

Chapter 4: Namibia

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Population (1993): 1,565,000

Population Growth Rate (1960-93): 2.6% per annum

Land Area: 824,292 square kilometres

GNP per Capita (1994): US\$1,530

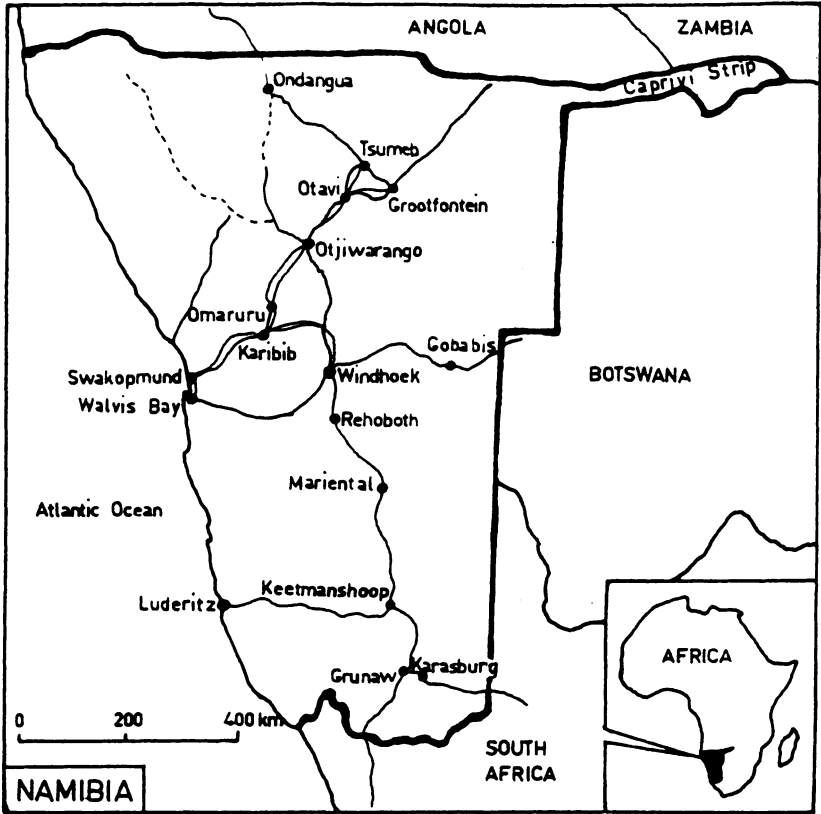
Year of Independence: 1990

UNDP Human Development Index (1994): 0.570

With a population of 1,600,000, Namibia might be described as a small state, even though it is certainly not small in area. The combination of small population and large area gives Namibia a population density of just 1.9 people per square kilometre, which, after Mongolia, is the second lowest in the world. The large area and low population density create major problems for administration of all kinds, including administration of examinations.

Between 1884 and 1919, Namibia was a German colony. After the end of World War I, the territory was forfeited by Germany and placed by the League of Nations under South African trusteeship. During the second half of the century this meant, among other aspects, that Namibia was subjected to the policies of apartheid. Also, the education system created by the South African regime was highly segmented. The fact that each community managed its own sub-sector according to its respective means led to wide disparities in staffing, types of schools, and academic achievement. Independence was achieved only after complex and bitter struggle in which the United Nations as well as various nationalist groups played a leading role.

In the era since Independence, the government has sought to reshape the education sector, and has stressed the key role of schooling in the emancipation of the communities which were previously disadvantaged. The priority given to education is evident from the allocation of 24 per cent of the government's total budget in 1994/95, a proportion which rose to 29 per cent in 1995/96. The latter figure brought investment in the education sector to a figure exceeding 10 per cent of Gross National Product, which was probably the highest proportion in the world. Given other pressing needs,



however, it seemed unlikely that these proportions would be sustained for long.

The Education and Examination Systems

Prior to independence, Namibia followed the South African education system. That system included a Standard 8 Certificate Examination and a Senior Certificate Examination based on group requirements and norm-referenced standardisation.

Since 1990, the formal school system has been divided into four stages as follows:

- lower primary: Grades 1 to 4,
- upper primary: Grades 5 to 7,
- junior secondary: Grades 8 to 10, and
- senior secondary: Grades 11 and 12.

No external examinations are taken at the primary level. Selection for upper primary school is based 50 per cent on continuous assessment of school work, and 50 per cent on internal end-of-year examinations. Until 1998, a similar arrangement was used to select pupils for junior secondary schools, but the government decided in the early 1990s to operate an external summative examination at the end of Grade 7 from that year.

