

Exploring Homeschooling as an Alternative to Public Schooling in Namibia

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PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

The public, learners and various stakeholders who demand relevant and quality education that contributes to the development of their communities rate the quality of basic education. It is crucial that schools educate learners to be responsible citizens and enhance their potential for career development and innovative ideas towards community projects. The aim of this research is to explore the introduction of homeschooling as an alternative to public school and propose the curriculum that would address the current shortcomings.

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Abstract: Homeschooling affords parents an opportunity and freedom to uniquely structure their children's learning environment, use various digital/technologies to access resources which enhances their learning, promote independent learning and can potentially instill much needed moral values in the Namibian children. There is paucity of homeschooling literature in the Namibian context, hence this study sought public views on the introduction and implementation of the homeschooling program in Namibia for the policy makers to formulate the homeschool framework. The study used the existing international literature to explain the concept of homeschooling to the public for their contributions. It adopted a qualitative approach, using an open-ended questionnaire to collect data from a sample of 160 respondents who were purposively selected for their expertise in education and parenting school going aged children. The findings indicate that the introduction of homeschooling is long overdue as it can potentially restore the meaningful values of education which currently are eroding in the public schools. Homeschooling can also be an alternative solution during the pandemics such as COvid-19 supported by online learning. Additionally, advancement in new technologies when used under supervised conditions can produce global learners with relevant understanding towards developmental agenda. This study proposes a national structure for the ministry of basic education in Namibia to consider when drafting the policy of homeschooling.

Key words: Homeschooling, learning concepts, eLearning, public schooling, homeschoolers

I. Introduction and background.

It is generally understood that education starts at home, this is true for Namibia when it comes to aspects such as general acceptable behavior, respect and cultural values. Homeschooling for basic education as it happens in the western world is a new concept for Namibia but it has been in existence for more than a century and according to Whitehead and Bird (1984: 23-24) some American leaders and intellectuals such as George Washington, Woodrow Wilson, Abraham Lincoln, and Franklin D. Roosevelt; general Douglas MacArthur; authors such as Mark Twain; Phyllis Wheatley; Pearl S. Buck, and George Bernard Shaw; industrialist Andrew Carnegie; Philosopher Benjamin Franklin; orator Patrick Henry; and inventor Thomas Edison were largely home-schooled.

Article 20 of the Namibian constitution makes it clear that all persons shall have the right to education. The rest of the sub-articles are silent on the homeschooling concept, however "right to education" can be interpreted to include the education offered in the home setting which can be regulated through established standards by the ministry of education as indicated in the same article part 4. It is stated here that all persons shall have the right, at their own expense, to establish and to maintain private schools, or colleges or other institutions of tertiary education. The interpretation could include parents educating their children especially at the primary level which is open for the public discussion.

When Covid-19 hit Namibia for the first time in March 2020, as a preventative strategy to curb the spread of the Corona virus, the country went on lockdown stages that lasted over 6 months (Government Gazette No. 7222 of 2020). By implication, schools, Universities and other institutions of education closed their doors for learners and students. Schools resorted to using eLearning and other technologies but this could only work in towns with reliable internet connection hence for some schools, learning packages were designed for parents to collect for their children. Parents started teaching and marking their children's work following the set guidelines. It was a challenge for most parents but with time, some parents felt that their children can actually do school work from home provided there is a national structure with the curriculum and schemes of work or course outlines for them to follow. Private schools or parents that could afford good internet facilities were able to have their children continue with online learning under the supervision of parents and guardians supported through virtual teaching by the subject teachers. While homeschooling is a new concept in Namibia, literature reveals that it is legal, legitimate and has existed in many western and African countries for many years. It was estimated that in 2008, over 1.5 million children were homeschooled in the United States (NCES: 2008) and owing to its popularity and rapid growth, the number exceeded 2 million in 2010. According to Scheriff (2008: 2), home school is an expression of core values of freedom, personal liberty and respect for education. That is to say homeschoolers are well-educated parents who believed that they are removing their children from a bureaucratic process that doesn't serve their children well. One can submit that only parents with the capacity in terms of resources and soft skills are able to effectively homeschool their children who later can join the public schools in certain grades through a standardized test to evaluate their competencies.

South Africa recognizes homeschooling as a legitimate schooling option which is part of the education system. The South African Schools Act no. 84 of 1996 allows parents to register learners to receive education at home if they meet certain requirements such as the child's interests, meeting the standards of public school education and minimum requirements of the curriculum in the public schools. It is estimated that in 1996 already, approximately 1300 South African children were taught at home (Durham, 1996: 72) and this number increased to about 2400 homeschoolers in 1997 (Van Oostrum & Van Oostrum, 1997a: 1).

