

**QUALITY ENHANCEMENT IN TEACHING USING SELF-ASSESSMENT STRATEGIES: A CASE STUDY OF SELECTED SCHOOLS IN THE ZAMBEZI REGION OF NAMIBIA**

**Vincent Mubiana Matakala<sup>1</sup>, Africa Zulu<sup>2</sup>, David Nkengbeza<sup>3</sup>**  
Katima Mulilo Campus, University of Namibia

---

**ABSTRACT:** *This qualitative study explored how self-assessment strategies can be used to enhance quality education in schools. Purposefully sampled school principals and heads of department (HoDs) of five combined schools in the region participated in the study. Face-to-face interviews were conducted with the five participating school principals while the HoDs were engaged in a focus group interview. This study revealed that schools have common understandings of quality and quality education. The study revealed that the use of a single type of teacher self-evaluation (TSE) deprives innovative teachers from initiating and exploring other viable self-assessment strategies. Therefore, this study recommends a creative application of alternative self-assessment strategies in order to enhance the quality of education in selected schools in the Zambezi Region of Namibia.*

**KEYWORDS:** continuous professional development, quality education, quality education enhancement, self-assessment, self-assessment strategies, teacher effectiveness

---

## **INTRODUCTION**

In 1990, the newly independent Government of the Republic of Namibia (GRN) enacted laws to eliminate imbalances that had prevailed during the colonial dispensation. This allowed previously disadvantaged Namibians to have free access to basic education, from primary level up to lower secondary level.

Since then, Namibia has been reforming its educational system in order to empower the local schools without compromising on national standards and requirements. With the school as the heart of the educational system, school practices and processes have forced the Government of the Republic of Namibia to embark on a speedy but steady process of decentralisation and devolution of the powers, functions and authority to local schools and agencies. The Ministry of Education, Arts, and Culture (2013a:3) declared that: ‘The State is taking full responsibility for expanding and availing resources, through [the] regional budget program for Pre-primary and Primary education’. This declaration by the Government directly addressed the national goals of access, quality, equity and democracy in the education sector (Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture, 1993). The introduction of Universal Primary Education (UPE) in 2013, attached an even greater

importance to the empowerment of local schools and local communities, while setting standards that all schools should try to meet (Government of the Republic of Namibia, 1999).

Despite several mitigation strategies by the Ministry of Education to improve the quality of education in the Zambezi region, Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality (SACMEQ) research findings indicate that the Zambezi region is rated as one of the poorest in literacy and numeracy. Makuwa (2005) found out that  $\leq 5\%$  of the learners in the Zambezi region attained the minimum level of mastery in literacy and  $\leq 1.2\%$  of the learners reached the desirable level of mastery in literacy. Less than eighty-percent of the teachers achieved the desirable level of mastery in literacy.

In 2014, the Zambezi region was ranked as the least performing region countrywide (Salkeus, 2015). The factors attributed to the poor performance of the region were multifaceted. Stakeholders, particularly school principals and teachers, were often blamed for the region's lack of quality education as manifested by the poor national examination results. According to Ntabi, Nkengbeza and Maemeko, (2017:96), 'common observations in the school system show that all stakeholders within the sector points (sic) to each other as being responsible for this mediocre performance'. . The low performance by learners in local and national examinations necessitated the researchers to explore how the quality of teaching and learning can be improved using self-assessment strategies in selected combined schools in the Zambezi Region.

### **Research problem**

McKinsey (2007:44) states that 'the quality of an education system cannot exceed the quality of its teachers and that the only way to improve outcomes is to improve instruction (teaching and learning)'. The process of improving instruction of teaching and learning cannot be coincidental. It requires teachers to regularly self-assess their teaching and learning repertoire to improve learner outcomes. According to the Speaker of the National Assembly of the Republic of Namibia, 'Improving education quality calls for contextualised initiatives at school level practice' that are responsive to the needs and expectations of learners (Katjavivi, GRN, 2016:7).

