

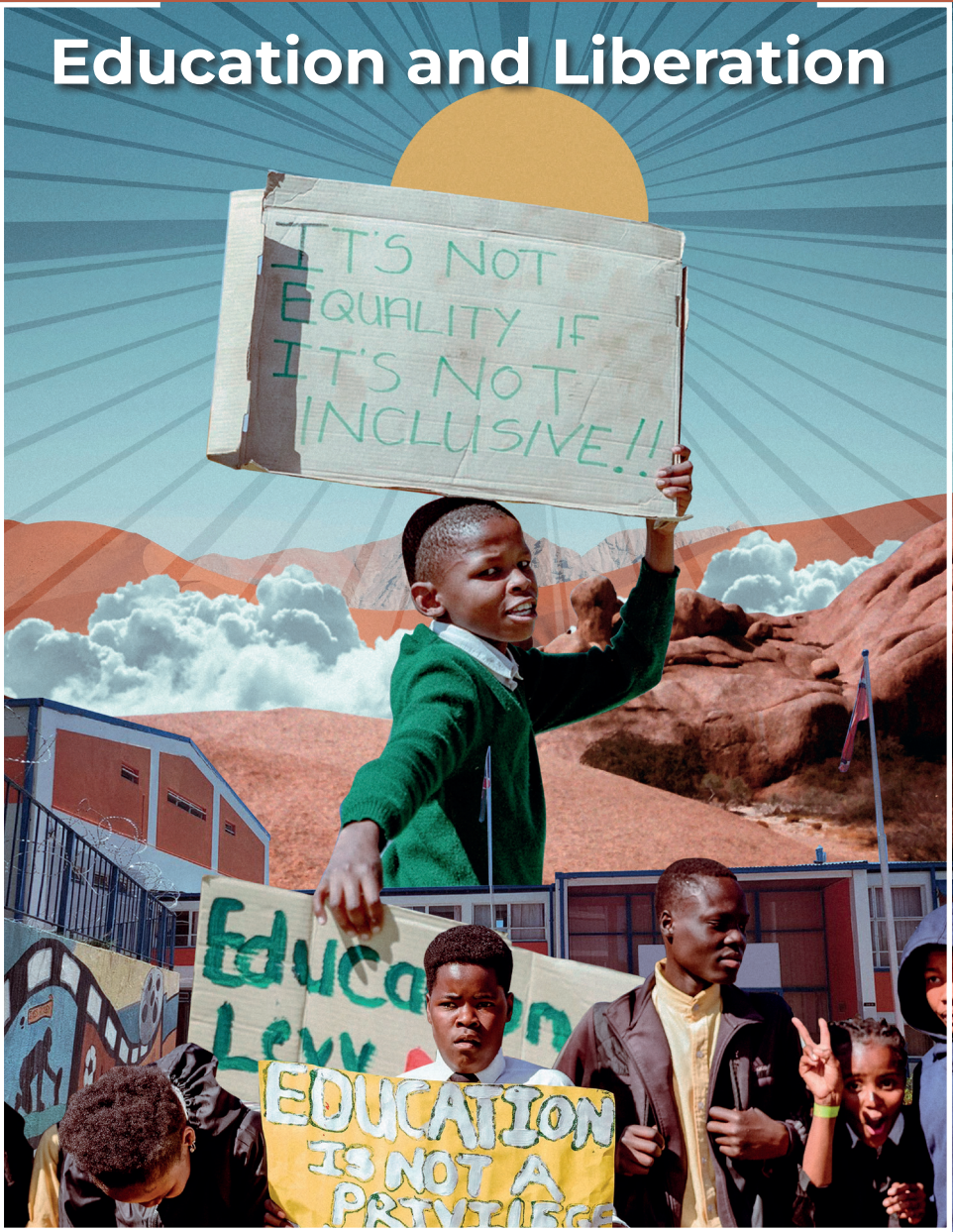
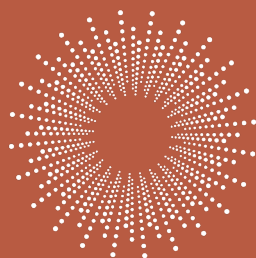


Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	4
Acronyms and Initialisms	5
Editorial: Education and Liberation	7
The Quest for Education for Liberation: The Case of the Namibia National Students Organisation	20
<i>Ndumba J. Kamwanyah</i>	
A Case Study of Radical Pedagogy in Practice: The South African Committee for Higher Education (SACHED) and Regional Liberation Networks (1959–1994)	26
<i>Tammy-Lee Lakay</i>	
Challenges that Outsmart the Transformation Agenda: An Analysis of Why Certain Challenges Persist in the Namibian Education System Despite Several Reforms.....	43
<i>John Nyambe, Marius Kudumo, & Ellison Tjirera</i>	
Social Justice and Education in Namibia: From Theory to Practice	69
<i>Lucy Edwards-Jauch</i>	
Education for All? Unpacking Social Justice and Grassroots Policy Implementation: A Case Study of the Otjituu Settlement	97
<i>Tjipura Tjipura</i>	
Beyond Colonialities: Leveraging Ubuntu for Transformative Higher Education in Namibia.....	105
<i>Bruno Venditto & Adalbertus Kamanzi</i>	
Epistemic Destruction and Indigenous Knowledge Loss During the OvaHerero/Nama Genocide (1904–1908): A Case study of OvaHerero Epistemicide	137
<i>Kahuhu Alphons Koruhama & Joyce Muzengua</i>	

Epistemological Access at the Institutions of Teacher Education.....	148
<i>Fares Amweenye, Sakaria M. Iipinge & Elizabeth Ngololo</i>	
The Relevance of Theological Education in Contemporary Namibia: A Contextual Analysis of the United Lutheran Theological Seminary–Paulinum..	173
<i>Emma N. Nangolo</i>	
Critical Pedagogies in Anti-Colonial Cultural Work: Oudano as Praxis.....	198
<i>Nashilongweshipwe Mushaandja</i>	
Decolonising Early Childhood Development in Informal Settlements: A Case Study of New Elementary Namibia and the Implementation of the Sixth National Development Plan	218
<i>Kevin Wessels</i>	
A Case Study of Parenting a Neurodivergent Child Juxtaposed against the Provisions of the Sector Policy on Inclusive Education in Namibia.....	229
<i>Immaculate Mogotsi & Christel Menette</i>	
Case Study: Bridging the Gender Gap in Education in Zambezi Region, Namibia.....	256
<i>Phiona Nandu</i>	
Political Worker Education in Namibia: The Case of the Labour Diploma Course.....	262
<i>Herbert Jauch</i>	
Dissecting the Subsidised Funding Model in Namibia 2026: Free Registration and the Question of Sustainable Access to Higher Education	269
<i>Benhard Kavau</i>	
Contributing towards Social Justice in Namibia? The Activist School of the Economic and Social Justice Trust.....	274
<i>Herbert Jauch & Nafimane Hamukoshi</i>	
Review of the Namibia State of Skills Demand and Supply Report.....	281
<i>Christophina Ndahambelela Ainima</i>	

Editorial: Education and Liberation

Lucy Edwards Jauch & Ndumba Kamwanyah

Introduction

The theme of “education and liberation” in Volume 5 of *Namibian Journal for Social Justice* is not only urgent and timely, but also historically grounded: it is a play on the aspirations voiced during the liberation struggle by a slogan of Namibia’s student movement, “education for liberation”.

Globally, and particularly in the Global South, education consistently functioned as a double-edged sword, being deployed as an instrument of colonial oppression, while simultaneously serving as a means of emancipation and resistance for the oppressed. Education offers a paradox: it can be a catalyst for liberation and serve as a transformative force for justice, dignity, and freedom, but it can also reproduce colonial hierarchies.

Social justice in education demands adherence to some key social justice principles, namely access, equity, participation, diversity, and respect for human rights. Namibia’s educational policy frameworks all declare deep commitment to these principles. However, many of the articles featured in this edition lay bare the gaps between policy discourse and practice

with the aims of stimulating discussion and engendering a review of current practices.

