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Understanding Curriculum Ideology: Impact of Neoliberal Ideology in a Namibian Context

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Understanding Curriculum Ideology: Impact of Neoliberal Ideology in a Namibian Context
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Neoliberalism, the unrestricted, free-market capitalism or economic has become the principal central organising principle for political, economic, and social decision making. Education has been incorporated into this global agenda with more and more countries adopting neoliberal education and/or curriculum reforms. There is a need to explore neoliberalism as a curriculum ideology in the same light as conventional curriculum ideology. That is, there are values, beliefs, and views of the world that ultimately affect the purposes of schooling and the nature of any given curriculum.

Neoliberalism has emerged as the dominant curriculum ideology Namibia even when the official discourse and rhetoric claims to be progressive. Learner-centred education has been the central ideology in basic education in Namibia since independence, however, Test-based accountability, market-like school management initiatives, and high-stakes tests have all become a mainstay of Namibian basic education. In addition to curriculum narrowing, test-based accountability models also contribute to unhealthy schooling habits of competition and anxiety among teachers and students.

Despite research indicating that neoliberal reforms have had detrimental effects on educational quality, in Namibia, these reforms are largely accepted as unproblematic and the meritocracy narrative is widespread. In many ways the neoliberal curriculum in Namibia is resembling the colonial Bantu Education both in practice and social (re)production.

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1 Introduction

This research was partly inspired by the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals for achieving quality and equitable education (Transforming our world: The 2030 agenda for sustainable development.2015). According to the UN, quality education can improve quality of life and equip societies with the tools required to develop innovative solutions to problems. However, discussions about education too often do not consider the aspect of curriculum, so much so that many people consider education and curriculum to be synonymous. However, this is a misleading assumption, according to Null (2011) *education* is an abstract concept that takes place across multiple social institutions and interactions, while *Curriculum* is a more deliberate and tangible concept that is always tied to decision making such as the purpose of education and schooling. Null (ibid) declared that curriculum is at the very heart of education.

I hold the view that school is supposed to be a place for children to learn and help them lead personally fulfilling lives. Schooling should be about supporting the development of capacities, knowledge, and understandings that will enable children to think about the world around them, ask questions that lead to new and innovative ideas in order to solve real problems (Patrick, 2013; West-Burhum, 2009). The process of curriculum development is not a value-free process and most curricula are based on these four broad ideological positions; *Scholar or Academic*, *Social Efficiency*, *Learner-Centred*, and *Social Reproduction*. These ideologies can influence people's ways of thinking about curriculum and ultimately education,

This research contends that neoliberalism has become such a dominant force in education reforms around the world that it needs and should be considered a curriculum-making ideology that operates on and through education. Global education reform efforts focus increasingly on implementing neoliberal reforms that are often constructed along free-market capitalism (Au, 2016; Rizvi, 2017; Sahlberg, 2016). These include but are not limited to test-based accountability systems, and high stakes standardized tests as measures of quality (Auld, Rappleeye, & Morris, 2019; Rizvi, 2017; Sahlberg, 2016). Scholars like Fazal Rizvi (2017) and Joseph Zajda (2018) argue that neoliberalism as an ideology that operates on and through education is largely overlooked. Therefore, this study will not only attempt to show neoliberalism as a curriculum-making ideology but also highlight how neoliberalism has risen to become the dominant cur-

riculum ideology in Namibia. Therefore, this study is aimed at understanding; (a): how neoliberal ideology impacts quality of education (outcomes) in Namibia, and (b): how such ideology serves to reproduce social and economic inequalities.

Understanding the implications of ideology in the curriculum-making process is essential to all the actors who engage with the curriculum at various stages from development to implementation and even the general public. Given my own background as a teacher, I find that this is especially important for teachers to gain an understanding for several reasons, teacher education programmes hardly address issues of curriculum, and when they do, it is usually with regard to lesson planning and aligning the lesson to curriculum objectives. The deeper theoretical and ideological manifestations of curriculum are severely ignored.

Therefore, in Namibia where legacies of colonial education still impact many aspects of education, perspectives on and understanding of curriculum ideologies can be beneficial in not only overcoming colonial legacies but lead to conceptualizing education and curriculum to meet the needs of contemporary Namibian society. This study is also made relevant because according to Schiro (2013), the goal here is to help various actors involved in education and who are interested in improving educational quality and outcomes, be cognisant of underlying issues that are essential to achieving those objectives, and ultimately leading to better curriculum reforms and implementation, as well as policymaking. For teacher, this awareness will hopefully help to avoid continuously accepting the same ways of teaching they are accustomed to without much critical reflection or replicating practises from their experience as students.

The upcoming chapter of this study deals with the concept of curriculum, providing a brief overview of curriculum ideology and how different definitions of the curriculum are actually influenced by the ideological positions that scholars and other curriculum workers have. In chapter three, I attempt to establish neoliberalism as more than just an economic and political philosophy but also as a curriculum ideology in much the same as the conventional ideologies in the previous chapter. Chapter four provides a brief over of the Namibian educational and curriculum context, highlighting the evolution from colonial education until independence. Chapter I provide a critical analysis the dominant ideology in curriculum development in Namibia, first establishing the dominance of neoliberal and the effects of neoliberalism on education and curriculum-making in Namibia. In my conclusion I present some possible avenues for further examination.

2 Understanding Curriculum Ideology

There are many components to what we refer to as an education system; teachers, students, parents, policies, and funding all play a key role in education. Curriculum is a component in education that arguably is often overlooked both in public and academic discourse and yet, it is claimed that curriculum is at the heart of education (Null, 2011). Scholars generally agree that a curriculum considers several key considerations such as its purpose and goals, issues such as what teachers should know, what they should do, and how they should do it (ibid). This study is concerned with the underlying ideology in the basic education curriculum in Namibia, this way one can best understand the policies, aims and objectives, and teaching and learning approaches that are implemented in schools.

For instance, a curriculum can be conceived in for and from a wide variety of ideas and objectives. Governments can use the curriculum as a means of inculcating different values and attitudes such as; adherence to government rule or law, teaching about the country's unique social, cultural, economic or political institutions, it can be used to forge identity (national) and bridge ethnic or racial divide (Cantoni et al., 2017). In Namibia the curriculum was instrumental in promoting a sense of reconciliation after years of colonialism, it was also effectively used to combat the spread of HIV/AIDS. The Curriculum also has the potential to shape society at an individual and collective to the point that people's beliefs, preferences and, social and political outlook could be as a direct consequence of curriculum (ibid). Thus, despite the common-sense or sometimes naive assumptions about curriculum as a neutral document, literature has shown that there are some underlying values and beliefs, assumptions, philosophies, and ideology that goes into curriculum development and also transmitted through it (Apple, 1977; Au, 2016; Daun, 2018; De Lissovoy, 2013).

It is necessary to establish a deeper understanding of curriculum before delving the various philosophies and ideologies under which curriculum is conceived and developed. thereafter, I will highlight some of the more dominant ideologies that inform various curriculums in the world. I will also touch upon an aspect of curriculum that I think is crucial to understanding how ideology operates within an education system, the hidden curriculum.

2.1 Defining Curriculum

Defining curriculum is not as straight forward an endeavour as many might think because there are divergent views and perspectives about education and the purpose of school. Often the definitions given by various scholars are largely dependent on the ideology from which they view what the purpose of school/education should be. Dillon (2009) contends that ‘the definitions and conceptions of curriculum are known to be incoherent, and by individual contrast, to be divergent when not contradictory’ ((Dillon, 2009). Since there are varying philosophies and ideologies about education, this thesis is not necessarily seeking to provide a concrete or fixed definition of curriculum; such an exercise will be reductionist and may oversimplify a concept that has proven to be more nuanced than initially thought.

This position was inspired by the works of Arthur Ellis (2004) and Webster and &Ryan (2014) whose approach I found to be useful in coming towards a definition or understanding of what curriculum is. Their approach in many ways allows the reader to choose a definition that best aligns with their philosophy and ideology. Based on that, (Ellis, 2004) argues that definitions of curriculum tend to be either prescriptive or descriptive or some combination of the two. Webster & Ryan (2014) on the other hand, provide an interesting approach to understanding curriculum, while most if not all scholars agree that the word curriculum is derived from Latin, what Webster & Ryan (ibid) does however add that the word can be understood in two ways. They claim the word means either “running a course (race)” or a racing chariot. Therefore, curriculum can be conceptualised either as “curro”, which is a noun related to the nature of the course itself or as “currere” a verb referring to how the course is run or ought to be run (Webster and Ryan 2014: p.9).

Prescriptive definitions according to Ellis (ibid) tend to focus on what “ought” to happen and thus, conceive curriculum as a plan or intended course of study developed by experts prescribing what should take place in school. This is what Webster & Ryan (2014) argue is curriculum when conceived as a noun; the curriculum will primarily be concerned with a predetermined course of study to be delivered and adhered to. Descriptive definitions, on the other hand, are conceived from the perspective of curriculum as a verb. This perspective is more concerned with what actually happens when the curriculum is engaged with, in other words, the experience of students and the harnessing of their interests and talents. The following are examples of the

contrasting ways in which scholars arrive at definitions for curriculum; the first definition echoes the prescriptive conception and the latter, the description conception of curriculum as:

A prescribed body of knowledge and methods by which it might be communicated.

Alan Block (as cited in (Ellis, 2004))

The reconstruction of knowledge and experience that enables the learner to grow in exercising intelligent control of subsequent knowledge and experience. Daniel Tanner and Laurel Tanner (as cited in (Ellis, 2004))

The above shows how different ideologies can provide drastically different definitions of the same thing. It is also possible that some definitions will not be strictly prescriptive or descriptive but rather some combination of the two.

