



Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium  
for Monitoring Educational Quality

## Quality of Primary School Inputs in Namibia

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### Introduction

This paper highlights the quality of four primary school inputs in Namibia in relation to the nation's defined benchmarks. The four inputs are: basic learning materials, mathematics textbooks, learner-teacher ratios, and class size. These four indicators are described in the section titled Selected Indicators, where it is also shown how they are related to the quality of education. The data used in this paper were collected in 2007 from 6,398 Grade 6 learners in 267 primary schools in all 13 regions in Namibia. This was part of a major international study known as the Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality (SACMEQ) III Project. The SACMEQ III Project sought to examine the quality of education provided in primary schools in Namibia and 14 other African school systems.

The results in this paper cover Namibia as a whole, and are then further disaggregated by regions, school location (rural versus urban), and type of school (government versus private). The results from the SACMEQ II Project (2000) are also provided, to enable monitoring of the general trend in the provision of the selected inputs in primary schools in Namibia between 2000 and 2007.

### Background

Following independence in 1990, the Namibian Government viewed universal education reform as a principal means of investing in human capital to promote socio-economic development. At first, the government stressed the need for Universal Primary Education (UPE) by introducing the Education for All (EFA) concept, which became the foundation on

which the post-independent Namibian education was to be built. Access, equity, democracy, and quality were set as the four main pillars of the Namibian education system. By 2007, Namibia had attained a 92.3 percent Net Enrolment Ratio (NER) of all children aged 7-13 (Grades 1-7) and the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) of 116.6 percent in similar grades and age groups, with all genders equitably represented (Ministry of Education (MoE), 2007a).

While much has been achieved in terms of access to schooling, a lot still needs to be done in order to: improve quality, ensure equitable distribution of resources (i.e., human, financial, and material), and attain greater efficiency and curb wastage. Repetition and dropout rates in particular place an extra demand on education resources in terms of expenditure, teaching, and learning space provision.

Schooling in Namibia is highly subsidized. The government, with its development partners, finances most school expenditure, including teachers' salaries. Parents are, however, expected to pay some minimal fees to cover the School Development Fund (SDF) which is meant to take care of minor school expenses and the replacement of damaged facilities. These minimal fees are, however, not compulsory, as according to policy, no child can be denied access to primary education because of an inability to pay school fees (Ministry of Education (MoE), 2008).

The government pays for learning materials, teaching facilities, teachers' salaries, and textbooks in all public schools. The allocation of the education budget to the regions is based on the total budget received from the treasury as well as the budgets submitted by the regions based on their needs. The fact is that the per capita fund (PCF) formula is not used when allocating budgets to the different

regions and this is a crucial issue. However, the cabinet approved the PCF formula in 2010, which was to be implemented as soon as possible. This has yet to be realized. The formula uses the following criteria: (a) the percentage of school-going-age children in a region; (b) the size of a region and how far the central part of the region is to the head office; and (c) the poverty index, which included orphans and vulnerable children (OVC). The regions will then re-distribute the funds to schools based on: the number of learners; where the school is located; whilst also taking into account the school phase (i.e., level of the school) as the unit cost. Each public school then prioritizes its needs in relation to the budget allocated. The budgets allocated per school are categorized into: (a) a stationery budget – this caters for teaching and learning items, such as exercise books, pencils, erasers, posters and maps, (b) a textbook budget, and (c) a miscellaneous budget – this caters for school maintenance, equipment, and groceries. Schools in Namibia purchase their learning materials from government stores using government purchase order forms, each of which are different for textbooks, stationery, and others items.

The current method of allocating funds does not meet all learner and school's needs equitably. This prompts schools to take their own initiatives to raise funds or to ask parents to assist when it comes to buying their children's learning materials.

The SACMEQ data are ideal for examining the quality of school inputs in Namibia for at least two

reasons. Firstly, the data were collected using modern scientific sampling techniques that are known to be reliable. Secondly, the data are available for three time points (1995, 2000, and 2007). This made it possible to monitor the quality of school inputs in Namibia over time.