The external examination taken at the end of Grade 10 is called the Junior Secondary Certificate (JSC) examination. Students who proceed to senior secondary school then take examinations for the International General Certificate of Secondary Education (IGCSE) and/or the Higher International General Certificate of Secondary Education (HIGCSE), which are offered by the University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate (UCLES). Both these examinations are taken at the end of Grade 12. The HIGCSE examination has been developed especially for Namibian candidates who wish to further their studies in South African universities and polytechnics, since the IGCSE is considered to have too low a standard for that purpose. The HIGCSE is not available in any other country, and is an example of the way that UCLES has been willing to tailor its work to meet Namibian needs.

In addition to this main system are some variations. First, for the JSC examination, special arrangements are made for blind and deaf students. Second, one private school offers Advanced-level examinations; and third, until 1998 six other schools which have particular links with South Africa were allowed still to offer the South African Senior Certificate Examination. For the rest of the country, this examination was phased out in 1994.

Table 4.1 shows the numbers of candidates sitting each examination in

1995. The greatest number, as might be expected, was at the JSC level. However, even at the Grade 12 IGCSE level there were over 10,000 full-time candidates. A large number of students also took the part-time Grade 12 South African examination.

Table 4.1: Numbers of Candidates sitting Examinations, Namibia, 1995

| <i>Examination</i> | <i>Number of Candidates</i> | <i>Certifying Body</i> |
|---------------------------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| JSC full-time | 25,058 | Namibian Examinations Board |
| JSC part-time | 3,021 | Namibian Examinations Board |
| JSC blind and deaf | 7 | Namibian Examinations Board |
| Grade 12 full-time HIGCSE | 697 | UCLES |
| Grade 12 full-time IGCSE | 10,246 | UCLES |
| Grade 12 full-time 'A' level | 20 | UCLES |
| Grade 12 IGCSE resit | 2,848 | UCLES |
| Grade 12 full-time Senior Certificate | 168 | South African Certification Council |
| Grade 12 part-time Senior Certificate | 18,008 | South African Certification Council |
| Grade 12 supplementary Senior Cert.* | 3,480 | South African Certification Council |

* 1996 figure

Staff and their Responsibilities

In 1996, the staff structure of the Department of National Examinations & Assessment (DNEA) in the Ministry of Basic Education & Culture provided for 52 posts as indicated in Table 4.2. In addition, 20 Occasional Employees are appointed annually for about 10 months of the year. A new staff structure which is currently being negotiated is expected to provide for education officers who will be responsible for research and statistical analyses of examination data.

The posts are divided into two divisions. The Administrative Division is responsible for data processing and enquiries, reproduction, packing, despatching, financial control, stock control, transport, and administrative support. The Professional Division is responsible for assessment and test-item development, and for question-paper development and control.

The professional officers include the specialists in each subject. All hold at least a degree plus an education diploma or equivalent, plus teaching or teaching-related experience. All the education officers have attended the training programme organised by UCLES in Cambridge, UK. In turn, they have been responsible for training of teachers, with the assistance of UCLES subject specialists, through workshops. The education officers are members

Table 4.2: Staff Structure of the Department of National Examinations & Assessment, Namibia, 1996

| | |
|--|--|
| 1 Director | 1 Principal Data Typist |
| 1 Deputy Director: Examinations Admin. | 4 Data Typists/Senior Data Typists |
| 1 Senior Educ'n Officer/Subject Specialist | 1 Clerical Assistant |
| 6 Education Officers/Subject Specialists | 1 Programmer (vacant) |
| 1 Chief Systems Analyst | 1 Registry Clerk |
| 1 Chief Control/Senior Exams Officer | 2 Lithographic Operators/ Senior Lithographic Operators |
| 2 Control Officers | 1 Chief Caretaker (vacant) |
| 1 Chief Clerk/Examinations Officer | 1 Messenger |
| 13 Clerks/Senior/Assistant Exams. Officers | 2 Watchmen |
| 1 Accountant (vacant) | 4 Driver |
| 1 Private Secretary | 4 Cleaners (2 vacant) |
| 1 Senior Typist | 2 Labourers |
| 1 Typist/Senior Typist | |

of appropriate curriculum panels in the Ministry's Curriculum Development Directorate. This ensures coordination of curriculum with assessment. Training in desk-top publishing during 1995 assisted improvement of the physical appearance of the examination papers. However, little research has yet been conducted, because the workload has not made it possible.