The above has shown that curriculum is not a straight forward concept, people's definition of curriculum is arrived at from multiple understandings of the word itself and viewpoints about schooling and education. It is thus necessary to discuss some of the viewpoints which inform curriculum workers in developing and implementing curriculum.

Curriculum and Ideology

Before describing the different educational or curriculum ideologies however, it is useful to establish an understanding of the concept of ideology as it relates to education. Societies are shaped by beliefs, attitudes, and ideology through social, cultural, and economic interactions, and they underlie political institutions and policy choices (Cantoni et al., 2017). As a generic term, ideology refers to a collection of ideas, or a worldview that embodies how people explain, justify, and believe the world should be organized and function (Alexander, 2015; Schiro, 2013). Alexander further adds that such views and accompanying actions are aimed at preserving, amending, uprooting, or rebuilding a given social order (Alexander, 2015).

The purpose of education and therefore, curriculum, is not devoid of the inherent beliefs about human nature, ideal society, and the meaning of life that those involved bring with them (Webster & Ryan, 2014b). Such purposes according to Webster & Ryan (ibid) address bigger picture issues involving the ultimate aims of education and subsequently ideas of life and society. Thus

curriculum ideology refers to the concrete (and abstract) modes by which knowledge is disseminated in classrooms, it speaks to the underlying values, meanings, attitudes and behaviour that are negotiated in schools through the official curriculum content (Apple, 1977; Daun, 2018; De Lissovoy, 2013) as well as the basic and organizing framework of the normative and conceptual knowledge that students actually get, as Apple (1977) frames it, the deep structure of school experience. Apple (ibid) further asserts that it is only through unearthing these deep structures that we can begin to point out social norms, institutions, and ideological principles perpetuated through the day-to-day actions and practices of those who engage with curriculum (Apple, 1977; Brathwaite, 2017).

2.2 Approaches to Curriculum Development

The following section provides basic and brief descriptions of curriculum development under two umbrella approaches as conceptualised by Webster and Ryan (2014). According to Webster and Ryan, curriculum ideology can be classified under two main traditions; the traditional approach and the progressive approach. These approaches according to Web and Ryan (ibid) typify how different ideas or philosophies of curriculum result in radically different views of education aims and practices and how these are valued. For instance, progressives may place the child at the centre of all learning; traditionalists rely on an asymmetrical relation between the child and the teacher, where the latter is an expert who determines the needs of the individual child (Webster & Ryan, 2014).

Although speaking from a specific (USA) context, Michael Schiro (2013) claims that most curriculums are generally conceived within four visions of education which advocate for very different purposes of schooling and equally vastly different methods of achieving those respective methods. Schiro (ibid) does this in an attempt to address the problem that the expressed intent (relating to the common term *curriculum philosophy*) is usually contradicted by actual behaviour (ibid). This is because, there is a difference in the behaviour of teachers when dealing with curriculum issues such as lesson planning versus the actual execution of such lessons and interaction with students (Schiro, 2013).

It is worth noting that no one ideology is fixed or static but rather, ideologies are complex, intertwined, and sometimes they overlap (Alexander, 2015). Thus, the ideologies discussed are to provide a picture of how and why curriculum is conceived and that most curriculums in

practice are not based purely on one ideology, there is often overlap between two or more ideologies in any given curriculum. To emphasise this point, Schiro (2013) points out that Learner-centred ideology, referenced later in this study, in the U.S. have included child study (1890s), progressive education (1910–1950), open education (1965–1980), developmentalists (1970–1990), and constructivist (1990–present) (Schiro, 2013). The terms used by Schiro and therefore in this thesis are not fixed and different labels may differ but principle positions are the same. Furthermore, Schiro deliberately uses the term (curriculum) *ideology* instead of *philosophy* to distinguish between motives that underlie behaviour and articulated beliefs (Schiro, 2013). Thus, curriculum ideologies refer to people’s endeavours while they engage in curriculum activity or think about curriculum issues. This is at the very essence of this thesis, to examine the chasm between stated curriculum objectives and curriculum as praxis.

2.2.1 Traditional Approaches

Traditional approaches to curriculum development are primarily concerned with attempts to conserve traditions, maintain the stability of customs and social order. Webster and Ryan (2014) argue that these approaches see the passing of knowledge, facts, and wisdom from one generation to the next, as paramount. Franklin Bobbitt is widely regarded as a pioneer in the field of curriculum (Null, 2011; Webster & Ryan, 2014), and is credited with establishing the field of curriculum as a specialized discipline of education. Franklin Bobbitt’s vision was that curriculum developers should look to the activities that prepared the child for adulthood, that is, to prepare students for adult work and other societal roles as determined by those who are deemed knowledgeable (ibid).

Scholar Academic Ideology

This ideology is borne out of the traditional approach where curriculum development is concerned with maintaining customs, traditions, beliefs, and other societal norms. These are viewed as important sources of knowledge to be included in the curriculum. The scholar academic ideology in particular places the study of the content of traditional academic subjects at the forefront (Null, 2011; Schiro, 2013; Webster & Ryan, 2014). It rests on the idea that acquiring an understanding of academic disciplines such as Science or Mathematics, involves the learning of its content and ways of thinking (Schiro, 2013). Essentially this is a conception of a curriculum that is content-driven.

This is a hierarchical conception of curriculum or learning in that in the first instance, the subject matter is selected or decided by experts who then pass it down to those at the bottom of the hierarchy, meaning the teachers and learners who disseminate and learn the content respectively. This type of curriculum conception of learning is based on predetermined objectives from the top, just as content delivery by teachers is structured by predetermined methods, often derived from scientific methods (Au, 2011). I think Paulo Freire captures this type of ideology when he writes, “in the banking concept of education, knowledge is a gift bestowed by those who consider themselves knowledgeable upon those whom they consider to know nothing” (Freire, 2014).

Social Efficiency ideology

Social efficiency ideology perceives learning to be a social undertaking. It states that the initial aim of learning is to meet the needs of society (Null, 2011; Schiro, 2013; Webster & Ryan, 2014). The goal according to Schiro (2013) is to train young people in the skills and knowledge they will need in the workplace and at home in order to live productive lives and maintain the functioning of society. This ideology is credited to one of the pioneers in curriculum studies, Franklin Bobbitt (Au, 2011; Null, 2011; Schiro, 2013; Webster & Ryan, 2014). Bobbitt and others advocated for an education curriculum that was in opposition to curriculum dominated by subject matter but rather that it should serve communities in economic, pragmatic, and useful ways (Null, 2011).

Social efficiency belief involves in the first instance determining the needs of society and then to develop a curriculum that efficiently meets the determined needs. This ideology is also hierarchically constituted, in that the body of information or knowledge is derived strictly from adult activities from which the experts who have collected this information not only determine the content of curriculum but also develop the best or most efficient methods for teachers to get students to meet these objectives (Au, 2011; Dillon, 2009; Null, 2011; Webster & Ryan, 2014).

From the above, we see a standards-based conception of curriculum that is also teacher-centred. According to Au (2011), the students are perceived as “raw materials” to be shaped like commodities according to specified standards and objectives. Literature suggests strongly that the objectives and standards are determined at higher levels (administration or experts) and in turn dictate to teachers the most efficient methods of the ‘production’ processes. From this, we see

the roots of the current global trend in education that pushes for standardisation and test-based accountability.

2.2.2 Progressive Approaches

The progressive paradigm isn't merely a counter position to traditional approaches to curriculum. A progressive approach may differ slightly in their respective representation (i.e. individualism or societal) but ultimately this point of view emphasizes the quality of experience and processes of growth and development over the mastery of content and skills (Ellis, 2004). Although John Dewey is credited with initiating the modern movement in education (Webster & Ryan, 2014b) research indicates that this point of view has existed as far back as 1st century A.D when Roman educator Quintilian argued that curriculum is best determined by the interests of the learner. These ideas of child/learner-centred learning were revived in the 18th and 19th century by the likes of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Johann Pestalozzi, and Friedrich Froebel. Quintilian, like John Dewey centuries after him, did not think subject matter had a positive lasting effect. Dewey went on to advocate for the social aspect of education arguing that it was more important than the academic.

Learner-centred Ideology

The learner-centred ideology focuses solely on the individual student. The hallmark of education and learning under this paradigm is educational needs which must be incorporated in the learning process. According to Ellis (2004) the goal of learner-centred education is self-actualization. This means that school experience should afford each individual the freedom and opportunity to aspire to whatever they dream of becoming. The concepts of freedom not only are radically different from traditional approaches but proponents argue that they are central to learner-centeredness. Learning is seen as an active process driven not by the whims of those at the top of a hierarchical relationship but driven by the interests of the individual learner. For progressives, experienced curriculum, meaning the interactions a student has with their environment, teachers, students, objects both (abstract and concrete) are more important than secondary experiences gained through textbook content or teacher-driven learning (Ellis, 2004; Null, 2011; Schiro, 2013).

Within this framework, teachers are seen as facilitators of learning, the teacher has to ‘create contexts, environments, or units of work which stimulate the growth as they construct meaning for themselves’ (Schiro, 2013). Thus, teaching is to be adapted to the individual needs and interests of the learner and the learning process is regarded as an end in and of itself (Ellis, 2004; Schiro, 2013; Webster & Ryan, 2014).

The Social Reconstruction Ideology

Similar to social efficiency, Social reconstruction perceives learning to be a social undertaking. However, the social reconstruction ideology is concerned primarily with social justice or education for social justice. There is a focus on issues such as human rights, equity, and sustainability with the idea that education can transform society rather than maintain the status quo which many progressives would argue is built on inequality. This ideology assumes that because education is a social process, it can be utilized to develop students’ ability to critically analyse and understand society, creating solutions and a vision for a better society (Ellis, 2004; Schiro, 2013; Webster & Ryan, 2014).

