued that the 2003 National Policy on Adult Learning aimed at operationalizing the Educational Act (16 of 2001) through Part XII of the Act. While this student recognizes that this policy is ‘a set of processes that routinely converts inputs into outputs,’ she spoke in general terms rather than quoting a clause which is part of the policy that might be used to educate people to alleviate urban poverty. However, she noted that ‘government laws affect all aspects of our lives and that government politicians engage themselves in politics in order to assist in the implementation of laws.’ Nonetheless, the student could not name the clauses in the Education Act that this policy attempted to operationalize.

The third student of the 17 students who referred to the Education Act stated correctly that the *‘National Policy on Adult Learning of 2003 provides a framework within which the Government and non-governmental institutions strengthens and promotes the role of adult learning in individual, community, regional and national development of adult learning.* It is this student who referred to *‘National Policy on Adult Learning as instrument to operationalize other policies such as the National Agricultural Policy,’* without discussing the specifics of how these two policies are related.

One of the 7 student who never referred to any law or policy argued in her assignment that *‘there were no laws that could influence these policy guidelines.’* Therefore, she advised that *‘the*

guidelines will not be effective because the government has not yet developed laws that might assist directing the formulation of said guidelines.'

For Part 2 of the 2019 assessment, students found it difficult to analyze and evaluate options to implement the goals of laws from which the 2003 National Policy on Adult Learning was derived from. Out of 25 registered students only 7 students got it right.

One of these 7 students stated that *'public policy is best described as the broad area of government laws, regulation, court decisions, and local ordinances. Policy making process is a part of politics and political action to fulfill these broad government laws and court decisions.'* He stated that *'poverty is a result of politicians not agreeing how to use the resources for the benefit of citizens.'*

Another student correctly stated that *'adult learning being a concept of lifelong learning means guidelines should be based on 2003 National Policy on Adult Learning which provides learning opportunities to adults on such topics as agricultural and forestry production and management, water point management and community development.'* *Guidelines that promote such learning opportunities will enable community educators/developers to implement agricultural programme to alleviate urban poverty. Unfortunately, our laws are not always clear and therefore they do not guide better policy development,'* the student concluded. Nonetheless the student did not refer to the National Agricultural Policy. The rest of the students argued that during policy implementation one does not need to make references to laws where policies were drawn from. This is, even though the course materials advised on implementation as an attempt to achieve the goals of the country's laws and policies.

The 2020 was a COVID-19 year and 37 students were registered for the course through a full online mode using Moodle Learning Management System (Moodle LMS). For 2020, a two-part assessment was also provided to students to analyse. Part 1 of the assessment required students to read and analyse a newspaper article; entitled: **Free Education for Namibian Children by Albertina Nakale, New Era Newspaper, Thursday, 20 December 2012, Windhoek.** The newspaper attempted to inform the public about the Free and Universal Primary Education which was supposed to be implemented as of January 2013. The task was for the students to indicate all Namibian laws that have given impetus to this Free and Universal Primary Education in the country. The 2nd part of this Assessment requested students to formulate guidelines to enable parents to understand what Free and Universal Education entails and integrate these guidelines in school boards' agendas

Regarding Part 1 of the assessment, 21 of the 37 students referred to the Constitution as a law that mandates free and universal education in Namibia. Article 20, Section 2 of the Constitution of the Republic of Namibia states that: *'Primary education shall be compulsory, and the State shall provide reasonable facilities to render effective this right for every resident within Namibia, by establishing and maintaining State schools at which primary education will be provided free of charge.'* Fifteen (15) of the 21 students directly quoted the Ministry guidelines that *"as from January 2013 parents and guardians of learners in Grade 0 (pre-primary) to Grade 7 will no longer be required to contribute [financially] to the School Development Fund (SDF)."* Only 5 of the 37 students mentioned or referred to the Education Act 16 of 2001 arguing that *'the Education Act established the School Development Fund (SDF) which negated the promotion of Free and*

Universal Primary Education. They explained that Section 5 of the Education Act 2001 (Act No. 16 of 2001) *promoted regulations that gave permission to school boards to charge parents an annual fee as parents' or guardians' or caregivers' contribution to the SDF.* None of the students mentioned Article 28 of the Child Care and Protection Act No. 3 of 2015 as amended which accords a whole paragraph to free education and Article 29 of the same Act with stipulations on the contributions of education to child development.

The students however did well on responding to Part 2 of the assessment - expanding on the Ministry of Education's directives that parents and guardians of learners in Grade 0 (pre-primary) to Grade 7 will no longer pay school fees. All 37 students understood that it is now the responsibilities of Government through the Ministry of Education to provide each school with a sufficient budget to cater for the needs of all learners enrolled at a particular school. In formulating the guidelines, half of the students quoted again Article 20 of the Constitution and about 5 students referred to the recommendations that emanated from the 2011 National Conference on Education on which the newspaper article was based, which called for, among others, free primary education, as the Ministry of Education in consultation with various stakeholders decided to make this constitutional provision a reality.

In 2021, the course was again offered through online, and 19 students were registered. The assessment requested students to provide and discuss laws that led to the creation of the Namibian College of Open Learning (NAMCOL). Students were required to elaborate on (1) laws that existed before the creation of NAMCOL and (2) laws that were enacted or adopted after the creation of the College and how they are used to ensure service delivery and to address the current educational needs of the Namibian society.