Because of budgetary constraints, the senior education officer and six education officers are each responsible for a number of subjects. This makes

Table 4.3: Subject Responsibilities of Specialist Officers, Namibia, 1996

| Post | Subject Grouping | No. of Subjects* | No. of Papers |
|--------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------|------------------|
| Senior Education Officer | Mathematics & Natural Sciences | 6 | 44 |
| 1 Education Officer | Agriculture, Life Science, etc. | 8 | 24 |
| 1 Education Officer | Crafts, Design & Technology | 15 | 48 |
| 1 Education Officer | Humanities & Social Sciences | 8 | 58 |
| 1 Education Officer | European Languages | 6 | 106 |
| 1 Education Officer | African Languages | 5 | 61 |
| 1 Education Officer** | | | |

* The same subject at different grades and examination levels is counted as a single subject.

** This officer should also have responsibility for languages; but at the time of writing, the post was vacant.

their tasks extremely difficult, because they are not always specialists in these subjects. The distribution of responsibilities is shown in Table 4.3.

As noted above, some challenges arise from the geographical size of the country. Namibia is divided into seven regions, and each region has one regional examination official plus a clerk for examinations and assessment-related tasks. Each region also has a personal computer, which is linked to the headquarters minicomputer for the purpose of supplying information to candidates on credits accumulated and for checking entries. Decentralisation to the regional offices of responsibility for the conduct of examinations is costly, but has greatly improved commitment, involvement and solidarity.

Another indicator of the scale of operations is the volume of paper work. In 1995, the DNEA prepared and distributed 146 circulars containing directives for the conduct of examinations, marking of papers, retrieval of marks, interpretation of examination requirements, and release of results. Moreover, conduct of the external examination in March (the supplementary Senior Certificate Examination), an external examination in May/June (IGCSE resit) and six external examinations in November/December placed such a burden on the section responsible for packing and distributing materials that in 1995, 4,600 hours of overtime were required. During 1995, 7,778,700 question papers were packed and distributed to the seven regions. In addition, 3,634,000 circulars, old question papers and letters were packed and distributed to various destinations.

School teachers are employed for marking of JSC scripts, which is done centrally in Windhoek. For the 1995 end-of-year examinations, 745 teachers were withdrawn from schools for a period of one week each. School teachers are also employed as examiners in question-setting panels for the JSC and localised IGCSE/HIGCSE papers. University personnel are occasionally employed for vetting, but not for other tasks.

Methods for maintaining confidentiality of question papers include:

- use of sealed envelopes,
- use of couriers instead of the postal service, with examinations in steel containers and the keys sent separately,
- use of safes and strongrooms (with the requirement that only one person should have access to the safes of schools where external examinations are conducted), and
- use of reinforced steel doors and closed-circuit television (with 14 cameras) where papers are printed, packed and stored.

In addition, training on security as well as other matters is provided annually for regional staff, heads of centres, and invigilators.

Social and Political Factors

Although the population of Namibia is small, it is also racially and ethnically diverse. In the new political environment, this diversity must be catered for and respected. The long years of struggle against domination by South Africa have created a backlash against many of the social structures that existed before 1990. The examination system both reflects the changes and is an instrument for achieving a new society.

Among the first foci of the post-Independence changes was the JSC History syllabus, which has now been rewritten. Political forces have also required introduction of more Namibian languages as examinable subjects. When added to the existing diversity of European languages which are examinable subjects, the total list is formidable (Table 4.4). Preparation of all these examinations would be a strain for any system, but it is particularly onerous in a small one.

At the IGCSE and HIGCSE level, however, there exists a delicate balance between national and international forces. On the one hand is the clear evidence of local orientation in syllabuses, which UCLES has respected and facilitated; but on the other hand is a concern for the qualifications to be internationally recognised.

Moreover, the mere existence of the HIGCSE in Namibia is a reflection of competing forces. The University of Namibia allows entry on satisfactory IGCSE results, but South African universities require HIGCSE grades. The main reason that the Namibian government is willing to support the HIGCSE examinations is that the University of Namibia does not cover all fields of study, and the government therefore wishes some Namibians to study abroad. Since the HIGCSE was only introduced in 1995, at the time of writing it had not been tested for admission to institutions in the UK, USA or elsewhere. However, early indications are that it would be recognised for study in such places.