Learning within this framework, unlike the social efficiency model, the necessary knowledge does not exist in books or determined by a privileged few, but rather it is derived from student engagement with their community and through active reflection. Principally the students are to be given the opportunity to develop attitudes and skills for social, political, and cultural critique (Webster & Ryan, 2014). It gives agency to those who part-take in the teaching and learning process. Much like the learner-centred approach, the teacher within this paradigm takes on the facilitator but more importantly, there is an almost if not a fully symmetrical relationship between the teacher and learner. In fact, Dewey (as cited in Null, 2004) argued that the best education happens when there is a reciprocal relation between teachers and learners and each one can learn from the other. It only matters that teachers make the curriculum, the learning experience, purposeful, appealing, and motivating. Collaboration both among and across various teachers and learners is also a common feature of this ideology.

It must be pointed out that each of the ideologies discussed above has their detractors and have been extensively critiqued by scholars. Wesley Null’s work in *Curriculum: From Theory to Practise (2011)* not only provides a wide range of curriculum ideologies in almost granular

manifestation, but he also provides the strengths and weaknesses in each. The reason for describing these ideologies is to help establish that curriculum is informed by ideas that espouse different values and understanding about education and schooling. It also helps to establish an understanding of neoliberalism as an educational ideology much like those discussed above. However, scholars have long obsessed with only certain parts of the reform introduced under neoliberal globalisation and internationalisation that it has been largely overlooked as an ideology operation on and through education (Au, 2011; Daun, 2018; De Lissovoy, 2013; Rizvi, 2017; Zajda, 2018).

3 Globalization/Neoliberalism as Educational Ideology

It could be argued that the conventional approaches and curriculum ideologies discussed in the previous section may have different ideas about society, and the purpose of education but at their core, the primary consideration was the wellbeing of society and the public good. Neoliberal ideology on the other hand is primarily concerned with global market needs (Daun, 2018; Rizvi, 2017; Sahlberg, 2016; Takala, 1998), therefore representing an entirely different theoretical framework from which education and curriculum are conceived. Neoliberalism is often used interchangeably with globalisation and it is also (too) often thought of as an economic theory to the point that the key ideological effects of neoliberalism on education have largely been overlooked (Daun, 2018; De Lissovoy, 2013; Ross & Gibson, 2007; Zajda, 2018). Neoliberalism is a complex of values, ideologies, and practices that affect the economic, political, and cultural aspects of society (Rizvi, 2017; Ross & Gibson, 2007; Zajda, 2018).

The following section aims to reveal just that, how this ideology is not only affecting education systems globally but also how neoliberal values have affected curriculum development and education reforms in postcolonial Namibia. Before getting into the description of the neoliberal ideology, it is necessary to provide a brief understanding of the concepts of globalisation and neoliberalism, both in general and educational contexts.

Understanding Globalisation in an Education Context

Globalization is a complex and multifaceted concept that invites different meanings that are contestable, competing, or simply descriptive (Rizvi, 2017; Sahlberg, 2016; Smith, 2003; Zajda, 2018). Some scholars even question the usefulness of the concept largely due to its ambiguity and the lack of a precise definition. Globalization is usually seen as a process of opening doors for the international exchange of culture, trade, through the increased movement of people, and the development of information and communication technologies (Rizvi, 2017; Sahlberg, 2016).

Roger Dale (as cited in Joshee, 2008) proffers two theoretical approaches to understanding globalization in an educational context that is relevant to this thesis. The first he calls ‘‘common world educational culture’’ which sees globalization as a move towards a universal set of principles that can help bring out the best in the various national systems of education. The second,

which he calls a “globally structured educational agenda” sees the process as one of homogenization driven by supranational forces leading to a day when the nation-state, and national systems of education, are obsolete (p.31-32). Scholars generally agree that the process of globalisation challenges the notions of “modern society”, that is, the idea where society equals the nation-state as the centre of the social, political, and educational activity (Autio, 2013). As a result, Autio (ibid) argues that today the beginnings, endings, and interconnections of social practises such as production, culture, education, that were previously defined and rationalized by the nation-state, now exceed the border of anyone one place, which complicates and diminishes the role of the nation-state.

3.1 The concept of Neoliberalism

The terms globalisation and neoliberalism are often used interchangeably (Ross & Gibson, 2007), and while there may be different interpretations and definitions about *globalization*, there appears to be a broad consensus with regard to neoliberalism. Stephen J. Ball (2016) provides a useful generic definition. Ball (ibid) contends that neoliberalism is “a complex, often incoherent, unstable and even contradictory set of practices that are organized around a certain imagination of the ‘market’ as a basis for the universalisation of social relations, with the corresponding incursion of such relations into almost every single aspect of our lives” (Shamir as cited in (Ball, 2016, p.1047). Webster & Ryan (2018) consider the neoliberal ideology to be the unrestricted, free-market capitalism or economic rationalism in an Australian context. It is not restricted to the global market economy however, but that it impacts many aspects of society including education. Numerous scholars suggest that the dominant conception of globalisation is underpinned by a set of deeply ideological assumptions associated with the concept of neoliberalism and hence these terms are often used interchangeably (Joshee, 2008; Rizvi, 2017; Ross & Gibson, 2007; Zajda, 2018).

Neoliberalism rests on the idea that human wellbeing or public goods and services are delivered most effectively by the maximization of entrepreneurial freedoms of a free market, as with the private sector. It rests on a strong faith in free-market competition which relies on choice, private property ownership, and individualism (Brathwaite, 2017; Rizvi, 2017; Ross & Gibson, 2007). In an educational context, this translates idea that markets ought to be allowed to play

a foundational role in determining educational priorities and policies through quasi-market reforms that include privatization, global competitiveness, the necessity for greater market choice and accountability (De Lissovoy, 2013; Joshee, 2008; Rizvi, 2017; Sahlberg, 2016).

There are varying perspectives about the consequences that globalisation or neoliberalism has had on schooling. For instance, Pasi Sahlberg (2016) argues that global education reforms have created new opportunities for some education systems to transform from an industrial model of education to more dynamic and progressive forms of schooling. However, there is no shortage of literature pointing out the problematic implications of these market-inspired reforms (Au, 2011; De Lissovoy, 2013; Joshee, 2008; Rizvi, 2017; Sahlberg, 2016). The adoption of neoliberal reforms was motivated in part due to the failure of education systems to meet expectations. Subsequently, conventional public education policies or philosophies were replaced or are challenged by quasi-market approaches that included standardizing teaching and learning, test-based accountability, and the provision of alternative forms of education, i.e. private schools (Sahlberg, 2016).

These reforms were adopted on the assumption that they would lead to a “higher degree of cost-effectiveness, enhancing the productivity of both individuals and institutions. In recent years, reform discourse is heavily driven by International student assessments such as the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) (ibid), PISA and other such international indicators of educational achievement have emerged as the benchmarks for educational quality and making them appear inevitable and beneficial (Rizvi, 2017; Sahlberg, 2016). Levin and Fullan (as cited in Sahlberg, 2016: p.130) describe four operational principles underlying market-based reforms.

- Competition among schools would lead to better outcomes for students.
- Autonomy for schools is necessary for schools to properly compete.
- Freedom for parents to choose schools for their children.
- Information for the public based on comparable measures of student achievement and a single national curriculum.

Because marketplace education ideology promised to governments efficiency and transparency, and consumers diversity and quality, these ideas quickly became the driving ideas of education policies around the world, driven by international development organizations (World Bank,

OECD, UNESCO, etc), education consultants and other actors involved with educational policies (Rizvi, 2017; Sahlberg, 2016).

3.2 Neoliberalism: A Curriculum Ideology

There, is a wealth of literature that examines the effects of neoliberalism on education policy and practise. According to Webster and Ryan (2018), the dominance of neoliberal ideology has had a significant impact on the teachers` curriculum work globally. However, it has been suggested that the over-emphasis on processes of competition and commodification has meant that, arguably, a key ideological effect of neoliberalism has been overlooked. Such is the dominance of neoliberalism that several scholars claim that it has established a new theoretical doctrine (Daun, 2018; Joshee, 2008; Zajda, 2018).

Consequent to this doctrine, globalisation has acquired according to Duan (as cited in (Zajda, 2018) “a new meta ideology that carries strong elements of Western ideologies” (p.1). This view is supported by Fiona Patrick (2013) asserts that despite much criticism in research, neoliberalism has become the “unquestionable orthodoxy that operates as if it were the objective truth” Chopra as (cited in moved in Patrick, 2013). Furthermore, the neoliberalism is often accompanied by the discourse of knowledge economy and together these ideological paradigms have considerable impacts on educations systems in many developed and developing nations (Patrick, 2013; Rizvi, 2017) It is thus worth investigating neoliberalism as a curriculum ideology much like the conventional ideologies described earlier in this document.

Within a neoliberal doctrine, it is important to understand that the traditional concept of the nation-state and its role in defining educational needs is severely challenged (Autio, 2013; Rizvi, 2017; Ross & Gibson, 2007). Therefore, the global market economy becomes the central organising principle for political, economic, and social decision making (Patrick, 2013; Rizvi, 2017; Ross & Gibson, 2007. This is despite there being considerable confusion and ambiguity with regard to the concept of neoliberalism (Patrick, 2013). As a curriculum ideology, it has been argued that it is not the curriculum itself but rather itself theoretical acquiescence to the uses of broader political (and economic) initiatives of neoliberalism, where the curriculum is co-opted as its operational core (Autio, 2013). In other words, education has been absorbed into an agenda of wealth production at various levels through discourses relating to the knowledge economy (Patrick, 2013; Rizvi, 2017).