Across the globe, movements for decolonising education seek to challenge Eurocentric curricula, validate indigenous knowledge, and cultivate critical pedagogies (Smith, 2021). In this sense, education is becoming a praxis of liberation—an ongoing struggle to decolonise and transform oppressive structures and create spaces for dignity, justice, and freedom.

By weaving together case studies, theoretical reflections, and opinion pieces, this volume positions education as a transformative force. It calls on scholars, practitioners, communities and policymakers to recognise that education can oppress or liberate. Together, these contributions frame education in the context of power, identity, and justice, and not merely as the transmission of knowledge. This implies that liberation through education is lived experience in classrooms, communities, and historical memory.

Volume 5 also takes stock of how far Namibia has progressed in providing

quality education for all, and what challenges remain. The discussions cover all levels of education and skills development from early childhood development to tertiary education. The discussions also point to some of the structural factors beyond education per se that act as barriers severely curtailing access to equitable, quality education for all. A key question that emerges is whether, in a highly unequal society, it is possible to provide equitable quality education to all.

Education for Liberation: An Overview

Liberation can be defined as an emancipatory project and the actions taken to free individuals or groups from control by and dependence on external entities. Such control and dependence can manifest as restraint, confinement, restriction, repression, slavery, or domination. Liberation can occur through the passive attainment of legal rights or active and deliberative acts towards self-empowerment (Susen, 2015). Various educational philosophers, particularly those confronted with conditions of repression, applied these emancipatory ideals to education. The most notable is the Brazilian educational philosopher Paulo Freire, who operated under conditions of military dictatorship and saw education as a means for personal empowerment and societal transformation (Freire, 1970/2007).

Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* remains a consistent authority in understanding education as a political act for the oppressed and a pathway to liberation. From this standpoint, Freire (1970/2007) argues that education must move beyond what he calls the "banking model" of depositing information into passive learners. Instead, education should liberate and foster "*conscientização*"—critical consciousness that enables individuals to challenge oppressive systems. This critical pedagogic framework is particularly relevant in postcolonial and neoliberal contexts where education systems continue to bear the imprint of colonial and capitalist epistemologies that undermine democratic schooling (Giroux, 2011).

In Africa, Julius Nyerere's education and liberation philosophy combined the emancipatory ideals of education for liberation with utilitarianism to address the legacies of colonialism facing newly independent African states. For Nyerere, education should be a platform for the transition from socioeconomic dependency to economic independence and self-reliance. As such, education should facilitate the acquisition of problem-solving and critical-thinking skills, a community-oriented ethos, vocational skills, and practical skills to address the problems of underdevelopment caused by colonialism (Okanda, 2024).

During the liberation struggle in South Africa, education was an important site of resistance, and educational boycotts were common ways of registering dissent with the apartheid system. In some quarters, the slogan “liberation before education” emerged. Neville Alexander (1990) explored the paradoxical relationship between education and liberation. On the one hand, education is a means through which the system of racial capitalism reproduced itself, while on the other, students needed the skills education offered for their own social reproduction/ survival within the existing social order. He therefore opposed suicidal tactics that would sacrifice the education of an entire generation for political ends. Instead, he argued that education could be transformed into a weapon to build critical consciousness that could be used to challenge the oppressive system. He proposed an alternative education that draws on Freire’s visions and critical pedagogy methods.

Education for Liberation in Namibia: Historical Context

Namibia has a long history of student involvement in emancipatory politics. Educational issues and the student movement had catalytic effects on the broader anticolonial and national liberation struggle. As far back as 1921, the Universal Negro Improvement

Association (UNIA), a Pan-African cultural organisation founded by Marcus Garvey, with the rallying slogan “Africa for Africans” raised awareness about colonialism, aiming to reclaim and free the homeland from white domination. The UNIA operated in the central and southern parts of Namibia. In 1923, the Otjiserandu (Red Band Organisation) organised mainly among Ovaherero groups to build a mutual aid society that protested the lack of educational opportunities.