The IGCSE and HIGCSE are perhaps not quite as international as their names suggests. Of the 41 IGCSE syllabuses currently offered in Namibia, 17 are either localised or Namibia-specific. The remaining 24 are international syllabuses. The 17 localised subjects comprise 51 examination papers, while the total number of IGCSE examination components is 102. This means that the DNEA is already responsible for setting, marking and moderating exactly half of all the IGCSE examination papers offered in the country. At the HIGCSE level, only two of the 13 syllabuses are localised. However, even this is a significant element, and the Ministry aspires in the long run to localise all syllabuses at both levels.

Table 4.4: Languages Offered in External Examinations, Namibia, 1996

| | <u>Subject</u> | <u>No. of Papers</u> |
|--|--|----------------------|
| <i>HIGCSE</i> | English as a Second Language including Literature | 3 |
| | Afrikaans as a First Language including Literature | 3 |
| | English as a First Language including Literature | 3 |
| | German as a First Language including Literature | 3 |
| | French as a Foreign Language | 2 |
| | German as a Foreign Language | 2 |
| <i>IGCSE</i> | Oshikwanyama as a First Language incl. Literature | 5 |
| | Oshindonga as a First Language incl. Literature | 5 |
| | Otjiherero as a First Language incl. Literature | 5 |
| | Rukwangali as a First Language incl. Literature | 5 |
| | Setswana as a First Language including Literature | 5 |
| | Silozi as a First Language including Literature | 5 |
| | Afrikaans as a Second Language | 5 |
| | English as a Second Language | 6 |
| | Afrikaans as a First Language including Literature | 5 |
| | English as a First Language | 6 |
| | German as a First Language | 6 |
| | French as a Foreign Language | 5 |
| | German as a Foreign Language | 5 |
| | Literature B (English) | 2 |
| Literature B (German) | 2 | |
| <i>Senior Certificate</i> | Oshikwanyama as a First Language HG | 3 |
| | Oshindonga as a First Language HG | 3 |
| | Otjiherero as a First Language HG | 3 |
| | Rukwangali as a First Language HG | 3 |
| | Setswana as a First Language HG | 3 |
| | Silozi as a First Language HG | 3 |
| | Afrikaans as a Second Lang. HG + SG | 2+2 |
| | English as a Second Language HG + SG | 2+2 |
| | Afrikaans as a First Lang. HG + SG | 3+3 |
| | English as First Language HG + SG | 3+3 |
| English as a Second Language incl. Literature HG +SG | 2+2 | |
| <i>Junior Secondary Certificate</i> | Oshikwanyama as a First Language | 3 |
| | Oshindonga as a First Language | 3 |
| | Otjiherero as a First Language | 3 |
| | Rukwangali as a First Language | 3 |
| | Setswana as a First Language | 3 |
| | Silozi as a First Language | 3 |
| | Nama/Damara as First Language | 3 |
| | Afrikaans | 3 |
| | English | 3 |
| | Afrikaans as a First Language | 3 |
| | English as a First Language | 3 |
| | German as a First Language | 3 |
| | French as a Foreign Language | 4 |
| | German as a Foreign Language | 4 |
| | Latin | 2 |

Note: HG = Higher Grade; SG = Standard Grade.

Costs

Namibia pays a financial penalty for not conducting its secondary school leaving certificate examinations entirely on its own. Table 4.5 summarises the fees for the 1995 IGCSE and HIGCSE examinations (paid to UCLES) and the 1994 Senior Certificate Examination (paid to South Africa). The UCLES fee was in fact a special rate, lower than the amount usually charged by UCLES. Nevertheless, the total amounts paid were substantial. The fee to UCLES was N\$5.3 million (US\$1.3 million), and the fee to South Africa was N\$4.0 million (US\$0.9 million). In addition are costs, which in 1995/96 amounted to N\$25,000, arising from despatch of scripts marked in Cambridge and Cape Town. It is not certain that the examination would have been cheaper had Namibia conducted it all by itself. However, if the examination had been localised, the foreign exchange would have been retained in the country.