### **Objectives of the research**

The following were the objectives of the study:

- To examine the resources available to ensure that quality education is realised by the use of self-assessment strategies in selected schools in the Zambezi region.
- To develop self-assessment strategy models that can enhance quality education in selected schools in the Zambezi Region.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Quality in the school context

There is no single universally agreed upon definition of quality in education as stated above. However, despite the vagueness of the meaning of quality in education, some scholars and authorities posit that quality education is best perceived from the contextual environment from which one is defining it, such as teaching, learning and curriculum, elements which determine quality education (Dimmock, 1990). A change in one of the three major elements affects the other two elements. In other words, these three elements are interdependent. Dimmock (1990:201) perceives quality education in schools as entailing one or more of the following:

- Improving the standards of teaching and teachers' performance.
- Improving the standards of learning and learners' performance.
- Providing a curriculum more relevant to learners' needs.

### Quality assurance and quality enhancement

The key concepts of quality control (QC), quality assurance (QA), and quality enhancement (QE) are closely related and need clarity. Juran and Godfrey (1979:95) define quality control as 'a universal managerial process for conducting operations so as to provide stability – to prevent adverse change and to maintain the status quo'. The ISO 9000 defines quality control as 'a process for maintaining standards of quality that prevents and corrects in such standards so that the resultant output meets customer needs and expectations' (cited in Hoyle, 2001:654).

Quality assurance is defined differently. Hoyle, (2001:654) defines quality assurance as 'part of quality management focused on providing confidence that quality requirements will be fulfilled'. UNAM (2010:16) defines quality assurance as 'an all-embracing term referring to an on-going, continuous process of evaluating the quality of an education system'. Quality assurance can thus be defined as a continuous and systematic approach to evaluation by educational institutions such as schools to determine the extent to which the institutional goals are being realised.

According to Elassy (2015:256), quality enhancement is 'a subsequent "treatment" process to develop the limitations that QA discovered'. QE is an aftermath of the quality assurance systems that are often put in place by institutional and national agencies. Quality enhancement can be regarded as a deliberate and systematic process of innovation that leads to improvement of the systems that have been quality assured.

In this study we have used Edward Deming's TQM theory (1988). His approach to quality management derives from statistical methodologies in which he advocates the use of statistical methods to reduce variability and to improve production. Deming (1988) proposes an emphasis on

precision, performance and attention to customers' requirements through statistical methods designed to reduce variation. Table 2 describes Deming's fourteen principles that form the main basis of his TQM theory.

Deming's theory of quality management advocates a paradigm shift in organisations to embrace a quality culture of continuous improvement (Deming, 1994). In general, businesses are established to maximise production and profits amidst rivalry competition. Hence, for companies or organisations to remain and sustain their business activities, it is essential that they continually produce goods and services that satisfy and exceed customers' needs and expectations. For schools to remain and sustain their educational activities, it is important that they continually provide educational services that meet and exceed the teaching and learning needs of learners. This requires teachers to constantly self-assess their teaching repertoires by using suitable self-assessment strategies that incorporate Deming's theory of continuous improvement.

Table 1: Deming's fourteen principles of total quality management (Deming, 1988)

<b>TQM principles</b>	<b>Explanation of the principles</b>
Principle 1	Create constancy of purpose for continual improvement of services.
Principle 2	Adopt the new philosophy and abandon traditional ways of working.
Principle 3	Move from inspection to building quality into every process.
Principle 4	Stop awarding contracts on the basis of the lowest bid – specify and buy quality.
Principle 5	Engage in the process of continually improving every aspect of company activity.
Principle 6	Use work-based training techniques.
Principle 7	The emphasis for leaders and managers must be on quality, not quantity.
Principle 8	Drive out fear by improving communication.
Principle 9	Break down organisation barriers.
Principle 10	Eliminate slogans and exhortations.
Principle 11	Eliminate arbitrary numerical targets.
Principle 12	Allow for pride of workmanship by locating responsibility with the worker.
Principle 13	Encourage education and self-development.
Principle 14	Create a management structure and culture that will drive the preceding 13 principles.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Research design**

A mixed methods research design was used to address the complex nature of the research problem which could not be addressed from the unique perspectives of a qualitative or quantitative study (Ponce & Pagán-Maldonado, 2015). However, despite mixing the two approaches of qualitative and quantitative methods, the researchers predominantly used the qualitative [QUAL] research design in this particular study. A sequential mixed methods design was used to address the research problem of quality education enhancement in the Zambezi region.

## **Study population**

The study participants were drawn from a total number of forty-three (43) combined schools in the Zambezi region. The study population comprised forty-three (43) school principals, forty-eight (48) HoDs, and six-hundred and seven (607) teachers in combined schools in Zambezi region (Ministry of Education, Arts, and Culture, 2017).