## Selected Indicators

The four selected indicators of the quality of school inputs are: (a) basic learning materials, (b) mathematics textbooks, (c) learner-teacher ratios and (d) class size. The descriptions of these four indicators have been provided in Table 1 below together with the set benchmarks for Namibia.

Basic learning materials, i.e., possession of at least one exercise book, something to write with, and a ruler, are considered crucial to ensuring that learners participate reasonably in learning activities in the classrooms. Therefore, it is desirable for all learners to have these materials. A ruler is especially important for mathematics and science lessons, particularly for the upper primary school classes (Grades 4 to 8). Likewise, it is desirable for each learner to have sole use of a textbook (especially for the core subjects, such as reading, mathematics, and science), because research evidence has shown that sole use of textbooks is essential for effective teaching and learning in the classroom. Sole use of textbooks is also preferable, because it enables learners to undertake academic activities at home, such as doing homework and revising school work.

**Table 1: National Benchmarks for the Selected Indicators of the Quality of Education**

| Selected Indicator       | Description of the Indicator   | National Benchmark |
|--------------------------|--|--------------------|
| Basic learning materials | Learner has at least one exercise book, a pencil or a pen, and a ruler           | 100%               |
| Mathematics textbooks    | Learner has sole use of a mathematics textbook during mathematics lessons        | 100%               |
| Learner-teacher ratios   | Total number of learners in a school divided by number of teachers in the school | 40:1               |
| Grade 6 class size       | Average number of Grade 6 learners per class                                     | 40                 |

SOURCE: MoE, 2007b.

Concerning learner-teacher ratios and class size, research evidence shows that lower values are desirable for better quality education. It is thought that, to a certain limit, lower values on these two indicators are associated with more interaction between teachers and learners, resulting in better quality education. Learner-teacher ratios and class size are also key indicators for checking if expansion in participation rates is accompanied by adequate provision of teachers and classrooms.

The recommended learner-teacher ratios and class size for primary schools in Namibia is 40 learners per teacher and 40 learners per class, respectively (MoE, 2007b).

## Key Findings

The data on the four inputs were analyzed and the results are depicted in Figures 1 to 4.

### Basic Learning Materials

In 2007, only 73 percent of the Grade 6 learners had at least one exercise book, a pencil or a pen, and a ruler. In other words, around three in every ten (27%) learners did not have all the three basic learning items that were considered necessary for effective participation in classroom activities. There were large variations among some regions. Erongo and Khomas recorded the highest percentages (86%) while Ohangwena recorded the lowest (57%). In addition, there was a difference of (13%) between rural (68%) and urban schools (81%). However, there was no difference between learners in government and private schools.

On average, 79 percent of the learners in all the SACMEQ countries had basic learning materials. This implied that the overall situation in SACMEQ countries was generally better than the Namibian situation. The percentage for Namibia remained the same between 2000 and 2007 (73%).