Additionally, “the basic structure in educational and curriculum theories, the relationship between the individual and society, has been drastically deconstructed by the processes of globalization” (Autio, 2013: p.27). Consequently, national policies and objectives are usurped by claims of a global economy, resulting in countries adopting corporate logic as the operational philosophy and policy of nation-building (ibid).

Neoliberalists perceive the purpose of education to be that of preparing young people for a world of work in a changing globally interconnected and highly competitive world (Berliner, 2011; Gyamera, 2018; Rizvi, 2017). Education or curriculum is thus designed to meet the perceived labour market needs of the global economy (Rizvi, 2017). Autio (2013) suggests that it is not particularly important whether curriculum-making within a neoliberal framework takes traditional or progressive approaches as discussed earlier in this study but rather, what is crucial is the notion that public control of schools means that whatever the character of the curriculum that is developed, teachers as employees are expected to implement the curriculum as outlined in the same fashion as other employees in the private sector who are expected to implement their business’ systems, procedures, and rules. In this way, teachers are seen as passive conduits of the curriculum as decided by a governing (Autio, 2013).

Although neoliberal ideology appears progressive from the above description, it, however, leans towards more traditional approaches. For instance, just as the social efficiency model, curriculum goals are determined, shaped, revised by scientific or empirical knowledge (Autio, 2013; Schiro, 2013). In one of the largest Australian classroom level study, it found that because of the movement towards the commodification of official knowledge, teachers increasingly turned to the social efficiency model of teaching (Webster & Ryan, 2018). Webster & Ryan (2018) further allude to the use “teacher-proof” curricula in the findings, the social efficiency model of teaching occurred through “commercially produced, packaged tests and standardised pedagogic sequences that enable them to be compliant with the new criteria for performance” (p.66-67).

Teacher-proof curricula or curriculum-as-manual refers to predetermined curricula based containing so-called proven methods (hence teacher-proof) and templates that direct and guide a school's day-to-day classroom activities (Autio, 2013; De Lissovoy, 2013; Sahlberg, 2016). Just like the social efficiency model, the notion of teacher-proof curriculum is hierarchically constituted and the idea that experts will determine and shape and revise the knowledge, skills, and

competencies needed for the market economy rests through” evidenced-based reforms”(Autio, 2013). This represents a shift in the understanding of the purpose of education; a shift from education being perceived as a public good to education geared to the labour needs of markets (Gyamera, 2018; Rizvi, 2017). Subsequently, the learning and the development of human virtues such as morality, responsibility, intellectual and aesthetic curiosity have been usurped by a reductionist emphasis on skills for business through “accountability,” production-line-discourses of “quality” (Autio, 2013; Gyamera, 2018; Rizvi, 2017).

The notions of individualism and standardization imply some level of progressiveness, after all, learner-centred education which can be argued is the bedrock of progressive approaches to curriculum, emphasizes that individual interests and talents should form the basis of learning. Standardization can be argued to speak to equality, the assumption being that if learners have access to the same standardized curriculum, material, and methods, educational achievements will be determined meritocratically (Au, 2016; De Lissovoy, 2013). However, the neoliberal concept of individuality is one that perceives the individual as autarkic, that is, the individual is self-sufficient and not necessarily needing other humans (Autio, 2013), in essence, the human as an island.

This is a departure from progressive approaches that privilege individual endeavour and interests within a broader society. Standardization, on the other hand, is a key feature of the neoliberal ideology that assumes that clear and high-performance standards for schools, teachers, and students are necessary for improving the quality of teaching and better overall school performance (Berliner, 2011; Brathwaite, 2017; Sahlberg, 2016). Standardization has led to a shift in focus from inputs to outcomes in education in the 1990s (Sahlberg, 2016) and according to Au (as cited in Sahlberg, 2016), the proliferation of prescribed curricula that is built on that assumption that students should be educated to the same, often ambitious learning targets. Standardized high-stakes are then employed to assess the quality of education.

In the main, traditional approaches as discussed in chapter 2 strongly lean towards social reproduction and neoliberal ideology based on the above is no different, albeit, that the neoliberal ideology does not necessarily respond to any particular social needs but rather the needs of the global markets, these economic imperatives according to Gyamara (2018) to silences complex inequalities and power relations. Mitchell (as cited in Joshee, 2008) goes further and asserts

that neoliberal ideology has an imperative to create hierarchically conditioned, globally-oriented state subjects. In other words, as Mitchell (*ibid*) explains, it creates individuals oriented to excel in ever-transforming situations of global competition, either as workers, managers, or entrepreneurs. This (false) notion of meritocracy conditions young people to believe that their performance in school reflects not only their innate ability but also their worth which is measured against and set against their peers or competitors (De Lissovoy, 2013).

3.3 Criticism of Neoliberal Ideology

There is no shortage of literature critical of both globalization and neoliberalism. Neoliberal globalization is defined by the promise of market diversity, innovation, efficiency, transparency, and quality (Rizvi, 2017; Sahlberg, 2016). It is argued that neoliberalism positions or constructs individuals, societies, and institutions across complex and often uneven relations of power, class, and culture. Neoliberal theory operates behind an illusion of benevolence espousing wonderful ideas of freedom, liberty, choice, and rights in order to conceal its true purpose, the restoration, and reconstitution of social class power or hierarchy (Gyamera, 2018; Rizvi, 2017). This section will however concentrate on issues that are of particular interest to the Namibia context that has been argued stifling teaching and learning leading to poor education outcomes (Autio, 2013; Berliner, 2011; Sahlberg, 2016). Also, neoliberalism has been accused of (re)producing social inequality and that is pertinent to the Namibian context because Namibia is among the most unequal societies in the world (Au, 2016; Brathwaite, 2017; Gyamera, 2018).

Rizvi (2017) for instance contends that even though the arguments in favour of quasi-market reforms are often presented as self-evident, there is no data to actually validate such claims. Rather, these arguments centre on the technical aspects of how to realize market-like reforms than examining their virtues. Thus, the idea that the private sector is more efficient and cost-effective at delivering services without compromising on quality is a claim that has been shown to be both groundless and unverifiable Verger and Fontdevila (as cited in Rizvi, 2017: p.9). Tero Autio (2013) contends that countries that implemented neoliberal reforms have performed poorly in numerous international comparisons.

Another argument against neoliberal ideology as a whole is by Autio (2013) who contends that the globalized American mainstream model of education, which is the quintessential neoliberal model of curriculum policy and practice has proven detrimental to the aims of education proper

(p.22). To make his point Autio (ibid) cites Diane Ravitch, one of the most powerful advocates of accountability, privatization, and standardization movement in education in the United States America. Ravitch (as cited in Autio, 2013) believed that standards and choice could not coexist as they do in the private sector. She asserts that instead of the promise of quality of neoliberalism reform, American schools were producing “graduates who were drilled regularly on the basic skills but were often ignorant of almost everything else. Colleges continued to complain about the poor preparation of entering students, who not only had meagre knowledge of the world but still required remediation in basic skills” (Autio, 2013: p,22).

At a macro level, the virtues of competition further highlight the detriment to the quality of education has meant that collaboration between schools and teachers with regard to sharing ideas and teaching and learning material has been weakened (Sahlberg, 2016). Sahlberg (ibid) further argues that the most harmful consequences of competition in education are increased suspicion, distrust, anxiety, and fear in schools and classrooms, to the point where students perceive cooperation with other students as a threat to their own success. This situation is largely due to the high-stakes testing, which is used as the measure of educational quality and once again using an American context, Berliner (2011) contends that high-stakes tests have slowed the growth or reduced achievement despite the pressures from the systems in which they are conducted.

Furthermore, standardization, which is associated with competition and high-stakes testing, is said to narrow the freedom and flexibility in schools and classrooms to do things in a meaningful way (Sahlberg, 2016). Here Sahlberg (2016) asserts that research has shown that education systems that have adopted neoliberal reforms have seen the narrowing of teaching and learning where teachers focus on “proven methods” in basically teaching to the test.

The manner in which neoliberal ideology produces or reproduces social inequality is manifested in two ways; firstly, it is widely accepted that neoliberal ideology is at its core focused on preparing young people for a world of work (Berliner, 2011; Gyamera, 2018; Rizvi, 2017). Secondly, neoliberal ideology is built on an idea of meritocracy (Au, 2016; Brathwaite, 2017; De Lissovoy, 2013) in the sense that the performances of students in schools create a belief in students that their performance is a reflection of their capacity and worth (De Lissovoy, 2013).

This would constitute in essence the first iterations of social and class reproduction. This illusion of meritocracy inculcates beliefs and attitudes that make people accept social life according to norms of economic rationality, competition, and measurement (De Lissovoy, 2013; Rizvi, 2017). The problem with the meritocratic narrative assumption is that “failure” is placed on an individual or group (deficit paradigm) rather than locating those individuals or groups on a wider social and educational structures, systems, and processes that reproduce inequalities (Gyamera, 2018).

4 Curriculum Ideology in the Namibian Context

In this section, I will briefly discuss the main educational ideology present in the colonial Bantu Education system in Namibia during Apartheid and connect it to the reform efforts after independence. I will argue that even though the overt elements of colonial education have been done away with, the hidden aspects have largely remained unchecked and continue to impact the education system, even more profoundly than the stated curriculum.