When homeschooling started in the 17th and 18 century, Angelis (1998) submitted that parents educated their children at home due to lack of availability of schools, so it was out of necessity but this has since changed. The outbreak of Covid-19 pandemic closed down all the schools and parents became teachers at home using prepared materials from schools or eLearning/online classes. This practice is not far from the concept of homeschooling, and it can continue for some parents.

There are various reasons why some parents choose to home school their children over traditional schools such as large teacher-learner ratio; lack of classroom discipline; declining standards of education and increasing costs of schooling (Durham, 1996: 76). Additionally, Moore & Moore (1994: 39) clarify that home educated children are highly competed socially seldom age-segregated and generally respectful of their parents. The advancement in new technologies and tools have presented opportunities for homeschool families to access needed resources, share resources with other homeschooling families, get necessary assistance from local school teachers and to attend virtual classes when interacting with many subjects and curriculum experts globally.

II. Statement of the problem

While literature presents empirical evidence that validates the existence of homeschooling in America, Europe and some African countries, there is paucity of homeschooling information in Namibia. Article 20 of the Namibian constitution is silent on the homeschooling besides the provision to establish private schools and institutions that conform to set guidelines. However, the Namibia Basic Education Act no. 3 of 2020 defines homeschooling as instructions in which parents and care-givers or other privately appointed tutors or service providers teach a learner following a legally approved academic curriculum at home instead of at a public or private school. By implication, homeschooling can be explored as an alternative form of schooling in Namibia for parents that have the capacity and necessary resources to educate their children at home. This study sought public views on

introduction and implementation of a national homeschooling program as an alternative form of schooling in Namibia.

III. Literature Review

This section presents some learning theories that parents can adopt to ensure effective learning takes place at home, the structure of the national homeschooling program that is collaborative in nature and organized at the national level and some activities to be prescribed to the homeschooling learners for their social balance.

3.1 Learning Concepts/strategies

It is a known fact that teaching a smaller group is more effective as it affords the teacher an opportunity to attend to all concerns and questions from the learners. Martin-Chang, Gould and Mense (2011) established that homeschooled learners had higher achievement scores as compared to those attending public schools. Their performance is attributed to the individualized teaching & learning and the use of technology to benchmark their understanding. Similarly, Sabol (2018) echoed that parents that are homeschooling their children have the freedom to uniquely structure the learning environment to meet the needs of their children. Additionally, homeschool families can rely on digital devices and internet to provide alternatives to public and private schools.

When it comes to learning, Maslow's (1968) theory of motivation can be applicable in a school or house environment to ensure meaningful learning. Physiological needs of the children are met through proper nutrition for excellent concentration, good ventilation and lighting to do school work, intervals and rests for bathroom visitations and comfortable dressing codes to do school work. Mwamwenda (1995: 266 – 267) emphasizes that parents that monitor learning have a responsibility to ensure that psychological needs are fulfilled. The monitoring should be extended to ensuring that children feel protected and loved; guided and taken care-off, and own their activities to develop a positive self-concept. When learners are active in their own learning, they are likely to understand concepts and be able to construct their own understanding of complex ideas (Futurelab, 2009).

Piaget (1995) through his theory of constructivism asserts that a child who experiments in activities makes meaningful connections and is better able to integrate their experiences into reality. In other words, active participation translates into authentic and practical application of knowledge. Home school parents have ample time to take their children to different industries for exposure and in the process children tend to apply theory to reality. It is crucial that the content to be learnt is related to a real-life situation to enhance performance. Mwamwenda (1995: 307) explains that distributed practice of short practice periods assist learners for effective learning when separated by rest intervals. His explanation is well applicable to a house setting where there is no competition for classroom space or teaching time.

Home schooling children develop the much needed independence when it comes to learning and doing more research. Independent learning is associated with other terminologies such as learner autonomy, personalized learning and student-centred learning (Meyer et al., 2008). In support of independent learning, Knight (1996: 36-36) clarifies that independence doesn't mean absence of parental or teacher's guidance but the outcome of a process of learning that enables learners to work with such guidance as they wish, and this can be from electronic media, parents and tutors among others.

3.2 Homeschooling structure

There is enough literature to validate homeschooling hence the choice to homeschool or go for the traditional public school depends on a variety of factors such as the cost of schooling, relevant subjects' choice, discipline in schools and teacher-learner ratio. Homeschool families have that freedom to uniquely structure the learning environment for their children, provide guidance on subject choices and enhance their learning by using different digital resources (Sabol, 2018). Additionally, Ray (2015) submits that homeschool structures are flexible and afford myriads of instructional approaches and strategies to choose a style that fits a child's abilities and interests. Vigilant, Anderson and Trefethren (2014) believe that many traditional schools have overlooked and do not support the learning needs of many children as compared to homeschooling programs.