### Mathematics Textbooks

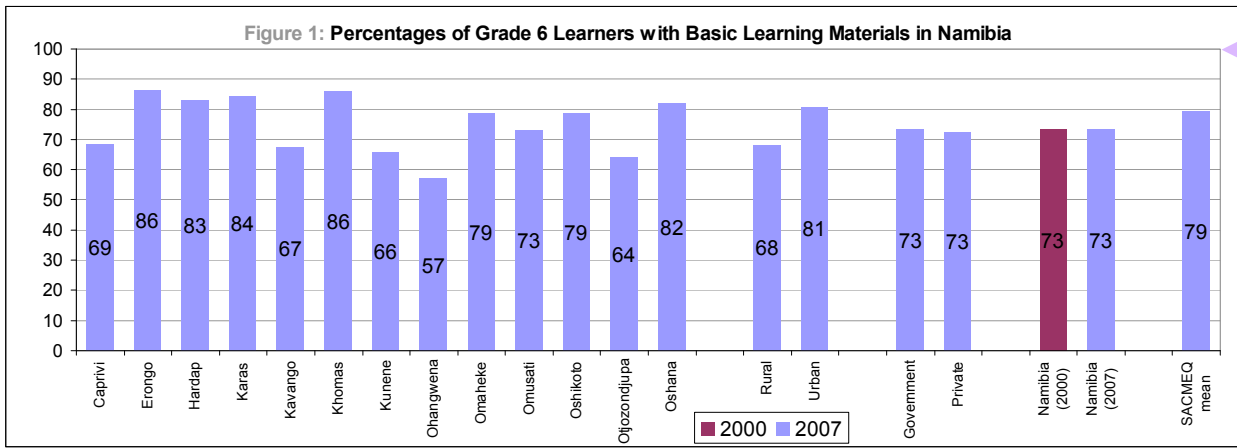
The government target is for each learner to have sole use of a textbook per subject. It is, therefore, worrying that only 32 percent of the Grade 6 learners in 2007 had sole use of mathematics textbooks. It is also troubling that the quantity of these textbooks dropped since 2000, when the percentage of Grade 6 learners with sole use of mathematics textbooks was 48 percent. Furthermore, the textbook situation among SACMEQ countries in 2007 (41%) was generally better than the situation in Namibia (32%).

Erongo recorded by far the highest percentage of learners with sole use of mathematics textbooks (64%). There were noticeable variations among the other regions with Kavango (13%) being the lowest and, as such, considerably lower than all the other regions. The textbook situation in rural schools (27%) was worse than that in urban schools (40%). Government schools (32%) were better off than the private schools (29%).

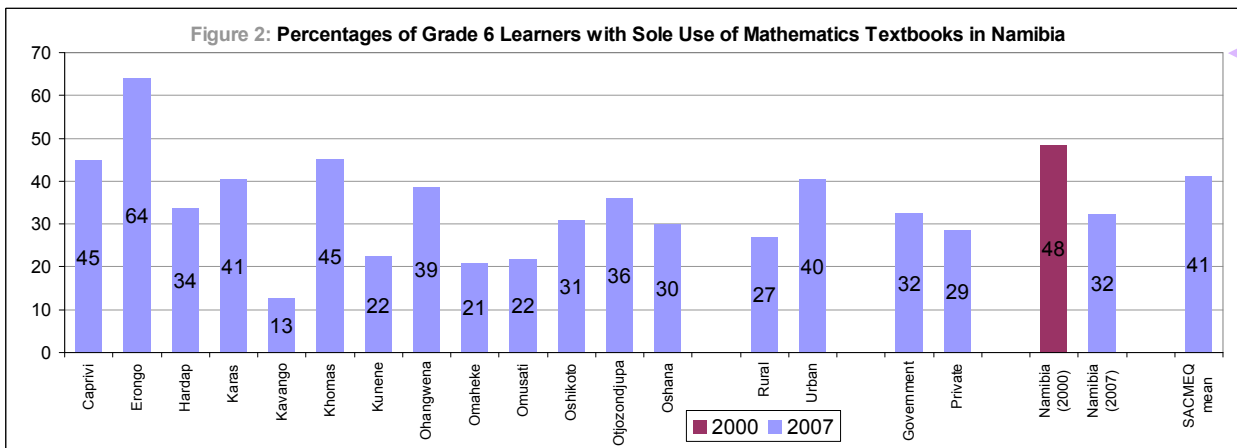
### Learner-Teacher Ratios

In 2000 and 2007, the mean learner-teacher ratios among primary schools in Namibia were exactly the same, namely, 31 learners per teacher. These mean values were within the country's set benchmark of 40 learners per teacher. These results depicted a primary school system with a substantial teaching workforce.