4.1 Colonial Educational Ideology: Bantu Education

It is difficult to talk about the Namibian education system without acknowledging the country's colonial past, particularly Bantu Education. Colonial education according to Tikly (2001) was not universal, and offered very limited basic education and therefore a limited human resource base for postcolonial societies to draw from on their quest to become globally competitive. As such, Tikly (ibid) argues that the marginalisation of contemporary African economies can be attributed to colonial education. A lot has been written about the colonial history of Namibia, particularly the history of colonial education, and therefore does not fall within the scope of this study. Instead, this thesis seeks to locate the underlying ideological conceptions of education, although the racial component cannot be denied, it is equally important to understand the underpinning ideas about society and the purpose of schooling, because ideology transcends race and can be reconstituted to suit the times. Additionally, Bantu Education has had an indirect and direct influence on the ideological orientation of contemporary education in Namibia.

In a nutshell, Bantu Education typified *Banking Education* as propagated by Paulo Freire (Freire, 2014). It had the express aim of keeping the black Namibian population in a permanent state of political, social, and economic subordination. Tomlin (2016) lays out the link between Bantu education and the banking concept quite well and writes that students do not acquire the ability to actually learn for themselves, because instructors do not teach them how to think. Instead, they continually deposit information that will cause the students to formulate particular beliefs that will benefit the prevailing hegemony rather than work in the best interest of the students (Tomlin, 2016). They (students) were not expected to engage in any critical discourse,

because they do not want them to challenge the status quo. Rather, they were being indoctrinated to be obedient, and follow instructions, establish Black people to be subservient to Whites (Tomlin, 2016).

Based on the above, it is clear that Bantu Education had two main ideological orientations, that of racial white supremacist ideology and at the same time had a clear capitalist ideology operating quite well under the cover of the glaring racial doctrine. Next, I will attempt to locate Bantu Education within the conventional curriculum ideologies discussed earlier in this document.

Locating Bantu Education in Curriculum Making Ideology

It is perhaps a much easier exercise to reveal the dominant ideology in Bantu Education by the process of elimination based on what we know about conventional curriculum ideologies discussed earlier in this thesis. Therefore, it becomes apparent that Bantu education certainly cannot be accused of any semblance of progressive conceptions of education. It is characterised, as the literature suggests, by teacher-centred rote learning approaches designed to sustain hegemonic power and did not concern itself with the world to be revealed to those whom Bantu Education served (Chisholm & Leyendecker, 2008; Christie & Collins, 1982; Freire, 2014; Ipinge, 2013; Jansen, 1995; Ndimande, 2013b; O'Sullivan, 2002b).

There is also very little evidence that Bantu Education was geared to developing expertise in any particular subject discipline, nor was it necessarily concerned with the skills and expertise of the teachers who were to implement this system as would have been the case under a scholar/academic ideology. The aim of education under such an orientation is to help students acquire and understand the accumulated knowledge of academic disciplines (i.e. Mathematics, Science, Biology, etc). It involves learning content, and ways of thinking from teachers who are supposed to be highly knowledgeable in their disciplines (Null, 2011; Schiro, 2013), but 90% of teachers in Bantu education were either under-qualified or unqualified. Therefore, education was limited to basic to the three 'Rs' (reading, writing, and arithmetic) and opportunities for secondary and tertiary education were rare, thus Bantu Education fails to meet this standard (Chisholm & Leyendecker, 2008; Christie & Collins, 1982; Ndimande, 2013b; Tomlin, 2016).

This leaves Social Efficiency ideology as the only possible ideology under which to classify Bantu education. Bantu education had the dual aim of maintaining the hierarchical social order of white supremacy and black inferiority while ensuring a steady supply of semi-skilled, semi-literate workforce needed for capitalist production (Chisholm & Leyendecker, 2008; Christie & Collins, 1982; Ndimande, 2013b; Tomlin, 2016). Social efficiency involves determining the needs of society and developing an education system or curriculum that would meet those needs. Furthermore, those needs were determined by those who enjoy a certain prestige in society (Schiro, 2013; Webster & Ryan, 2014a). Bantu education was established to meet the growing needs for a semi-skilled, semi-literate urban workforce. Here, Bantu education was not simply instituted because of racism but also to develop and serve a capitalist mode of production, in this case, the provision of non-competitive cheap labour (Christie & Collins, 1982; Tomlin, 2016).

4.2 Resistance to Colonial Education: Pre-Independence Ideology

I was unable to find literature that spoke to the actual nature and design of curriculum both at the United Nations Institute for Namibia in Zambia and the SWAPO School in Loudima, Congo (Brazzaville). However, this section is important because the philosophies and ideologies that developed within the liberation movement are crucial to understanding how the post-independence curriculum in Namibia came to be formulated.

Although resistance to colonialism started almost as soon as colonialism itself, it is widely regarded that Bantu Education indeed provided renewed impetus for local resistance (Jansen, 1995; Ndimande, 2013b; Tikly, 2001). The decades leading up independence, Namibian liberation movements, and in particular SWAPO [1], found refuge and interacted with other liberation and independent states in neighbouring countries that had already achieved independence. Some of the leaders and intellectuals in these movements were themselves products of the very same Bantu or colonial education system (Tikly, 2001). During this period, through interactions between the independent states and the liberation struggle, there was some radical experimentation with alternative forms of education developed under colonialism and apartheid (Chisholm & Leyendecker, 2008; Eriksen, 2000; Jansen, 1995).

As a consequence of colonial resistance, educational ideas that developed during this period were a blend of Africanism, socialism (Marxist) social-democracy, and desegregation

(Chisholm & Leyendecker, 2008; Jansen, 1995; Ndimande, 2013b; Tikly, 2001). But even before the influences of the independence movement in southern Africa, internally Bantu Education was unpopular for various other reasons. The imposition of Afrikaans as the medium of instruction was perhaps the biggest issue with the indigenous population but other factors such as the rigid control and development of the curriculum, content, examinations and of course poor pedagogical approaches and methods, made Bantu education untenable (Christie & Collins, 1982; Ipinge, 2013; Jansen, 1995). Thus, any imagination of alternative forms of education, regardless of the political or educational ideology that may or may not have existed at the time, would probably seek the very exact opposite of Bantu education. This helps to explain why for instance, progressive and Marxist approaches found appeal with liberation movements and such ideology would form the basis for educational ideology after independence (Eriksen, 2000).

Two ideologies emerged during the liberation struggle that have come to influence education in an independent Namibia, namely Learner-centred Education and Education with production. In addition to that, the organization of schooling was already being developed through the United Nations Institute for Namibia in Lusaka and the SWAPO School in Loudima Congo, Brazzaville (Chisholm & Leyendecker, 2008; Eriksen, 2000; Jansen, 1995).

Learner-centred Education and Education with Production

The basic elements of learner-centred Education (henceforth LCE) have already been described (as an ideology) earlier in this document. What is important to note, however, is that it emerged as a key concept during the liberation struggle and why it continues to be the central ideology for education in postcolonial Namibia. Chisholm & Leyendecker (2008) do a great job of chronicling the history of LCE in Namibia from its pre-independence roots right up to modern-day Namibia. Chisholm and Leyendecker (2008) for instance argue that the shared histories of resistance to colonialism of liberation movements would have inspired educational ideas that resonated with progressive approaches such as LCE. LCE was appealing to the liberation era imagination, with its inherent promise of both social and economic development, necessary for undoing the previous social injustice and at the same time achieve economic growth that would benefit all citizens (Chisholm & Leyendecker, 2008).

Education with Production, (henceforth EwP), is an educational philosophy that centred on ‘combining hands and head’, or “to foster the relationship between school and community, theory and practice and study and work (Eriksen, 2000). It can be inferred that EwP had a social reconstruction tenor to it; it was appealing because it sought to redress the knowledge and skills shortages among the Black population. This concept was implemented at the SWAPO school in Loudima, Congo, Brazzaville from 1986 to 1991 (Eriksen, 2000). EwP is defined as teaching about production and providing labour training and work experience for the youth ((Ndebele, 2014): p.371), it is basically an approach intended to prepare youth for a world of work after school. In the main the philosophy is taken from socialist (Marxist) ideology that was quite popular with the liberation movements in southern Africa at the time and thus (Chisholm & Leyendecker, 2008; Takala, 1998) posit that the concept is aimed at combining education with production in order to effectively link theory and practice and thereby ensuring effective learning, doing and understanding of production in its social context. It sought to break down the social division between mental and manual labour that was perceived and indeed characteristic of colonial education.

In many ways, Loudima also represents a site for the first intimations of ideological struggles and contestation that would characterise educational policy and discourse in an independent Namibia. The approaches and methodologies developed at the Loudima school have influenced the conception of the school system. On the one hand, Loudima largely operated on progressive approaches such as LCE (Chisholm & Leyendecker, 2008). On the other hand, however, even though its appeal was thought of as a means of giving Black Namibians useful skills for the job market, EwP also has elements of traditional approaches, and it specifically lends itself to social efficiency ideology. Additionally, Loudima is also the place where the first influences of neo-liberal ideology came into the educational discourse. With regard to the latter, the school, in close co-operation with Zambia and Zimbabwe (former British Colonies), adopted the British school system [2] from Form 1 to Form 5. Additionally, the students had to take Cambridge International General Certificate for Secondary Education (IGCSE) arranged with the aforementioned former colonies and the University of Cambridge (Eriksen, 2000; Jansen, 1995).

From the above, we see the pre-independence aspirations for education in an independent Namibia were a direct result of the resistance to education. SWAPO and its allies recognized the skills shortages through EwP while at the same time supported ‘actual processes of individual

learning rather than continue the colonial teacher-centred, Bantu Education that relied on strict government control, rigid discipline in schools, and negative assessment principles that were characteristic of Bantu Education.

4.3 Post-Independence Reform and Ideology

Actors and Purposes in a Changing Geopolitical Landscape.