In opposition to apartheid education in 1948, Nama leaders from the African Methodist Episcopal Church commenced with the formation of independent schools. The African Improvement Society, a Namibian offshoot of UNIA, also concerned itself with educational and cultural opportunities for indigenous Africans. During the 1940s, the Damara community of Windhoek formed Fakkell (Torch), an organisation that also protested poor educational opportunities and forced removals (Katjavivi, 1988).

In 1952, the South West Africa Student Body was formed by Namibian students in South Africa. They petitioned the UN regarding the continued South African control over Namibia. In 1957, Namibian students in South Africa joined forces with Namibian migrant workers in South Africa to form the Ovamboland

People's Congress (OPC) in Cape Town (Becker, 2017; Leys & Saul, 1995). Key figures in the OPC were Andimba Herman Toivo Ya Toivo, Emil Appolus, Fanuel Kozonguizi, Andreas Shipanga, Maxton Joseph Mutonguleme, Jacob Kuhangua, Solomon Mifima, Otilie Schimming Abrahams, and Kenneth Abrahams. The OPC's aim was to fight for the rights of migrant workers (South African History Online, 2013). In 1958, the short-lived South West Africa Progressive Association was formed. Although it collapsed a year later, it laid the foundation for the formation of the South West African National Union (SWANU), a Namibian resistance movement (Maseko, 1995).

During the 1970s, under the auspice of the SWAPO Youth League (SYL) and the Namibian Black Students Organisation (NABSO), students raised political consciousness across the country. SYL organised across ethnic divides and supported the major workers' strike of 1971. In 1972, students aligned to SYL supported a boycott of Ovamboland elections (Leys & Saul, 1995). In 1972 a Christian students conference in Okahandja resolved to set up a new student movement that straddled ethnic divides. This led to the eventual formation of NABSO in 1975. In 1975, NABSO rejected the Turnhalle Conference as a racist South African hoax. They linked workers' and students' struggles to the broader

national liberation struggle. With the 1976 student uprisings in South Africa, NABSO organised a school boycott against the use of Afrikaans in schools. Schools across the country took part in the boycott (Maseko, 1995; Williams, 2004; Leys & Saul, 1995).

In 1982 Namibian students at the University of Fort Hare in South Africa mooted the idea of a new Namibian student movement. The Namibian National Students Organisation (NANSO) was launched at Döbra in 1984 as a non-racial, non-partisan, unaffiliated and independent student movement. NANSO linked educational struggles to the broader national liberation struggle, and embraced Freirian philosophy (hence its slogan "education for liberation") (Leys & Saul, 1995). In his case study "The Quest for Education for Liberation: The Case of the Namibia National Students Organisation", Ndumba Kamwanyah illustrates how NANSO represented a strand of the broader liberation movement. NANSO was formed in 1984 to primarily oppose Bantu Education. However, its political programme demonstrated a commitment to resisting apartheid and colonial occupation. This came on the heels of the implementation of AG8 (Administrator General's Proclamation 8) of 1980 that incorporated education into the broader Bantustan policy of racial and ethnic fragmentation (Cohen, 1994).

It also came at the time when many young Namibians were forcibly conscripted into the South West African Territorial Force (an auxiliary arm of the occupying South African Defence Force) which was set up to oppose the People's Liberation Army of Namibia (Nöthling, 1989).

Artists were central to building critical consciousness and resistance to colonialism and apartheid in Namibia. In his article "Critical Pedagogies in Anti-Colonial Cultural Work: Oudano as Praxis", Nashilongwe-shipwe Mushaandja explores the nexus between the arts and critical pedagogy. He specifically looks at cultural processes as transformative education. His archival research features art works of influential Namibian artists like John Muafangejo. Through the art works, he interprets the agency of anticolonial resistance for decolonial thinking.

There were strong linkages between the Namibian and South African liberation movements. Due to a lack of tertiary educational opportunities in occupied Namibia, many had to pursue tertiary studies in South Africa, where they joined resistance politics. In "A Case Study of Radical Pedagogy in Practice: The South African Committee for Higher Education (SACHED) and Regional Liberation Networks (1959–1994)", Tammy-Lee Lakay illustrates how education for liberation was part

of the liberation discourse, and how the South African Committee for Higher Education (SACHED) gave concrete expression to the concept of education for liberation through praxis, featuring the programmes through which it implemented its critical pedagogy and the participation of Namibian students in some of them.