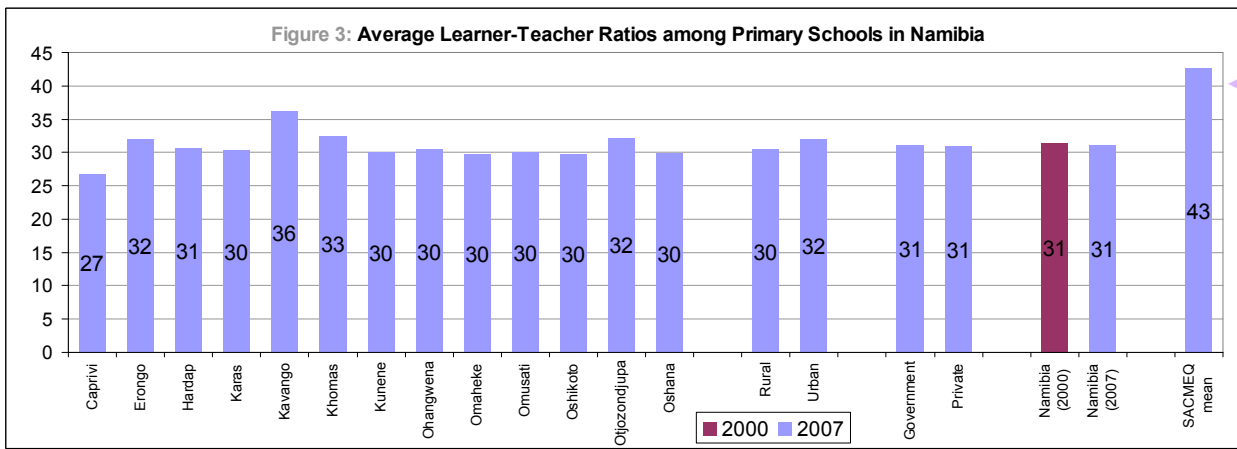
In 2007, there were some small variations between the regions, but all the mean values were well below the intended national benchmark. The highest mean value was in Kavango (36) and the lowest was in Caprivi (27). Moreover, there was little variation between urban (32) and rural schools (30), and there was no variation between government and private schools (31). The overall mean for Namibia was much lower (better) than that of SACMEQ ratio of 43 learners per teacher.



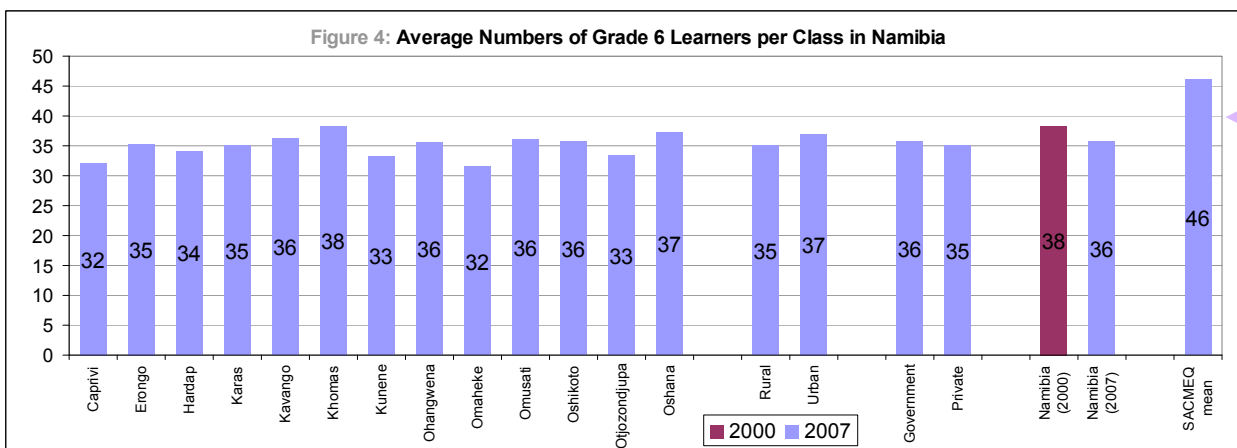
National Benchmark: All primary school learners in Namibia are expected to have basic learning materials (100%)



National Benchmark: All primary school learners in Namibia are expected to have a mathematics textbook (100%)



National Benchmark: 40 learners per teacher in primary schools



National Benchmark: 40 learners per class in primary schools

SOURCES of Figures 1 to 4: SACMEQ Data Archive.