Namibia's independence in 1990 came at a turning point in geopolitics, both globally and regionally. The end of colonial rule coincided with the fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of the Soviet Union essentially (Chisholm & Leyendecker, 2008; Jansen, 1995). The collapse of the so-called Soviet Bloc transformed the global ideological landscape. On the one hand, it diminished alternative or competing ideologies like communism or socialism which essentially died, and on the other hand, narratives about economic, political, and cultural exchange along a neo-liberal ideology became globally hegemonic (Rizvi, 2017). The impact of this is highlighted by the fact that at the same time (Fall of Berlin Wall), southern African states that had adopted radical or socialist experimentation upon their own independence, were now reversing course to liberal democracy and market (Eriksen, 2000; Jansen, 1995). These events according to Jansen (1995) affected the transition from colonial rule to independent rule in that it was no longer viable to adopt a socialist agenda upon independence.

Although Independent Namibia, unlike some of its counterparts in the region, has not undergone a structural adjustment programme to build up its education system, it has however been the recipient of a large volume of both technical and financial assistance to its education sector (Takala, 1998). Some of this assistance predates independence, for example, the involvement of Nordic countries in Louima, the United Nations and its agencies in the United Nations Institute for Namibia in Lusaka, Zambia, and USAID, and SIDA becoming major donors after independence (Eriksen, 2000; Jansen, 1995; Takala, 1998).

Education was established as the principal vehicle for the transformation and reconstruction efforts of the emerging state. It would also be the site of contestation which according to Jansen (1995, p.6) would directly and intensely engage the state and rival forces within. Thus, curriculum ideology or policy in Namibia emanates from different actors who might have had differ-

ent ideas about the purposes of education and schooling. Among those is the collective accumulated educational thinking and experience of the liberation movement which subsequently became the government (Jansen, 1995). Secondly, according to Jansen (ibid), the network of Afrikaner conservatives from the previous apartheid government still occupied key positions and made critical decisions within the education structure (Jansen, 1995; O'Sullivan, 2002b) and finally foreign experts. Due to a lack of technical expertise in curriculum development and other aspects of education, foreign experts from foreign governments and donor agencies were added to the mix (Eriksen, 2000; Jansen, 1995; Takala, 1998).

Key ideologies, Philosophies, and Policies in Basic Education

Curriculum or educational ideology is and has been a contested terrain both from within the boundaries of the Namibian nation-state and from influences of outside interest groups, culminating into a collection, not just curriculum ideologies that invariably leads to either contradictory or disjointed aims, means, and outcomes. At its inception, there may have been at least three competing ideologies within the basic education curriculum that had vastly different ideas about the purpose of education and how the curriculum should be formulated. Ideas ranged from those who thought education should maintain society (social efficiency), to those who sought social and economic transformation (learner-centred and social reconstruction ideology) and finally the position of global competitiveness (Neoliberal Ideology).

These sometimes conflicting and sometimes contradictory ideologies have dominated the Namibian education system and curriculum making process since independence. In the last decade, however, and especially with the implementation of the latest National Curriculum for Basic Education (2016), it suggests that neoliberal ideology has in the least subordinated competing ideology if not completely usurping the ideological “war. This study will focus on two main concepts operational in the Namibian curriculum discourse and framework to highlight the competing ideology; Learner-centred Ideology as represented by the learner-centred education policy (LCE) and the neoliberal ideology that is promoted through the development policy of *Vision 2030*.

LCE was developed in conjunction with a Danish development agency before independence and research suggest that there may have been conflicting conceptions between the two parties. Given the Namibian historical context, it is reasonable that the idea of LCE may have come

about as a natural reaction to colonial Bantu education which was, apart from its overt racial foundations, was teacher-centred, and relied upon rote learning and heavily controlled (Jansen, 1995; Ndimande, 2013a; O'Sullivan, 2002a). However, LCE in the Namibian context was also developed with the Danish development agency which in all likelihood conceived LCE that was strongly influenced by social democratic values and philosophies that are characteristic of Nordic countries (Chisholm & Leyendecker, 2008). The LCE policy definition of learner-centred education is revealing and worth writing out in full;

Learner-centred education presupposes that teachers have a holistic view of the learner, valuing the learner's life experiences as the starting point for their studies. Teachers should be able to select content, and methods on the basis of a shared analysis of the learner's needs, use local and natural resources as an alternative or supplement to ready-made study materials, and thus develop their own and the learner's creativity... A learner-centred approach demands a high degree of learner participation, contribution and production... [it] is based on a democratic pedagogy, a methodology which promotes learning through understanding and practice directed towards empowerment to shape the conditions of one's own life (Ministry of Education and Culture, 1993).

The first part of the definition above shows the Namibian conception of LCE. It places the teacher centre of learning in the least or the dominant one in that it is the teacher who initiates and sets the conditions of learning. This is contrary to the learner-centred ideology that places the learner at the centre of all learning and that the teacher takes a “backseat” acts as a facilitator of learning. Although there were other factors at play in the failure of LCE in practice, Chisholm & Leyendecker (ibid) suggest that perhaps it is this conflict on the ideas of how LCE should look like that led to the failure to successfully implement LCE in Namibia.

After the fall of the Berlin Wall, globalization that underpinned with neoliberal ideology had emerged as the dominant ideology. Governments all over the world were reacting to this development, and as such adopted neoliberal ideologies both out of geopolitical pressure (alternative forms have had collapsed) but also due to the social and economic state former colonies found themselves (Chisholm & Leyendecker, 2008; Jansen, 1995; Rizvi, 2017), believing that such policies would allow them to transform their societies to become comparable or on par with the highly industrialized Global North. The reimagining of social, political, and economic trajectory was necessary, the concept and knowledge economy was thus adopted in Namibia through

the development policy of *Vision 2030*. *Vision 2030* sees Namibia as a “prosperous and industrial nation developed by and through its human resources (knowledge economy and lifelong learning), enjoying peace and political stability” (Ministry of Education Arts and Culture, 2016, p. 2). Consequently, with no exception to Namibia, education systems globally are reshaping the relationship between the economy and educational purposes, linking knowledge economy to high paying professions (depending on local context). In other words, this has led to commodifying of knowledge, that which a student learns is only as relevant as its value in a global market economy (Rizvi, 2017). It implies according to Rizvi (ibid) that there is no inherent value in education but that its value rests solely on its links to the instrumental purposes of human capital development.

The knowledge economy is also linked to the notion of lifelong learning. Under the neoliberal ideology, the concept is more specifically linked to economic growth and competitiveness. On the aspect of Lifelong learning, Rizvi (2017) argues that it is a key component of the neoliberal ideology. Neoliberalism views education as a means to respond to among other things; accelerated pace of globalization and technological change, the changing nature of work and labour markets, and ageing populations. Those global forces according to Rizvi (ibid), are emphasizing the need for continuous upgrading of work and life skills throughout life (p.7). Here the concern isn't with personal or professional growth more so than ensuring that there will not be a shortage of labour due to skills shortage.

On the surface, the concepts LCE and KBE appear to be mutually beneficial. On the one hand, LCE espouses values that encourage individuals to explore and enhance their talents for both individual and the collective good of society, and it evokes the notions of constructivist conceptions of education such as Paolo Freire's problem-based (solving) education as opposed to the banking concept that was characteristic of Bantu Education (Freire, 2014). On the other hand, global economies were, and still are transforming and at an even faster rate today, with new economic activities and sectors emerging spurred on especially by ICT, science, media, entertainment and finance and nation-states have to evolve with the times and the tide of economic transformation.

5 Discussion

5.1 Neoliberal Ideology as the dominant Ideology in Namibian Basic Education Curriculum

There is no doubt that neoliberal education reforms have become popular all over the world, but that in no way suggest that these reforms are adopted uniformly as they manifest in different forms in each locality (Autio, 2013; Ball, 2016; Pinar et al., 2003). Namibia has not been immune from this trend of adopting neoliberal reforms in education. There is sufficient evidence that neoliberal reforms have not only encroached educational and curriculum discourses in Namibia but in fact, it has usurped other ideological positions that had characterised curriculum making in Namibia.

The main source of evidence to this effect is the conspicuous omission of learner-centred education from the latest revised national curriculum of 2016. The introductory chapter of the national curriculum for basic education provides an overview of the structures and principles of basic education in Namibia. This section has previously and consistently emphasised learner-centred education as the principle approach to teaching and learning (Ministry of Basic Education Sports and Culture, 2003; Ministry of Education, 2010; Ministry of Education Arts and Culture, 2016). Learner-centred education was more than just an approach to teaching and learning, education reforms in Namibia after independence were underpinned by this ideology. It established LCE as the central organizing ideology for education in Namibia and its omission from the curriculum document is quite significant. The curriculum does not omit specifically outlining LCE is the approach to teaching and learning, it almost reduces it to nothing more than a teaching strategy and not the defining approach in all of basic education.

Instead, it appears that *Vision 2030*, an economic/development policy has become the primary philosophy underlying the basic education curriculum. *Vision 2030* has been part of the overall curriculum-making process, it is an overall development policy that aspires to see Namibia as a highly industrialised knowledge-based society. It is not based on any educational or curriculum theory but recognises the central role that education has to play in realising that vision, which meant LCE was the most central ideology in curriculum development and implementation. The Idea of Knowledge Economy appears to have taken on a more prominent role in the curriculum discourse. The concept of a knowledge-based economy according to Rizvi (2017)

is based on a neoliberal notion that studying or acquiring knowledge for the sake of knowledge has no value unless it has commercial applications (Rizvi, 2017). The concept of a knowledge-based economy is justified through the broader national development plan, Vision 2030. According to Patrick (2013) When coupled with other discourses of globalisation and knowledge economy, these three ideological constructs exert considerable pressure in shaping education systems in both developed and developing countries. Such is the power of these discourses that it might appear “futile to argue that their effect may not either educational or economic good” (p.1). Namibia, like many countries around the world, has had to readjust the purpose of education to the needs of the global economy (Rizvi, 2017). Neoliberal globalisation and the notion of knowledge-based economy give rise to new kinds of conceptualisation of educational outcomes and objectives (Patrick, 2013). Crucially, however, Rizvi (ibid) claims, education systems that have aligned their education with neoliberal market economy have struggled to define such readjustments in practical policy terms. That means, the current defining policy in the Namibian curriculum has no basis in education theory and therefore does not necessarily concern itself with the means through which educational outcomes are achieved, only that they are attained. This is what opens the door for test-based accountability that relies on high-stakes standardized tests.