Education for All in Namibia: Staking Stock

"Education is a right, not a privilege" was a slogan of the student movement during the liberation struggle. Since then, Namibia has established the legal right to education. This was based on various international human rights instruments, most notably Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which declares that everyone has the right to free and compulsory basic education (United Nations, 2015). Article 20 of the Namibian Constitution affirms this right to education for all, as well as free, compulsory education up to the age of 16 (Government of the Republic of Namibia [GRN], 2016). This right is further consolidated by the Basic Education Act of 2020 (GRN, 2020).

There is a need to take stock of how far education has lived up to the emancipatory ideals of Namibia's independence struggle, and what challenges still confront education in the country. At independence, Namibia

was faced with a fragmented, racist and unequal educational system. This was the legacy of German colonial racism, and South African colonial racism and apartheid. Overcoming this legacy has proven to be a monumental task—indeed, one that has not yet been fully achieved. The question arises: Can there be equitable access to education in the structural context of extreme levels of poverty and inequality? Despite the introduction of numerous laws and policies to increase equitable access to education and relatively high budgetary allocations to education, as well as the introduction of free, compulsory basic education, access to quality education remains unequal and, for many, elusive. The colonial-apartheid deficits continue to impact educational achievement. Massification in access has overstretched resources, schools are overcrowded, and there are teacher shortages and a lack of basic services and learning materials; education, though inadequate, may itself be free, but many cannot afford the indirect costs of education like transport and uniforms (Shikoha et al., 2023).

In this volume of *Namibian Journal for Social Justice*, two articles explain the current challenges facing education in Namibia. In their article, “Challenges that Outsmart the Transformation Agenda: An Analysis of Why Certain Challenges Persist in the Namibian Education System Despite Several Reforms”,

John Nyambe, Marius Kudumo and Ellison Tjirera investigate the causal factors that impede educational transformation in Namibia, identifying three levels of such factors. They argue that ontologically, the neoliberal agenda is the underpinning causal force in the lack of transformation. This ontological force is often ignored, and impediments are often analysed at the surface or empirical level. There is therefore a need to increase the depth of perspective beyond surface level observations in order to come to terms with the challenges that outsmart educational reform in Namibia.

In her article “Social Justice and Education in Namibia: From Theory to Practice”, Lucy Edwards-Jauch looks at how social justice in education has manifested in Namibia. She addresses the theoretical and global policy discourses that influenced Namibian educational policy discourse and implementation. She further identifies the conditions and principles from which social justice in Namibian education can be assessed, namely redistributive justice, relational justice, and epistemological justice. She assesses these conditions through the key social justice principles of access, equity, participation, diversity, and human rights, and concludes that there is a gap between Namibia’s policy discourse, which embraces social justice, and how these policies are translated into practice.

In a case titled “Education for All? Unpacking Social Justice and Grassroots Policy Implementation: A Case Study of the Otjituuo Settlement”, Tjipura Tjipura points out that free and compulsory basic education that ensures equitable, inclusive, quality lifelong learning, as mandated by the Basic Education Act (3 of 2020), is not being realised. His study reveals deep-seated systemic barriers that challenge the essence of social justice, particularly epistemological justice, including pedagogical silencing and the enforcement of the academic hierarchy. It is claimed that lower-performing students do not have the right to speak, and are subject to systemic resource depletion with severe shortages of textbooks, the absence of information and communication technology, and deteriorating infrastructure.

Epistemic Justice: Colonial Legacies and Decolonising Education

Colonialism often led to the erasure of indigenous knowledge and cultural systems, and has also left enduring epistemological legacies. Universities and other educational institutions remain sites of epistemological violence where indigenous African knowledge is marginalised as inferior, and epistemic diversity of African knowledge systems remain suppressed. With the emergence of decoloniality debates, there have been louder calls for epistemic justice

in curriculum development to validate indigenous African knowledge systems (Woldegiorgis, 2025).