## **Sample for the qualitative phase**

Five school principals and five HoDs from the five educational circuits were purposefully sampled to form the population sample for the qualitative phase. Five school principals and five HoDs were purposively selected from the remotest schools in the Zambezi region. The selected school principals and HoDs often received minimal professional support from external agencies to enhance quality education in teaching and learning.

## **Data collection procedures**

The researchers used face-to-face open-ended interviews and focus group interviews to collect qualitative data during the first phase of the research. The face-to-face and focus group interview protocols were designed from an extensive literature review of documents including ministerial documents to gain a general understanding of the key concepts of quality and how quality education can be enhanced in schools. The interviews were conducted after working hours to avoid disrupting school principals and HoDs in conducting their school managerial work. The personal and focus group interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed by the researcher. Data gathered from both types of interviews was analysed to identify common themes and patterns.

## **DATA PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION**

### **Teacher effectiveness**

Teachers are perceived as the main recourse available to ensure that quality education is enhanced in schools in the Zambezi region. Quality education can be linked to teacher effectiveness in schools. Teachers who are efficient and effective in service delivery can use self-assessment strategies to enhance quality education in schools through teacher collegiality, awards' programmes, motivation and competition and avoid teacher reprimands for non-performance.

### **Teacher collegiality**

The participating school principals and heads of departments were asked the following question on teacher collegiality: *Do teachers at your school prefer to work in teams or in isolation? Explain.*

In general, the respondents indicated that teachers seem to prefer to work in teams. According to Respondent SP3:

*It is only through team work that our goal can be realised. Because, eh, through team work, teachers can plan together and they can exchange work. They can plan to visit each other even if management is not involved just to share these types of teaching strategies and other stuffs which will improve the teaching profession (SP3 lines 153 – 158).*

According to Respondent SP2; some teachers prefer to work in isolation. According to him/her, ‘some prefer to work in isolation but I encourage them to work in groups (SP2 lines’ 59 - 60).

The HoDs confirmed what the four school principals (SP1, SP3, SP4 and SP5) said that teachers prefer to work in teams. One HoD, who was supported by all the colleagues, reiterated as follows:

*I don't see my teachers or our teachers in our schools working in isolation. Because, you can even sometimes, vividly see them consulting each other when they are working on their preparations, or when they are preparing their teaching aids. They even do peer coaching themselves (FGI lines 158 - 163).*

However, one HoD mentioned that there are teachers who prefer to work in isolation and that they need professional help. According to the HoD, ‘there are some teachers who are so lonely, who are not cooperative. So, you have to do some activities. As said by my colleagues that during lesson preparations, they come together and plan’ (FGI lines 181 - 183).

### **Teacher awards**

Participating school principals and heads of departments were asked to explain how teachers are motivated to improve the quality of education in schools in the Zambezi region.

The five school principals agreed that best-performing teachers are bestowed with gifts and prizes for their outstanding achievements. The practice of rewarding teachers is done at different levels of the education system in the Zambezi region. According to Respondent SP1, ‘we have developed award ceremonies at different levels, i.e., at school, cluster, circuit, and regional levels’ (SP1 lines 175 – 176). Furthermore, Respondent SP3 said that, ‘best-performing teachers are awarded letters of appreciation; letters of commendation and conferred with certificates of recognition’ (SP3 lines 163 – 168). Respondent SP5 said, ‘we also award the best performing teachers with small tokens of gifts, trophies and certificates’ (SP5 lines 87 – 88).

The HoDs generally agreed that best-performing teachers are awarded in many different ways by schools and other education stakeholders. One HoD confirmed the awarding practice as follows:



*We really give praise to those who are doing the good work by giving them certificates. Sometimes, even the community themselves they give them tokens. They come to them and say we appreciate what you are doing at our school (FGI lines 164 – 167)*

### **Teacher competition**

The participating school principals (Respondents SP1, SP2, SP3, SP4 and SP5) and the HoDs were asked if teachers competed against each other in producing best results.