In 1993 and 1995, exit or termination examinations were introduced in basic education for junior secondary and senior secondary (or matriculation) respectively (Ipinge, 2013). These standardised examinations were developed and administered in collaboration with the University of Cambridge examination syndicate until locally produced National exams were introduced in 2007 (Ipinge, 2013). These examinations were organized along various subject areas or disciplines that are offered in secondary school and thus constitute what would be considered as high-stakes tests in a Namibian context. Whereas in places like the United States high stakes tests are highly consequential for schools, teachers, and students (Au, 2016; Ball, 2016; De Lissovoy, 2013), in the Namibian context, the reward and punishments aspect of test-based accountability is usually limited to the learners. These examinations determine which students can continue with formal basic education and which students can pursue tertiary education respectively. Additionally, there is an element of learner-centredness in the assessment policy and thus these examinations are taken in combination with continuous assessment and thus the examination grade alone isn't the only determinant factor but the work of the learners throughout the year are also factored in the final grade (Ipinge, 2013).

Undoubtedly, the emergence of neoliberalism as the dominant ideology in the Namibian basic education curriculum has reconstituted the relationship between education and the economy. Subsequently, this means that the main ideological position with regard to curriculum development has shifted from a progressive stance towards a neoliberal one. The curriculum has thus become to be viewed as a means of achieving neoliberal ends. Not only that, the absence of LCE in the teaching and learning environment has led to the proliferation of test-based accountability which has had a significant impact on not just obfuscating LCE in Namibian schools but also the overall quality of education in Namibia.

5.2 Impact of Neoliberal Ideology on Educational quality

Despite its progressive ideological underpinnings, at least in rhetoric and indeed policy such as the *learner-centred policy*, *inclusive education policy*, and other supporting educational policies. Ironically, however, the theoretical framework of the basic education curriculum is designed on traditional approaches to education. The curriculum itself is perceived as a technical document to be implemented, this is what is referred to as a *curriculum as product*. According to Ford (1994) this theoretical conception of curriculum functions on a set of predetermined principles, drawing plans to implement and achieve said objectives, and measuring the outcomes. Thus, success is measured by the degree to which, learners, function according to the predefined standards and objectives (Ford, 1994). This is also linked to neoliberal ideology that relies on the so-called teacher-proof curriculum. Teacher-proof refers to predetermined curricula that are essentially manuals containing proven methods and templates that direct and guide everyday classroom activities (Autio, 2013; De Lissovoy, 2013; Sahlberg, 2016). Whereas the Namibian national curriculum is supposed to be a general guiding document for educational aims and objectives, it is also usually accompanied by subject syllabi that specify what content should be covered, (in most instances) how it should be covered using so-called proven approaches of methods, the time frame in which it should be covered.

Nevertheless, the concepts of learner-centred education were found to be beyond the capacities of most teachers in the early years after independence (Chisholm & Leyendecker, 2008; O'Sullivan, 2002a), and I would add, beyond the established norms of education during apartheid that emphasised teacher-centeredness and centralised authority. The majority of teachers and

indeed prominent Black people in Namibia were products of Bantu education and their “success” in a system that was essentially designed for them to fail created a false sense of meritocracy. This idea thus placed the burden of successful academic outcomes squarely on the teachers and students and learners. The notion of meritocracy that is accompanied by neoliberal concepts of competition and high-stakes testing found fertile ground and resonance within the Namibian schooling culture.

Therefore, neoliberal reforms such as test-based accountability became widely accepted and go unquestioned. According to Sahlberg (2016), the problem with test-based accountability is not necessarily concerned with holding teachers and students accountable but instead, how that accountability is arranged and how its mechanism affects teachers' work and student learning. The pressures that come with this accountability regime inadvertently affect how teachers may implement the curriculum and research has shown that this leads to curriculum narrowing its focus on only items likely to be tested, thereby limiting both teacher and learner creativity as risk-taking and experimentation are limited (Sahlberg, 2016).

Despite its claims to improving the quality of education, which I might add is widely argued to be baseless, educational outcomes have not drastically improved in Namibia either. Although Namibia has not adopted high-stakes tests in the strictest sense, the exit examinations in junior and senior matriculation still carry very high-stakes and are highly consequential nonetheless. In these exit examinations, the results are derived from the continuous assessment mark and the actual examination score, thus the final year examination score accounts for between 50-65% of the final grade. This has resulted in devastating outcomes for Namibian learners where on average, less than 50% of the students taking the junior primary examinations progress to senior secondary, of which, another less than 50% makes the grade for tertiary education admission.

Primary schools are not spared from this accountability regime and perhaps it is more detrimental at this level than it is at secondary. Primary school is part of the foundational phase of education and it is here that creativity, critical thinking, and pursuance of interests and talents are developed and nurtured. But as stated earlier, “teacher-proof” curricula are detrimental towards developing these values and skills, and thus from my own experience, many children graduate from primary school lacking higher-order skills albeit cognitive or vocational. The fact that there are no consequential high-stakes tests at this level, the sheer volume of formal assessments from as early as the fourth grade is detrimentally consequential. There are rela-

tively high repetition rates in primary school and dropout rates are concerning. But more alarmingly is that the school cluster system as used at primary school is a precursor to standardized testing at the primary school level.

The school clusters system [3] was initially meant to encourage progressive principles of cooperation and collaboration between schools, teachers, and even learners. It was intended for teachers to share and improve on teaching and learning material, as well as approaches and methods. Instead, this initiative has become a tool for both standardization of teaching and learning content but also a subtle way of introducing standardized tests and examinations which I can attest to as a former cluster facilitator. Research as shown in this document clearly suggest that educational systems that have adopted policies emphasizing steering education through predetermined standards have prioritized core subjects (in this case STEM), suggests that teaching and learning are narrower and teachers focus on “proven methods,” “guaranteed content” and “predetermined” to best prepare their students for the high-stakes tests (Autio, 2013; Sahlberg, 2016). Because there are no consequential high-stakes tests at primary school, the quality of education at primary phase has largely gone unnoticed outside the education fraternity. Additionally, relatively low promotion marks for secondary school meant that there was and still is, a fairly high “pass” rate from primary school. Before the revised curriculum of 2016, the primary school pass rate was at 35% percent per promotional subject.

Test-based accountability and business-like management are not just presented as common-sense reforms but that it would lead to improved quality of education and educational outcomes. But according to research (Rizvi, 2017; Sahlberg, 2016), there is no actual evidence for this, on the contrary, many countries that have fully embraced neoliberal reforms have experienced either a decline in quality or have not seen significant improvements in their educational outcomes (Autio, 2013; Sahlberg, 2016). If anything, according to Gyamera (2018) curricula laden with neoliberalism influences do not encourage differentiation of the curriculum, deemphasizes indigenous education, and undermines local languages.

It can thus be surmised that neoliberal reforms have not significantly improved the quality of educational outcomes nor has it helped very much with the holistic development of the child. The heavy emphasis on test-based accountability has negatively impacted the overall quality of schooling. Instead of the acquisition of skills, values, and attitudes that would serve both individual and societal interests, the needs of the market economy are paramount and even those are not being satisfactorily met. Instead, the state of Namibia’s education is not too far removed from the colonial Bantu education and thereby reconstituting the social class inequalities.

5.3 Bantu Education by another Name

Test-based accountability found resonance within the Namibian education fraternity and wider community just simply due to the hegemonic power of neoliberal globalization but the country's educational history provided a fertile ground for such reforms to take shape with ease. Deborah Britzman (as cited in Webster and Ryan, 2014) argues that teachers continuously practice the same taken-for-granted ways of teaching because theoretical knowledge of teaching is not easily valued. This is because according to Webster & Ryan (ibid), each new generation of teachers repetitively embraces the same ways of teaching accustomed to without much critical reflection, that is, novice teachers attempt to replicate the teaching practices they experienced as students. This is largely true for teachers who were taught under the Bantu Education system and later became "experienced teachers" within it.

However, the same phenomenon is also true for novice teachers, who despite receiving training in new theoretical knowledge such as LCE, are likely to replicate, not just the teaching methods of their more "experienced" and often revered counterparts but also the existing school culture. Arbitrary assessment was a common feature of Bantu education and, it was essentially designed to perpetuate the apartheid doctrine which emphasizes failure. Students expected to fail because examinations were set up for them to fail in large numbers. Although the few that passed were usually equipped with very few skills relevant in the world of work (Iiping, 2013), they are usually the ones who rose to prominence within the subjugated black community and thus created a false sense of meritocracy (Au, 2016; Chisholm & Leyendecker, 2008; De Lissovoy, 2013). The notion of meritocracy that is accompanied by neoliberal concepts of competition and high-stakes testing found fertile ground and resonance within the Namibian schooling culture and has largely gone unquestioned.

