

An exploration of automatic learner promotion at three schools in Namibia: Implications for quality education



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DECLARATION

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ABSTRACT

The study aimed to explore the implications of the automatic learner promotion (ALP) policy on the quality of education at three primary schools in the Erongo region of Namibia. The study employed a qualitative, phenomenological case study design. The objectives of the study were as follows: to gain insights into teachers' understanding and implementation of the ALP policy; to ascertain the effects of ALP on learners and teachers, and hence, learning and teaching; and to determine the implications of the ALP policy on the quality education at the three schools.

The data for this study was constructed from a purposively selected sample of six teachers, six heads of department and three school principals drawn from three state primary schools. In addition to conducting semi-structured interviews with a total of fifteen participants, the 'National Promotion Policy Guide for Junior and Senior Primary School Phase' (National Institute for Educational Development (NIED)) (2015) was analysed.

The study found that only one of the three primary schools implemented the policy as required and stipulated in the 'National Promotion Policy Guide for Junior and Senior Primary School Phase' (NIED, 2015). Although the teachers and principals shared a common conceptual understanding of the policy, they had different understandings of how to implement it or whether to implement it at all. They also differed in terms of who was responsible for implementing the policy and the additional support required by learners who had been automatically promoted.

Nevertheless, there seemed to be agreement that the negatives of ALP outweighed the positives. This perception was informed by several key factors, which included a lack of support from the Ministry of Education; unpreparedness and unwillingness by teachers to provide the extra support required by learners who had been automatically promoted; and the tensions between learners who had met the minimum grade requirements and those who had not but were promoted regardless. The study found that most participants viewed the ALP practice as compromising the education quality. Instead of assisting learners who struggled academically, such learners continued to struggle in the next grade. Their lack of competencies in their previous grade meant they were continually compromised and disadvantaged in acquiring new

competencies. The difficulties experienced by these learners were compounded by a lack of interest, support, and motivation from teachers.

The study recommends extra support to the teachers to eliminate the challenges they face. Policymakers are encouraged to consult teachers when developing the policies and conduct workshops sharing the meaning and significance of the policy. Policymakers are also encouraged to implement mechanisms that encourage all schools to implement national policies. The study encourages more parental involvement in the implementation of the ALP policy.

Keywords: Automatic learner promotion (ALP); quality education; grade retention; learning support programme and the 'National Promotion Policy Guide for Junior and Senior Primary School Phase'.

OPSOMMING

Die doel van die studie was om die implikasie van die outomatiese leerderbevorderingsbeleid op die gehalte van onderwys by drie laerskole in die Erongo-streek van Namibië te ondersoek. Die kwalitatiewe navorsingstudie het 'n fenomenologiese gevallestudieontwerp gehandhaaf. Die doelwitte van die studie was soos volg: om insigte in onderwysers se begrip en implementering van die beleid te kry; om die uitwerking van die beleid op leerders en onderwysers en by implikasie, leer en onderrig vas te stel; en om die implikasies van die beleid op die gehalte van onderwys by die drie skole te bepaal.

Die data vir hierdie studie is verkry van 'n doelgerigte steekproef van ses onderwysers, ses departementshoofde en drie skoolhoofde uit drie staatskole. Benewens die uitvoer van semi-gestruktureerde onderhoude met vyftien deelnemers, is die nasionale beleid, die 'National Promotion Policy Guide for Junior and Senior Primary School Phase' (Nasionale Instituut vir Opvoedkundige Ontwikkeling (NIOO), 2015) ontleed.

Die studie het bevind dat slegs een van die drie laerskole die beleid geïmplementeer het soos vereis en bepaal in die nasionale leerderbevorderingsbeleid (NIOO, 2015). Alhoewel die onderwysers en skoolhoofde 'n gemeenskaplike konseptuele begrip van die beleid gedeel het, het hulle verskil in hul begrip van hoe om dit te implementeer, en of dit enigsins geïmplementeer moet word. Hulle het ook verskil in terme van wie verantwoordelik is vir die implementering daarvan en die bykomende ondersteuning wat outomaties-bevorderde leerders vereis.

Daar blyk ooreenstemmende persepsie te wees dat die negatiewe aspekte van die nasionale leerderbevorderingsbeleid die positiewe aspekte daarvan oorskadu. Hierdie persepsie is deur verskeie sleutelfaktore bepaal en sluit die volgende in: 'n gebrek aan ondersteuning van die Minister van Onderwys; 'n onvoorbereidheid en onwilligheid deur onderwysers om die ekstra ondersteuning te bied wat outomaties-bevorderde leerders vereis; en die spanning tussen leerders wat aan die minimum graadvereistes voldoen het en diegene wat nie daaraan voldoen het nie, maar nietemin bevorder is. Die studie het bevind dat die meerderheid deelnemers die praktyk van outomatiese leerderbevordering as 'n kompromie van kwaliteit onderwys beskou het. In plaas daarvan om leerders by te staan wat akademies gesukkel het, het leerders ook in die volgende

graad aanhou sukkel. Hul gebrek aan die nodige bevoegdihede vir hul vorige graad, het beteken dat hulle voortdurend blootgestel en benadeel is in die proses om nuwe bevoegdighede te ontwikkel. Die probleme wat hierdie leerders ervaar het, is vererger deur 'n gebrek aan belangstelling, ondersteuning en motivering van onderwysers.