Table 4.5: Fees for IGCSE, HIGCSE and Senior Certificate Examinations, Namibia

| | IGCSE & HIGCSE 1995 | Senior Certificate 1994 |
|-----------------------------------|------------------------|----------------------------|
| Number of candidates | 10,943 | 11,494 |
| Fee per subject (average) | N\$ 83 | N\$ 57 |
| Average amount paid per candidate | N\$ 487 | N\$ 344 |
| 80% subsidy paid by government | N\$ 4,268,362 | N\$ 3,163,148 |
| 20% paid by candidates | N\$ 1,067,090 | N\$ 790,787 |
| <i>Total</i> | <i>N\$ 5,335,453</i> | <i>N\$ 3,953,936</i> |
| | (US\$ 1,255,400 | US\$ 930,337) |

As indicated above, 29 per cent of the total government budget was allocated to education in 1995/96. This amounted to N\$1,100.0 million (US\$258.8 million), of which N\$21.2 million was allocated to the DNEA. From this amount, N\$2.1 million was allocated to staff remuneration, and slightly over N\$6 million to other services, particularly payment of examiners, markers and invigilators. Other costs were N\$1.4 million for materials and supplies, N\$0.5 million for transport, and N\$0.4 million for maintenance.

The sums budgeted by the DNEA for the conduct of external examinations are shown in Table 4.6. These sums excluded fees but included the setting and moderation of papers and marking schemes, translation of

question papers and marking schemes, translation of papers into Braille and translation of scripts from Braille, adaptation of question papers for sight-impaired candidates, marking and moderation of answer scripts, control over markers and moderators, moderation of course work and oral examinations, grading meetings, remarking of scripts on appeal, and remuneration of invigilators and heads of centres. The fact that the JSC examination is marked centrally in Windhoek adds to the costs since the examiners, moderators and markers must be remunerated for travel and subsistence expenses.

Table 4.6: Budget for Conduct of External Examinations, Directorate of National Examinations & Assessment, Namibia, 1995/96

| | |
|---|------------------------|
| Grade 12 H/IGCSE examinations | N\$ 313,394 |
| Grade 12 full-time South African syllabuses | 12,060 |
| Grade 12 part-time South African syllabuses | 1,690,976 |
| Grade 10 JSC full- and part-time | 2,517,082 |
| <i>Total</i> | <i>N\$4,533,512</i> |
| | <i>(US\$1,066,708)</i> |

As mentioned above, however, the government plans to phase out the South African Senior Certificate Examination. That will at least reduce one financial burden. It will also remove a major element in the existing complexity of operations.

Conclusions

Namibia has a demanding system of examinations, which has evolved rapidly and which is still in the process of change. Although Namibia's population is small, it has considerable diversity. This chapter has pointed out that despite the small population, the examination system is a major enterprise. Not only does it have a budget of N\$21.2 million (US\$5.0 million) plus N\$1.9 million paid in fees by candidates, it also involves the annual despatch of 7.8 million examination papers and 3.6 million documents of other types.

Moreover, while Namibia is small in population, it is vast in area. This greatly adds to the complexities and costs of operating the examination system. The system relies on development and coordination of its seven regional offices, but also requires all marking of JSC examinations to be done centrally in Windhoek. The employment of 745 teachers for a period of one week each is equivalent to 14.3 person-years; and that figure

excludes both the time spent organising the event, the time that the 745 teachers spent travelling, and the time spent on original preparation of questions and papers.

Had the processes of history been different, Namibia might have been willing to join a Southern African regional initiative offering a joint examination along the lines of those offered by the West African Examinations Council or the Caribbean Examinations Council. Alternatively, Namibia might have been willing to continue extensive use of the examination system of its dominant neighbour. Yet the actual pattern of events has required policy-makers on the one hand to be self-reliant and on the other hand to seek partners further afield. UCLES has proved a willing and competent partner, and has played a key role not only in the provision of examination papers but also in training of local staff. However, even at the reduced rates charged by the Syndicate, UCLES services are costly. Although for the time being the Namibian government has been prepared to make education a major financial priority, it is doubtful whether education will be able to retain such a major share of the budget for an extended period.

Because of these factors, policy-makers will have to maintain the search for balance between competing goals. On the one hand is the desire to support local cultures; and on the other hand is the need to heed practicalities and costs in the operation of an examination system. Another delicate balance is between national identity and international connections. Because of the small population base which supports the University of Namibia, that institution is not large enough to provide all the specialisms needed by Namibia's economy and society. This means that a sizeable proportion of Namibians need to go abroad for further education, which in turn requires attention to the standards and external recognition of senior secondary examinations.

In the meantime, Namibia has already established an examination system of which it may be proud. The complexity and changing nature of the context within which this has been done underline the magnitude of the achievement. Challenges certainly lie ahead; but the quality of existing achievements give cause for optimism about the ability to confront those challenges.