Homeschooling families form what is called cooperatives who share social and academic resources. Topp (2014) reports that these cooperatives organize to provide social interaction for children, emotional support for parents, opportunities to discuss the curriculum choices and delivery, park day play-dates, and enriching field trip experiences. Additionally, they also allow children to learn from other home educators which can also be done through virtual platforms.

Sabol (2018) highlights the formation of Charter School Partnership (CSP) by the homeschooling families where instruction is delivered in part from public institutions and the other half from the homeschool parents. It is through the charter that the curriculum, pacing guides, benchmarks, formative and summative assessments and

recording procedures are determined. Furthermore, CSP formulates policies that determine the distribution of instructional responsibilities shared by homeschool educators and charter school staff members.

Since parents have a choice of the method they want to use to provide their child with the education and curriculum that is right for them, the child's education is customized for the child as a learner. Moreau (2012) concludes that homeschooling is parent driven with the curriculum chosen, purchased and instructed by the parent however, specific public schools can also be chosen to add value to the homeschooling experience for the parents. There are several curriculums available for homeschoolers to choose from, and according to Bohon (2010), programs such as the freedom project education is commonly used in America because the curriculum seeks to use basic education to empower students to understand, enjoy the learning content and preserve the moral responsibility embodied in American founding principles. As homeschool gains momentum in many countries, so does the introduction of similar programs such as Freedom Project Education.

3.3 ELearning

In the past 10 years, new technological advances and learning tools have been developed to facilitate and provide learners unlimited access to a wide range of educational resources, instructional resources and synchronous virtual class attendance. This is evidence that homeschooled children will not be in isolation as it could be without technology which is arguably fast replacing teachers and also becoming a medium of instruction. Laurillard (2012) points out the relationship between technology and education that technology drives education. It is observed that homeschooling families embrace the use of technology in their teaching methods compared to teachers at public schools and this exposes homeschooled children to more content in different subjects and impact their learning positively (Hanna, 2012).

The digital revolution has profoundly affected our daily living and that includes the way we teach and learn. The use of computers, mobile phones and internet is at its highest level and still continues to increase as technology becomes more accessible especially for users in the developing countries (Poushter, 2016). Some people depend on their smartphones to record, take notes and rely solely on internet to access services. The cost of schooling is becoming expensive while many parents do not have enough income to pay for services such as transport to school, uniforms and buying books. Technology can save you time, resources and money.

Home schooling children can still virtually attend organized classes and have library resources anywhere globally as long as it is coordinated by the parents in line with their daily school work schedules. According to Grunawardena et al. (2009), learners and parents can make use of social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and LinkedIn to make connections with individuals of the same interests and expand their knowledge. Learners can also make use of digital games to enhance their learning. Boyle et al. (2016) submits that digital games serve a dual purpose of promoting the achievement of learning outcomes. It makes learning fun by providing simulations of real-world scenarios as well as role play, problem solving, and drill and repeat.

Homeschooled children and families can also make use of web-conferencing software for virtual meetings where they can login simultaneously and communicate about a given topic (Schindler et al., 2017). Findings suggest that students who participate in web-conferencing demonstrate critical reflection and enhanced learning through interactions with others (Armstrong & Thornton, 2012) and higher order thinking in response to challenging assignments (Wdowik, 2014). Similarly, Mansouri and Piki (2016) report that students who make use of Blogs show consistently positive findings for many of the behavioral and emotional engagement indicators. That is to say these students report that blogs promote interaction with others, through greater communication and information sharing with fellow students.

It can be argued that eLearning is a game changer in the 21st century and has enabled many university students to access study materials, submit assignments, write assessment activities and even attend virtual classes. The positive impact and significance of relying on technology became a reality during the Covid-19 pandemic especially in Namibia when there were strict restrictions on movements. Francis (2017) submits that all students can have a high level of academic achievement if they are put into a technology-supported environment that is more conducive to their learning styles. It is generally noted that most educators are no longer debating whether technology should be used for instructions but rather what type of technology promotes student engagement for effective and productive learning. It should be acknowledged that today's generation of learners are growing up in the information age, and this requires right tools for effective learning.