The two groups of respondents responded affirmatively with the exception of Respondent SP4 who responded negatively. Respondent SP4 justified his assertion as follows:

*For me if there was competition, we would see that when exams come out, another teacher would surpass [best-performing teachers]. But for the past five years, consistently, this teacher has been performing well without any challenge, so if you see that situation, it shows there is no competition (SP4 lines 289 - 292).*

### **Teacher motivation**

Participating school principals and heads of departments were asked how they motivated their teachers in producing good results. The respondents mentioned various ways of how teachers are motivated:

*We provide certificates at the school level for those who do well (SP1 lines 217 - 218).  
I motivate them by comparing their learners' results at school, cluster and circuit levels (SP2 lines 68 - 69).  
I normally motivate them by giving them examples of good performing teachers (SP3 lines 208 - 209).  
Yes. By giving them certificates (SP5 line 100).*

The HoDs agreed that they motivated teachers during routine class visits and that they discussed areas for improvement and focussed on the things that the teacher did well. 'We show him or her what he or she needs to improve on and motivate them to improve' (FGI lines 170 - 172). HoDs generally agreed that they motivate teachers by 'praising' them (FGI line 166).

### **Teacher reprimands**

The participating school principals and HoDs were asked to mention how they negatively sanction non-performing teachers.

The HoDs were hesitant to state how non-performing teachers were reprimanded in schools. However, one HoD voiced that, 'reprimand is a very bad thing, um; you have to tackle it tactfully.

I start with the good thing that the teacher is doing. Because it is not everything that this teacher is doing that is bad' (FGI lines 168 – 170).

Respondent SP3 confirmed that they reprimanded non-performing teachers in the following manner: 'if things are not improving, I will go to an extent of issuing warning, warning letters. Maybe I will start with a verbal warning and then warning written letter. Yes, and I have already issued all these things that I am saying' (SP 3 lines 190 – 193).

### **Decision-making**

When asked to state how they conducted the decision-making processes at their schools to ensure quality education, all the participating HoDs and principals mentioned that these processes were participatory and consultative. The school principals pointed out that they frequently consult teachers in decision making processes on quality education matters. The HoDs all agreed that, 'the value of decision making should be understood by everyone, and that they fully participate in implementing that decision' (FGI lines 152 – 153).

### **Academic freedom**

Academic freedom can be regarded as a critical recourse that can be used to explore the use of self-assessment strategies to ensure quality education in schools. The participating school principals and HoDs were asked if teachers' had academic freedom and control over their continuous professional development.

Their responses were as following:

*They do have control because many of them are studying in order to better their qualifications* (SP2 lines 49 – 50).

*Yes! I will say yes. Though, I cannot elaborate further* (SP3 line 139).

*Yes they do, they show that by paying for their studies. So it makes a significant contribution towards their personal and professional development* (SP4 lines 213 – 215).

*Partly, I think!* (SP5 line 72).

HoDs also concurred that teachers are afforded significant control over their continuous professional development. The trend of teachers pursuing further studies featured again. Social media was also identified as one way of granting teachers the liberty to network with their fellow colleagues.



## **Continuous professional development (CPD)**

Continuous professional development is another recourse that can bring about quality education in schools. Through CPD activities, teachers can continuously improve their teaching skills and knowledge. Participating school principals were asked to state their roles in supporting teachers in enhancing the educational quality in the region. They further confirmed that they encouraged their teachers to engage in continuous professional development activities and cited the following as examples of continuous professional development activities: ‘Workshops’, ‘Subject meetings’, ‘Upgrading of teacher qualifications’, ‘Mentoring and promotion of teachers’, and ‘CPD committee meetings’.

## **Exposition of self-assessment strategies**

The school principals and HoDs identified the departmental review strategy as widely in use in schools (Respondents SP1, SP2, SP4 and SP5):

*Yes. There is one for the department, where I will require the departmental head to review the results within the department, and then a report will be written, every member of the department should sign, to show that they contributed towards the resolutions in it and problems they faced within the department. And then from there, we normally have a reflection that we do termly or monthly, that we reflect on the results. If, tests were given, home works were given, and class works were given then we reflect on how learners performed and where teachers need assistance and build on towards the end (SP1 lines 257 - 264).*

All the participants made positive remarks on the value of self-assessment in schools.

## **Communication**

Communication is pivotal to the successful implementation and development of self-assessment strategies. The manner in which school principals communicate to teachers determines how self-assessment strategies can enhance quality education in schools. Participating school principals and HoDs were asked how often they communicated with your teachers about their personal and professional needs.