Additionally, neoliberal ideology has brought with it a new focus of administrative workload as teachers in Namibia. Teachers are inundated with and struggle to maintain administrative tools associated with neoliberalism accountability regime. The findings in the Australian study cited by Webster-Ryan (2018) are eerily similar to the Namibian context. Similar to Australia, much of this administrative work which is presented with the guise of educational efficacy and public credibility, is "focused on the management diversity through the planning of multiple lessons and materials, classroom behaviour and management issues, and on compliance of activities required for systems of accountability and school-based management systems" (Webster-Ryan, 2018; p. 66-67).

Beyond the manifestation of neoliberal ideology in the teaching and learning environment, structurally it does have a strong semblance to Bantu Education. Bantu Education was constructed and institute to produce and reproduce an equal society of White domination and Black Inferiority. It was well within the *doxa* of the racist White supremacy of the apartheid government. While neoliberalism isn't necessarily built of racist ideology, one of the biggest criticism of it is the absence of empirical evidence of the economic and educational efficacy. In Namibia, neoliberal reforms have not necessarily led to any significant improvement in educational outcomes, not on the quality of curriculum content. Therefore, the true purpose of neoliberal ideology is the restoration and reconstitution of class-based hierarchical power (Gyamera, 2018; Rizvi, 2017). It is a sort of "*wolf in sheepskin*" that operates behind benevolent words like freedom, choice, and human rights and even individual and societal prosperity, while actually positioning individuals, societies, and institutions across complex and often uneven relations of power, class, and culture.

It is thus within reason that the curriculum has become a tool for not just reconstituting social reproduction but also conditioning society to accept that such (re)production as natural. Au (2016) poses the question of whether or not standardized testing addresses or redresses the educational inequalities of children of colour in the United States. This question is pertinent to the Namibian context in that historically education was conceived to set up the Black community as failures (Ipinge, 2013). These failures according to Au (ibid) is used to justify neoliberal conceptions of meritocracy while at the same time denying structural inequalities. De Lissovoy (2013) the neoliberal ideology, especially through this test-based accountability regime, conditions students to understand and therefore accept that their worth and status in life is tied to their ability in school, even though as pointed out by Au (2016), that ability is tied to deeper structural disadvantages with which many Black children carry with into formal education.

In this way, the only distinction between Bantu Education and Neoliberal ideology in education is the absence of blatant racist ideology. It is a sort of "*wolf in sheepskin*" that operates behind benevolent words like freedom, choice, and human rights and even individual and societal prosperity, while actually positioning individuals, societies, and institutions across complex and often uneven relations of power, class, and culture.

6 Conclusion

This study set out to investigate the impact of neoliberal education reforms and ideology on the Namibian basic education curriculum and subsequently the society at large. Relying on the four educational or curriculum ideology traditions that were identified by Arthur Ellis (2004), this study established a foundational understanding of curriculum making ideology. Thereafter, it chronicled the evolution and transition of education and curriculum making process in Namibia from its colonial history up to the present day.

The research revealed that the process of curriculum development is not a value-free process but rather it is underpinned by often powerful ideas, beliefs, and attitudes that shape the way curriculum developers perceive, explain, and justify how schools should be organized and function. These ideologies determine the beliefs and decisions about the kinds of knowledge that should be taught in schools, how teachers should disseminate this knowledge, and how such information should be assessed. Additionally, each ideology carries with it, values systems, and ideas about the inherent nature of children and society in general.

I have longed held the notion that the Namibian Curriculum akin to the patchwork quilt, which in many ways it is, but crucially the research has shown that reforms and ideologies were not necessarily imposed or adopted without some level of agency from the “people” (government and policymakers) of a free and democratic nation. Nevertheless, this study has also established that although curriculum ideology is not necessary a new concept, in Namibia, there is limited understanding or at the very least a lack of appreciation for the underlying assumptions, beliefs, values, and attitudes that make up the national curriculum.

Most people discuss curriculum only in terms of subject discipline curriculum and too often the question of purpose if not necessarily addressed. Subject disciplines are basically the tools that curriculum developers and implementers use to achieve broader objectives underlying any curriculum. Determining the goals and objectives of a curriculum is a value-laden process, informed by visions and ideologies of school, education, and society at large. Research has shown that there are multiple and often conflicting ideologies that lead to very different forms of schooling. Despite the wide range of research on curriculum theory and practice, it appears the concept of curriculum ideology is largely overlooked.

For one, the concept of curriculum is often confused with that of education and therefore the two terms are used interchangeably. Education is an abstract concept that can and does take place in almost every social institution such as homes (families), religious institutions, the media, and other cultural influences such as sports and entertainment. Curriculum, on the other hand, is a specific, and tangible concept that is always tight to decision making. Unlike Education which can offer formally or informally, a curriculum is a deliberate document that involves decisions that outline the purpose of education and schooling. Therefore, as Null (2011) argues “Curriculum is the heart of education (p.1)”

In addition to providing descriptions of four broad curriculum ideological positions as identified by Michael Schiro (2014), this study attempted to establish neoliberalism more than just an economic policy that affects education, that it is indeed an educational ideology. The ideologies described by Schiro (ibid) can be summed up as either learner-centered, knowledge-centred, and society-centred (Ellis, 2004). Although there is literature that looked into the aspect of neoliberalism beyond the economic paradigm, the literature I encountered does not sufficiently establish neoliberalism as an ideology in the same breath as the ideological frameworks described by Schiro (2014). Instead, much of the literature looks at neoliberalism impacting education rather than an ideological paradigm that both determines the purpose of school and the methodologies that are employed to meet these objectives.

Indeed, neoliberalism has tenets of the social efficiency ideology, it is, however, different as neoliberalism is not necessarily concerned with any particular society per se, but rather, it caters to the needs of the global market economy. This represents a totally different conception of the purpose of education and which influences the type of curriculum that is developed which in my opinion is significantly distinct from the conventional visions of schooling. One could argue that the neoliberal ideology is a market-centred approach to curriculum and therefore, needs further interrogation.

Nevertheless, this research was principally interested in curriculum objectives from a Namibian perspective, it was an attempt to understand how the basic education curriculum came about. The research on curriculum ideology and/or curriculum theory from a Namibian context is very limited if non-existent. There is plenty of research that documents educational reforms after independence, even the learner-centred education that became the central organising framework for basic education, it seems was seen more as a teaching and learning methodology and not

necessarily as the central ideology underlying all aspects of education and education reform. Therefore, as this study has shown, the idea of LCE in Namibian schools has largely failed, in part due to other competing ideologies but also due to a failure to grasp the true essence of learner-centred education as the underlying principle for basic education, and the emergence of neoliberalism as a global phenomenon following the fall of The Berlin Wall. The lack of a strong moral basis for education and curriculum has allowed for neoliberal reforms to creep into the curriculum and eventually displace the poorly conceptualised notion of LCE as the dominant ideology underpinning basic education.

The lack of research and understanding of the deeper ideological implications on curriculum development in Namibia is typified by the fact that there has not been much of a reaction towards neoliberalism overtaking LCE in the national curriculum. Furthermore, the correlation between colonial Bantu Education at a deeper level was made evident here. Naturally, this study made some inferences based on research about the impacts of neoliberalism on the quality and outcomes of education in Namibia, but further research both qualitative and quantitative is needed so that contextually the claims made here are grounded in fact.

The meritocracy narrative that roots in the colonial Bantu Education system, appears steadfast in educational and curriculum discourses in Namibia and helping to perpetuate the supposed efficacy of neoliberal reforms. Hence, the notion of test-test based accountability has become a defining approach in public education, its appeal can be traced to the colonial past where education administration was based on central authority where arbitrary testing and school inspections were the order of the day. The colonial thinking was based on the assumption that Black people were incapable of ensuring quality in teaching and learning and that a capable outsider (usually white school inspectors) needed for quality assurance. The only thing that has changed in this regard is that the colonial ideology of White supremacy has been replaced by the supremacy of market-oriented reforms that have come to be considered not only commonsensical but that no alternatives exist.

Consequently, some researchers might refer to the assessment approach in Namibia as low-stakes testing as opposed to the consequential high-stakes testing as witnessed in the United States. Given that my initial research idea was based on problematizing test-based accountability, it is worth exploring the questions of whether the assessment policy in Namibia is tanta-

mount to high-stakes testing. Further, how these high-stakes tests impact the quality of education in terms of curriculum narrowing that research asserts are a consequence of not test-based accountability in the Namibian context. Considering that learners are basically the only people who bear the full brunt of this accountability system, there is a need to find out how learners perceive these tests and how it may affect their learning. Teachers too, face some backlash on poor academic outcomes, primarily through negative media coverage, there has not been any research that addresses the impact of a test-based curriculum on the teaching and learning especially with regard to the acquisition of 21st-century skills that are not only sorely missing among school-goers and basic education graduates but are part of the sustainable development goals of the United Nations.

Thus, going forward, there is a need to explore the possibility of some of the ideologies that informed curriculum-making, especially the years leading up to independence. The central aim of post-colonial education was social reconstruction, although some of these ideas were abandoned because of the socialist/communist, the emergence of decolonial discourses has helped to reconstitute ideas of social justice. The United Nations SDG goals aim to reduce poverty and inequality through quality education, and as such this requires a reconceptualization of not only the theories but also the ideology underlying curriculum development. As research has shown, countries that have adopted more egalitarian oriented reforms, are also the same countries that consistently outperform others in international student assessment indexes and most importantly they are among the most innovative and equal societies.

Notes

[1] South West Africa People's Organization (SWAPO) was the main liberation movement in then, South West Africa, and eventually became the ruling party in independent Namibia.

[2] Under the British school system A form is an educational stage, class, or grouping of pupils in a school .i.e. Form 1 is equivalent to Grade 7 or schooling for 11-2 years old.

[3] School Cluster System refers to the grouping of schools that are geographically close together in order to share resources and instructional materials with the purpose of improving the quality of education (Shikalepo, 2018)

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