Some scholars have argued that homeschooled children are more active when it comes to learning due to the acquisition of elements regarded as core value skills. Ghavifekr et al. (2014) submit that the integration of ICT into teaching and learning helps students in enhancing their collaborative learning skills as well as developing transversal skills that stimulate social skills such as problem solving, self-reliance, responsibility and the capacity for reflection and initiative.

IV. Research Methodologies

This research sought to gain an understanding of the public views on introduction of homeschooling in Namibia as an alternative to public schooling for parents that can meet set requirements. This qualitative study which is exploratory and inductive in nature employed a case study design. Yin (2014) finds case study to be an ideal approach to how and why type of questions. Similarly, case studies provide in-depth understanding of an entity in its context and setting (Stake, 2006). The research questions were designed to prompt the understanding and preferences of parents and educators on the introduction of homeschooling in Namibia as an alternative to public schooling especially after the Namibian schools were closed due to Covid-19 restrictions; questionnaires with open-ended questions were used to collect data. The collected data which was predominantly non-numerical was analyzed by using content and thematic analysis to quantify the meanings from established codes and themes. Three themes such as curriculum structure, assessment of homeschool learners and benefits of homeschooling over public schooling were formulated and used to quantify the findings with the purpose deriving the outcome. It was from the themes, literature and other provided information that a model was developed to guide the ministry of education in formulating the homeschool structure for Namibia.

The sampling frame for this research was 200 parents in Erongo region which was hard-hit by Covid-19 restrictions and schools had to close for about 5 months. These parents included teachers, education officers and other professionals with a certain level of education to understand the concept of homeschooling. Data was collected through the online distribution of questionnaires to teachers, parents, education officers, lecturers and other professionals. To maintain anonymity, a letter explaining what the research was all about, the purpose and the pledge of not divulging their identities was provided to ensure clarity of purpose.

V. Findings and discussions

Out of 200 questionnaires distributed, 160 which is 80% of response rate were successfully completed and returned for a thematic analysis. The findings were organized in line with qualitative approach adopted in this study to explore the public views on the introduction of home schooling in Namibia. The respondents constituted of 137 females and 23 males; 151 had Bachelor degrees and higher while the remaining 9 had certificates with industry experience. It is commendable that 98.8% of respondents had a good understanding of homeschooling and all of them support and prefer enrolling their children in the homeschool structure once introduced in Namibia. The responses were organized into themes, namely: curriculum structure, assessment of homeschooling children and benefits of homeschooling over public schools. The analysis of these themes, review of international literature and responses to certain questions on the research instrument guided the formulation of a proposed model for the ministry of basic education to follow when drafting structure of homeschooling in Namibia.

a) Curriculum structure

Majority (90%) of the respondents prefer a curriculum that offers not more than five subjects including mother language and mathematics. It should be an outcome-based curriculum for a knowledge based society that is aligned to the national curriculum which allows students to understand concepts in the context of the real world. While 90 (56.3%) respondents support a curriculum that follows a blended approach where learners can attend a specific subject at a certain local school, 93% of respondents proposed that the curriculum should have four (4) exit levels such as end of junior primary, senior primary, junior secondary and senior secondary with the flexibility of learners to join homeschool from the public school at the end of any exit/entry level. These findings support Moreau (2012) submission that parents play pivotal role on choosing the curriculum however, specific public schools can be chosen to add value to the homeschooling experience for the parents. Accordingly, parents can choose from many available curriculums (Bohon, 2010) and home schooling children can virtually attend organized classes and use library resources anywhere globally under the supervision of the parents.

b) Assessments of homeschool learners

All 160 the respondents concur that learners should be assessed by their parents or a nationally established body to ensure quality of knowledge attainment for the purpose of promoting certain competencies and be able to address areas of concern for the next phase, university or career path. Sabol (2018) clarifies the formation of Charter School Partnership (CSP) as a legitimate body that provides guidance and formulates policies on formative and summative assessments. The assessment can be done throughout as per the completion of a module in a specific subject. Eight seven (54.4%) respondents submitted that homeschooled learners should be assessed to evaluate their reasoning and creativity.