For part 1 of the assessment, all 19 students knew about the act that established NAMCOL, Namibian College of Open Learning Act, No. 1 of 1997 as amended, to provide junior and senior secondary education including distance education and face-to-face continuing education programme for adults and out-of-school youth using the Ministry of Education's curriculum. However, only 5 students referred to Part XII of the Education Act stipulating the Adult education provisions. None of the students referred to the Education Act amendment (Basic Education Act No. 3 of 2020), especially Regulation 30 on lifelong learning which requires the Ministry of Education to render and provide centres and facilities to be created for the promotion of both community and distance education.

In part 2 of the assessment, only one student referred to the 1991 Report of the Turner Presidential Commission on Higher Education in Namibia which first called for the establishment of a distance education college. Although there is a draft Open and Distance Learning Policy of 2007, none of the students mentioned this policy and only 7 students referred to the 2003 National Policy on Adult Education. Vision 2030 of 2004 which dedicated a whole section to the future of skills development (Section 4) was only mentioned by 2 students who referred to that section of the Vision as relevant to the existence of NAMCOL in training for future skills. The 2021 Vocational Education and Training TVET Policy was not mentioned by any student even though the policy was in its final stages of development (enacted in March 2021) when the students were busy with the course.

5. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The findings presented in the paper attempted to shed light on whether students understand that the Namibian Lifelong Learning Policy frameworks have been anchored on the legislations and accurately translates what their enabling Acts provide for. The analysis of data indicates that all students who participated in the course know and understand that the state through government is responsible for enacting laws from which policies are derived from. They also gained an understanding and knowledge that legislation is law and all policies must always comply with law (a very important aspects of policy development and implementation).

The 2019 Assessment

The economic and social priorities and goals of the National Policy on Adult Learning included reduction of income inequalities and poverty reduction respectively, yet none of the students elaborated on these connections of the two policies. The analysis also found that when laws and policies are outside of the education sector, it is difficult for students to make a connection. For instance, the National Agricultural Policy which covered food production for self-sufficiency in great details has taken a chapter from the National Policy on Adult Learning. Also, none made references to the National Housing policy which made references to poverty reduction in urban areas. The other policy is the National Youth Policy (NYP) III which seeks to address challenges that undermine youth development in Namibia with the goal of ensuring that young Namibians can assume their rightful place in building a “united, inclusive and prosperous Namibian House”. Furthermore, NYP III aims to capacitate, foster and harness the capabilities of young Namibians to make a meaningful contribution to the realization of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the AU Agenda 2063, Vision 2030, national development plans and the Harambee Prosperity Plan (HPP). The main issue of poverty reduction is well stipulated in HPP on a section dealing with social progression ‘on hunger poverty, the message of Government is clear; there should be zero deaths in Namibia, during and beyond the Harambee period, caused by lack of food. As a so-called “upper middle-income country,” no one in Namibia should die because of lack of food’ (Government of Namibia, 2015).

The 2020 Assessment

Since the Education Act No.16 of 2001 only made mention for compulsory education, students argued that Educational Act did not in any way influence the Free and Universal Primary Education Policy of 2013. Although, it is true that the original Education Act 2001 made no mention of either free or universal education, Regulation 38 of the 2017 Amendment stipulated that “*all tuition for pre-primary, primary, secondary, and special education ..., including schoolbooks (educational materials); ...; and examination ..., are provided free of charge to learners until they complete secondary education*”.

Nonetheless, being parents of school going children and many serving on boards of their children's schools, the discussion provided by students on this assessment was of quality and detailed. When it came to refer this discussion to the draft policy on lifelong learning, they asserted that the policy was not properly reflected.

This assessment has however shown that many students have difficulty in making a connection to laws and policies outside of the education sector. For instance, the Child Protection Act has stipulated a great deal on free and universal education but none of the students referred to this Act and how the free and universal education might assist in implementing the goals of this Act.

The 2021 Assessment

The 2003 National Policy on Adult Learning is derived from the Article 20 of the Namibian constitution which states that "all persons shall have the right to education" and Education Act (No. 16 of 2001) stipulates that any sector and community may establish, maintain and support adult education programmes. The policy is also based on the recommendations of the 1999 Presidential Commission on Education, Culture and Training.

The Policy provides lifelong learning opportunities to adults and include components of agricultural and forestry extension, water point management, community-based natural resources management, land resettlement, tourism development, small and medium enterprise development, primary health care, rehabilitation of people with disabilities, prison education, broadcasting, gender awareness programmes, voter education and road safety campaigns. With that large coverage that the Policy stipulates in clause.

It is a well-known fact that the development of coherent policies and plans is crucial to bring about real and sustainable changes in the education systems and achieve the goal of Education for All.

6. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In conclusion, a host of factors affecting or undermining the intended goals of the Lifelong Learning policy and the mismatch between the Acts and policies have been identified.

The paper recommends that since laws are mined from the general population practices, lifelong learning policies should closely reflect the laws where they are derived from, thereby enabling people to be conversant with societal issues and challenges.

Given that at national level some lifelong learning related policies have been in draft form for a long-time, students could not be blamed for not noticing them and for not picking up the relationships between some enabling acts or laws to make connections to the policies, but it remained clear that legislation and policy are two related concepts.

Laws and rules can be used to enforce the course of action set out by the policy and guidelines whilst policies can also be implemented to fulfil the legislative commitments.

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