In Namibia, the colonial legacy of education is evident in the privileging of Eurocentric knowledge systems and the marginalisation of indigenous epistemologies (Matemba & Lilemba, 2015; Zulu & Lumadi, 2025). Therefore, education in independent Namibia (both public and private) stands in stark juxtaposition to Neville Alexander’s contention that education for a new humanism ought to dismantle hegemonic structures and affirm the dignity of marginalised communities (Alexander, 2001). Against this background, this volume responds to that call to disrupt colonial and neoliberal pedagogies in Namibia and elsewhere. By doing so, this volume is situating education as a central battleground in the struggle for justice, human dignity, and liberation.

Articulating the theme of this volume, the articles in this issue offer concrete illustrations of the ways in which education intersects with liberation. In “Beyond Colonialities: Leveraging Ubuntu for Transformative Higher Education in Namibia”, the authors Bruno Venditto and Adalbertus Kamanzi propose the Ubuntu philosophy, with its emphasis on relationality and communal values, to serve as a counter-hegemonic framework in higher education. As Letseka (2011) contends,

Ubuntu challenges the individualism and competitiveness embedded in colonial and neoliberal models of education, and in their stead offers a vision of education rooted in solidarity and collective flourishing.

In their contribution “Epistemic Destruction and Indigenous Knowledge Loss During the OvaHerero/Nama Genocide (1904–1908): A Case study of OvaHerero Epistemicide”, Kahuhu Alphons Koruhama and Joyce Muzengua examine the systematic erasure of indigenous knowledge by colonial violence. This contribution underscores the historical trauma that continues to shape educational institutions in Namibia and other societies that have experienced colonial violence. Therefore, the article answers Gewald’s calls to urgently reclaim indigenous epistemologies as part of the broader project of liberation (Gewald, 1999).

Fares Amweenye, Sakaria Ipinge and Elizabeth Ngololo’s article, “Epistemological Access at the Institutions of Teacher Education” focuses on structural barriers within institutions of teacher education. The authors pose a critical question about whose knowledge is legitimised, and who gains access to epistemological resources. From this standpoint, epistemological access is not simply about physical entry into institutions, but about meaningful engagement

with knowledge that affirms learners’ identities and contexts (Morrow, 2009).

There is a misalignment between expenditure on tertiary education and early childhood development (ECD). A lack of school readiness accounts for high rates of repetition (United Nations Children’s Fund, 2024). This is illustrated by significant learning poverty (Steenkamp, 2025). ECD access is crucial for cognitive development and equity as it provides the basis for epistemological access. In a case study, “Decolonising Early Childhood Development in Informal Settlements: A Case Study of New Elementary Namibia and the Implementation of the Sixth National Development Plan”, Kevin Wessels illustrates how community-based ECD centres in informal settlements try to plug the gaps in state-funded provision. New Elementary Namibia offers decolonised learning that confers dignity and recognises indigenous knowledge. Despite this, learners face multiple resource constraints, including overcrowded classrooms, underqualified teachers, limited stipends, food insecurity, and inadequate infrastructure.

With reference to theological education, Emma Nangolo’s article “The Relevance of Theological Education in Contemporary Namibia: A Contextual Analysis of the United Lutheran Theological Seminary–Paulinum” points

to the continued epistemological dominance of Western philosophical and knowledge systems in theological education in Namibia. Her case study of the United Lutheran Theological Seminary – Paulinum’s Bachelor and Diploma programmes identifies the gaps in the curriculum that, if filled, would make it relevant to the Namibian historical, social and theological context. She demonstrates that due to the lack of a decolonised curriculum, the theological educational programme overlooks key social justice issues facing Namibian society, including gender dynamics, poverty and unemployment, and the need for land reform and LGBTQ inclusion. She further argues that Namibia requires a theological education that builds theological depth, spirituality, contextual understanding and pastoral competence.