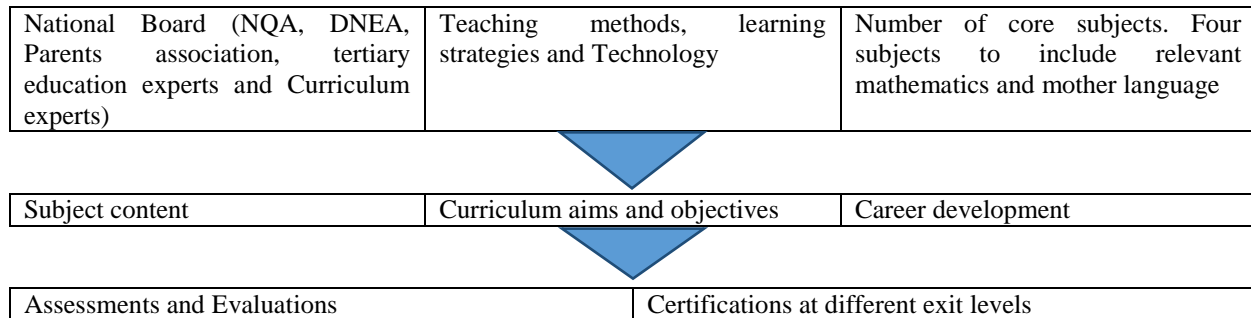
c) Benefits of homeschooling

All the respondents have affirmed that homeschool takes place under controlled environment which guarantees discipline, independent learning and good moral values. Learners have freedom to learn without pressure

hence ninety-two respondents associate the value of knowing than passing with homeschool which is critical for innovation. These findings are in line with Piaget (1995) theory of constructivism especially when children experiment in activities that make meaningful connections to real-life situations. Furthermore, independence when it comes to learning promotes a learning culture that enables learners to understand concepts and be able to construct their own understanding of complex ideas (Futurelab, 2009). While it is acknowledged that homeschoolers should have necessary resources to homeschool their children, all the respondents have indicated that homeschool is cheaper and safer for learners than public schools. Seventy three respondents have advised that parents seek professional assistance on careers and personality identification as it will assist them choose a suitable curriculum for their children. This is viewed as an advantage because homeschool learners tend to follow a curriculum that serves their interests, passion and abilities for their learning style. All respondents submitted that homeschool learners get individual attention for their individual needs.

5.1 Proposed model of homeschool structure

There is merit on designing a relevant curriculum that seek to ensure learners graduating from such a curriculum have attained a solid foundation of lifelong skills needed in a rapid changing society. There should be a national curriculum agenda that is Namibian original and true to the national needs and transformation. The structure has 3 levels such as input, process and output elements. The number of subjects, teaching methods and learning strategies should be recommended by the national board of homeschool in Namibia. The objectives of the homeschool curriculum and the content should be aligned to relevant career development. Home schooling system will use different assessments or examination methods to certify learners at different exit levels.



Looking at the proposed model of homeschooling, the ministry of education is tasked to do research in every aspect of the model in order to produce relevant and quality graduates. Through the national development plans, Namibia should strive to develop her own agenda which can easily be achieved through homeschool structure.

VI. Conclusion and Recommendations

The primary aim of the research was to explore the public views on the introduction of homeschooling system as an alternative to public and private schools. Homeschool is currently not recognized and understood by many hence the reliance on literature to define it in the correct context. The research established that homeschool should be introduced, legitimized and managed in the best interest of the country and all stakeholders. It was also felt that homeschool might provide solutions to the challenges experienced in the current education system, restore relevance and moral values. Ray (2015) submits that homeschool is not only flexible in terms choosing the relevant subjects but it uses instructional approaches and strategies that fit the learner’s interests and abilities. Not only that individual needs of the learners are handled efficiently but Vigilant, Anderson and Trefethren (2014) believe that many traditional schools have overlooked and do not support the learning needs of many children. It was further established that homeschool promotes independent learning and learner autonomy which is key to innovation and problem solving.

Based on the research findings, it is recommended that homeschool learner should have less than five subjects that are relevant towards the learners’ career development and these should include mother language. To ensure mastery of the curriculum, quality and promotion of different competencies; it was agreed that different assessment methods such as competency based and subject based should be employed for different learners. Moreover, homeschooling provides parents with freedom to choose time and a place for their children that is conducive to their learning styles which if done appropriately gives them an advantage over public schooled learners.

If the curriculum is to produce relevant graduates that will accelerate the actual transformation of economy, social and entrepreneurial aspects; it should be decolonized to benefit Namibia and structured to respond to our own agendas. The composition of the proposed national board of homeschooling should purposively ensure the learners graduating from homeschooling system are competent to join tertiary institutions or vocational training to produce the much needed human capital. Additionally, homeschooling learners should be allowed to join sport teams or social groups in public or private schools of their choice to promote accountability, leadership, teamwork and other needed skills. Sabol (2018) and Moreau (2012) proposed that homeschooling learners can partly affiliate to some schools of their choice to benefit on selected curriculum content or other aspects such as sport and social clubs. Lastly, since homeschool learners have fewer subjects, they can engage into industry familiarization tours and do industry research to enhance their career development.

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