They generally indicated that communication between them and teachers was frequent. Respondents SP2 and SP3 said, ‘It is done every time during morning briefings, once a week’ (SP 2 lines 40 – 41). ‘It’s done on a daily basis’ (SP3 line 27).

## **Relationships**

The relationship that exists between school principals and teachers is essential for the successful development of self-assessment strategies in schools. Respondents were asked to reflect on their relationships with teachers. Some regarded themselves as leaning either to the ‘supervisory’ or ‘subordinate’ type of relationship. However, some fell in between the two styles of leadership as detected by prevailing situations. Respondents SP1, SP2 and SP3 advocated the ‘supervisory’ type of relationship, while Respondents SP4 was in favour of the ‘subordinate’ type of relationship. Only Respondent SP5 dismissed either type of relationship by describing his relationship with teachers as that of collegiality.

The HoDs, however, viewed the relationship that existed between school principals and teachers as skewed towards the supervisory mode.

## **Leadership styles**

Leadership styles that school principals use can enhance or inhibit the successful development of selected self-assessment strategies in schools. School principals were asked to state their preferred leadership styles at their respective schools. They all indicated using mainly democratic and autocratic leadership styles by alternating the two styles. Respondents SP1 and SP2 indicated that the type of leadership style they used was dictated by the prevailing situations and circumstances.

## **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

Schools in the Zambezi region are privileged in using the National Standards for School Evaluation in developing their school mission statements, vision and goals. This is attested by the participants’ views that teachers are involved in formulating school strategic plans. Teacher involvement in decision making processes by school principals empowers teachers to own and be accountable for any collective decision made. Thus, self-assessment strategies should not be imposed on teachers by school principals or external experts. Schools should therefore avail more recourse for teachers to select and design suitable self-assessment strategies for use in improving the quality of education teaching and learning in schools.

Self-assessment strategies have proved to be effective not only in industry but also in education. Mount Edgemont secondary school is one school in the USA that uses self-assessment strategies to improve quality education in teaching and learning. Therefore, the development of self-assessment strategies requires school principals to create supportive and enabling environments for teachers to be innovative in schools. The leadership and communication styles used by school principals influence the manner in which self-assessment strategies can be developed in schools. Thus authoritarian school principals might find it difficult to convince and get adequate support from teachers who are suppressed to develop self-assessment strategies. On the contrary,

democratic school principals who are open to communication have an advantage of listening to personal and collective ideas of teachers on how best to develop self-assessment strategies.

### **Recommendations from the study**

From the study findings it is recommended that school principals should be innovative in availing recourses at school levels to support teachers' initiatives in using suitable and feasible self-assessment strategies to improve the quality of education in schools. Furthermore, teacher effectiveness and teacher involvement in decision making processes in schools should be used to empower teachers to own and be accountable for any collective decisions taken at school levels (Lin, 2014). In other words, self-assessment strategies should not be imposed on teachers by school principals or external experts. Therefore, it is recommended that school principals should avail possible recourses to empower teachers to select, explore and design suitable self-assessment strategies for use in improving the quality of education teaching and learning in schools.

The findings revealed also that self-assessment strategies have been proven to be effective in improving the quality of education in schools. The successful implementation of self-assessment in schools is dependent mainly on the school principals' attitude towards teachers. Leadership styles and communication policies that school principals adopt have either a positive or an adverse effect on the implementation of self-assessment strategies in schools. Therefore, authoritarian school principals might find it difficult to convince and get adequate support from suppressed teachers to develop self-assessment strategies. On the contrary, democratic school principals who are open to communication have an added advantage of listening to personal, professional and collective ideas of teachers on how best to develop self-assessment strategies. It is recommended that school principals should be approachable and supportive in empowering teachers to supplement the current use of TSE with other proven and effective self-assessment strategies to improve quality education in teaching and learning in schools.