Access, Diversity and Inclusion

Namibia has adopted “education for all” and policies on inclusive education affirm Namibia’s commitment to access for all, inclusion, and diversity (GRN, 1992, 2013). The translation of policy discourse into practice has been a challenge, as several articles in this volume illustrate. In their article “A Case Study of Parenting a Neurodivergent Child Juxtaposed Against the Provisions of the Sector Policy on Inclusive Education in Namibia”, Immaculate Mogotsi

and Christel Menette critically reflect on persistent gaps between policy commitments and the lived realities of educational access for neurodivergent learners. Their autoethnographic case study explores the difficulties of meaningful access to education from the perspective of a parent of a neurodivergent child. They point to institutional weaknesses that fail neurodivergent children, and call for systemic reform, collaborative practice, and the deliberate translation of inclusive education policies into classroom-level action.

Namibia has achieved success in ensuring access to education for the girl child, with high female enrolment rates in primary, secondary and tertiary education. There is generally equal enrolment of males and females in all school grades (GRN, 2025), while females constitute 64.7% of enrolment at tertiary education institutions (Namibia Council for Higher Education [NCHE], 2023). Phiona Nandu’s case study “Bridging the Gender Gap in Education in Zambezi Region, Namibia” illustrates how, despite these statistics, very specific gender issues, like learner pregnancies and menstruation, affect female education. She also points out how the lack of facilities and resources compound barriers to education for girls.

Access to higher education has increased substantially, and between

2019 and 2023 enrolment at Namibian tertiary institutions jumped from 13,000 to 80,226 (NCHE, 2023). With the recent introduction of subsidised higher education, one can assume that this massification will continue, and with it bring about an improvement in Namibia's skills base. In his opinion piece "Dissecting the Subsidised Funding Model in Namibia 2026: Free Registration and the Question of Sustainable Access to Higher Education", Benhard Kavau embraces subsidised fee-free higher education, but also asks what will happen to additional costs associated with higher education.

Adult and Non-Formal Education

Besides the traditional literacy and vocational training for income generation, there are additional social justice dimensions to adult education. Beyond the capabilities to sustain livelihoods, adult education should also promote active citizenship and enable the assertion of rights (Milana & Tarozzi, 2021). In this volume, we have two short case studies of adult education programmes that attempt to deepen democracy, advance active citizenship, and enhance knowledge and skills for the assertion of rights.

In his case study "Political Worker Education in Namibia: The Case of the Labour Diploma Course", Herbert

Jauch reflects on the Namibia National Union of Namibian Workers-linked worker education programme run by the Labour Resource and Research Institute (LaRRI). The focus of this programme was to build the internal capacity of trade unions to engage with organisational and broader policy challenges. LaRRI's labour diploma course targeted trade unionists to enhance their capacity to improve organisational development and their participation in policy discourse.

In the promotion of social justice, there is a need for education on the basic principles and dimensions of social justice. In an article that focuses social justice education for social justice activists, Herbert Jauch and Nafimane Hamukoshi, in "Contributing towards Social Justice in Namibia? The Activist School of the Economic and Social Justice Trust", explain the purpose, curriculum content and results of the Economic and Social Justice Trust's activist school. It provides insights into the wide spectrum of social justice concerns confronting Namibia and the world, like inequality, unemployment and poverty; decent housing and human rights; the struggle for a living wage; climate justice, the ecological crisis; the political economy; and social protection and gender justice. Their study reaffirms the importance of capacity-building for activism for social justice.

Research Review: Namibia State of Skills Demand and Supply Report

Educational attainment and outcomes are influenced by a number of structural and systemic challenges outside of the classroom. Christophina Ainima's article "Review of the Namibia State of Skills Demand and Supply Report" reveals some misalignments in the 2025 report that was commissioned by the Namibia Investment Promotion Development Board. The Namibian labour force faces some critical challenges. Firstly, there are high unemployment rates combined with critical skills shortages in key productive and technology-intensive sectors. Secondly, there is very little curriculum coordination between industry and educational institutions. Thirdly, the quality of education is often poor, with low educational attainment at secondary school level which precludes entry into some key fields of study. Beyond the systemic imbalances, the review points to broader, often unacknowledged structural factors that impact skills development. These include unequal access to cultural and financial resources that enable completion of resource intensive study pathways beyond formal enrolment. The skills deficit thesis is often invoked to explain high unemployment in Namibia, but the review also points to the structural nature of unemployment and the limited labour market absorption capacity.

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