## Class Size

The mean number of Grade 6 learners per class dropped slightly (hence, improved) from 38 in 2000 to 36 in 2007. Importantly, this number was well within the national benchmark of 40 and much better than the SACMEQ mean ratio of 46 learners per class in 2007.

In 2007, the number of Grade 6 learners per class for private schools (35) was almost the same as the number for public schools (36). Furthermore, there were minimal variations among the regions, with the highest mean in Khomas (38) (hence, well within the national benchmark) and the lowest in Caprivi and Omaheke (32, for both). The mean for rural schools (35) was just marginally better than the mean for town schools (37) and both mean values were within the national set benchmark.

## Summary of Findings

- This study showed that around three in every ten learners (27%) did not have all the three basic learning materials needed for effective participation in classroom activities. Moreover, at least three in every five learners did not have sole use of mathematics textbooks. Most of the learners without these basic learning materials (or without mathematics textbooks) were in rural schools, but substantial numbers were also in urban schools.
- This study also revealed that in 2007, the mean learner-teacher ratio (31) was within Namibia's benchmark of 40 learners per teacher. In addition, in all 13 regions, the average numbers of Grade 6 learners per class were within the national benchmark of 40.

## Suggestions

Regarding the problems with the provision of basic learning materials and textbooks in Namibian primary schools, the following policy options could be considered.

1. The Ministry of Education could advise school principals, especially in schools located in rural areas and regions such as Caprivi, Kavango,

Kunene, and Ohangwena – which had recorded the lowest percentages of learners with the basic learning materials – to always prioritize the use of the money allocated under the stationery budget to purchase learning materials, thereby ensuring that all learners have exercise books, pens and pencils, rulers, and textbooks.

2. The Directorate of Programme and Quality Assurance (DPQA) could carry out a follow-up audit to determine whether the 2007 recorded shortage of mathematics textbooks in Grade 6 has changed. This follow-up audit is important, because the ministry – with financial assistance from the United States Government through the Millennium Challenge Account (MCA) – has started making efforts to allocate more textbooks.

## Conclusions

This policy brief highlighted the quality of primary school inputs in Namibia using four indicators, namely: (a) basic learning materials, (b) mathematics textbooks, (c) learner-teacher ratios, and (d) class size. Against the country's own set benchmarks, Namibia scored poorly in the provision of basic learning materials and textbooks. However, it scored highly on learner-teacher ratios and class size, thereby indicating that there was an adequate supply of teachers and classrooms.

The situation in rural schools was worse for basic learning materials and mathematics textbooks than the situation in urban schools. Furthermore, concerning mathematics textbooks, the results showed that Namibia declined considerably between 2000 and 2007.

## References

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- MoE (2007b). *Education and training sector improvement programme*. Windhoek: Government of the Republic of Namibia.
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## Abbreviations and Acronyms

|      |  |
|------|--|
| DPQA | Directorate of Programme and Quality Assurance |
| EFA  | Education for All                              |
| EMIS | Education Management Information System        |
| FPE  | Free Primary Education                         |
| GER  | Gross Enrolment Ratio                          |
| MCA  | Millennium Challenge Account                   |
| MoE  | Ministry of Education                          |
| NER  | Net Enrolment Ratio                            |
| OVC  | Orphans and Vulnerable Children                |
| PCF  | Per Capita Fund                                |
| SDF  | School Development Fund                        |
| UPE  | Universal Primary Education                    |

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