### **Contributions of the study towards theory and practice: Self-assessment model**

The study findings contribute to existing theory and practice of quality education by advancing self-assessment strategies for use in remote schools that seldom receive external professional support. Teachers who intend to adapt the self-assessment model can use the steps to plan and implement the self-review process. It should also be noted that there are varied tools that can be adapted by teachers to analyse data to improve the quality of education in teaching and learning in schools. Juran and Godfrey (1978) present the following tools as effective in problem-solving: box plot, brainstorming, cause-effect diagram, data collection, flow diagrams, graphs and charts, histogram, Pareto analysis, scatter diagrams and stratification tools. The nature of the problem determines the type of tools that teachers can use to solve teaching and learning problems in schools. In this study, a flow diagram (See Figure 1 below) was used to illustrate how continuous

improvement of quality education in teaching and learning can be realised in schools in the Zambezi region.

The model can help teachers plan and focus on the research problem of how to enhance quality education in teaching and learning in schools in the Zambezi region.

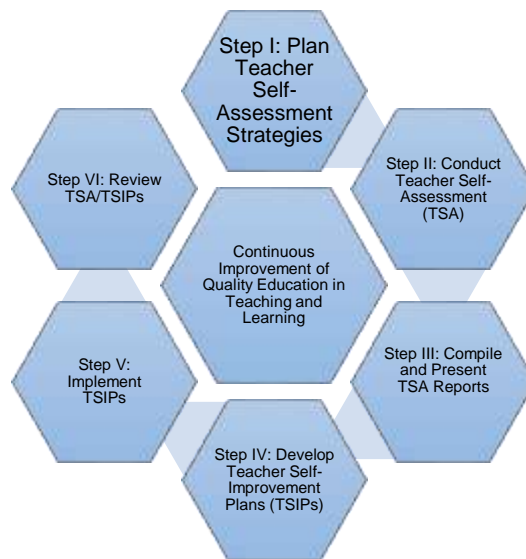


Figure 1: Guidelines for a teacher self-assessment model

The model of self-assessment process is based on Deming's four-stage cycle of quality improvement and Adam's self-assessment procedures. The steps can be reduced by combining two steps into one to befit a chosen self-assessment strategy where necessary. The teacher self-assessment derives from TQM quality management principles that emphasise the use of tools to inform decision-making in an organisation.

## References

- Collins Dictionary & Thesaurus of the English Language.* (2011). Glasgow: Harper Collins.
- Constitution of the Republic of Namibia.* (1990). Windhoek: Ministry of Justice.
- Deming, W. E. (1988). *Out of the crisis.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Deming, W. E. (1994). *The new economics for industry, government, education.* London: MIT.
- Government of the Republic of Namibia. (1999). *Presidential Commission on Education, Culture and Training.* Gamsberg McMillan: Windhoek.
- Juran, J. M. & Godfrey, A. B. 1979. *Juran's Quality Handbook.* New York: McGraw-Hill.

- Katjavivi, P. H. 2016. Educational transformation in Namibia. Windhoek: Government of the Republic of Namibia.
- Lin, Y. J. (2014). Teacher involvement in school decision making. *Journal of Studies in Education*, 4(3), 50-58.
- Makuwa, D. (2005). *The SACMEQ II project in Namibia: A study of the conditions of schooling and the quality of education: Namibia working document*. Harare: SACMEQ.
- McKinsey Report. (2007). *How the world's best - performing school systems come out on top*. London: McKinsey & Co.
- Ministry of Education, Arts, and Culture. (1993). *Toward Education for All: A Development Brief for Education, Culture and Training*. Windhoek: Gamsberg Macmillan.
- Ministry of Education, Arts, and Culture. (2013a). *Guidelines for the Implementation of Universal Education and Utilization of Funds Allocated to Schools*. Windhoek: Namprint.
- Ministry of Education, Arts, and Culture. (2013b). *SDP and PAAI – A Practical Guide*. Republic of Namibia. Windhoek: Namprint.
- Ntabi, M. L., Nkengbeza, D., & Maemeko, E. L. (2017). Teachers' perception on the causes of poor academic performance of Grade 12 learners in the four selected schools in the Zambezi region of Namibia. *IJRDO-Journal of Educational Research*, 3(4), 93-110.
- Ponce, O. A., & Pagán-Maldonado, N. (2015). Mixed Methods Research in Education: Capturing the Complexity of the Profession. *International Journal of Educational Excellence*, 1(1), 111-135.
- Salkeus, A. (2015). Lack of hostels blamed for poor performance. *Namibian*, 5.
- UNAM. (2015). *Quality Assurance and Management Policy*. Windhoek: University of Namibia.