Die studie beveel aan dat onderwysers ekstra ondersteuning ontvang om die uitdagings wat hulle met outomaties-bevorderde leerders ervaar, uit te skakel. Beleidmakers word aangemoedig om onderwysers te raadpleeg wanneer hulle beleide ontwikkel, en werkswinkels aan te bied wat die betekenis en implikasies van die beleid meedeel. Beleidmakers word ook aangemoedig om meganismes in plek te sit wat alle skole aanmoedig om nasionale beleide te implementeer. Die studie moedig aan dat ouers meer betrokke is by die implementering van die outomatiese leerderbevorderingsbeleid.

Slutelwoorde: Outomatiese leerderbevordering; kwaliteit onderrig; kwaliteit onderwys; graadretensie; leerderondersteuningsprogramme; die nasionale bevorderingbeleidsgids vir junior en senior laerskoolfase.

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1.1: Distribution of private and government/public schools in the Erongo region.....	6
Table 4.1: Biographical data of the participants.....	51
Table 4.2: Major and minor themes.....	53
Table 4.3: Difference between the learner promoted on ALP and those promoted on merit.....	67
Table 5.1: Differences between learners promoted on ALP and those promoted on merit.....	90

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1.1 : The map of the Erongo region	5
Figure 3.1 : The map of Erongo region courtesy of Alchetron free Social Encyclopedia for the World	41

LIST OF ADDENDA

Addendum A: Consent to participate in research	113
Addendum B: Research permission from the Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture	118
Addendum C: Interview schedule for teachers, HODs and principals	119
Addendum D: Notice of approval	122

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Declaration	ii
Abstract	ii
Opsomming	iv
List of tables	vi
List of Addenda	vii
Abbreviations and acronyms	xii
Chapter 1: Overview of the study	1
1.1 Introduction	1
1.2 Background of the study	1
1.3 Motivation/rationale for the study	3
1.4 Research problem	4
1.5 Research context	4
1.6 Research objectives	8
1.7 Research questions	9
1.8 Research methodology	9
1.8.1 Document analysis	10
1.8.2 Semi-structured interviews	11
1.8.3 Sampling	11
1.8.4 Ethical considerations	12
1.9 Significance of the study	13
1.10 Chapter outlines	14
1.11 Chapter summary	15
Chapter 2: Literature review	17
2.1 Introduction	17
2.2 Automatic learner promotion (ALP)	17
2.3 ALP versus grade retention	18
2.3.1 Positive effects of grade retention:	18
2.4 ALP as a global practice	19
2.5 ALP in the Namibian context	23
2.6 Teachers' attitude towards ALP	24

2.6.1	ALP policy formulation	26
2.6.2	Automatic learner promotion policy in Namibia education	27
2.7	The implications of ALP on the quality of education	30
2.8	Conceptual framework: Quality education	32
2.9	Chapter summary	34
Chapter 3:	Research design and methodology	35
3.1	Introduction	35
3.2	Statement of the research question	35
3.3	Research design	35
3.4	Case study as a research method	36
3.4.1	Semi-structured interviews	37
3.4.2	Document analysis	38
3.5	Research context	39
3.6	Population and sampling	44
3.7	Credibility and reliability of data	45
3.8	Data analysis and interpretation	46
3.9.1	Stage 1: Describing	46
3.9.2	Stage 2: Emergence of findings	46
3.9.3	Step 3: Comparing	46
3.10	Ethical considerations	47
3.10.1	Informed consent	47
3.10.2	Confidentiality	48
3.11	Limitations of the study	48
3.13	Chapter summary	48
Chapter 4:		
Data presentation		50
4.1	Introduction	50
4.2	Biographical data of the participants	50
4.3	Semi-structured interviews	52
4.3.1	Implementation of ALP policy in schools	53

4.3.2. The effects of automatic learner promotion on the learners and teachers	62
4.3.3 Effects of ALP on the learners	64
4.3.4 Effects of ALP on the teachers	65
4.3.5 Major differences between learners automatically promoted and those promoted on merit	67
4.3.6 ALP as a suitable alternative to grade repetition	68
4.3.7 The implications of automatic learner promotion on quality education	70
4.4 Chapter summary	72
Chapter 5:	
Analysis of findings	74
5.1 Introduction	74
5.2 Analysis of the ALP policy	74
5.2.1 Introduction	74
5.2.2 What a policy is? Why and how problems arise in the policy implementation	75
5.2.3 What the policy does and its implications on ALP	76
5.2.4 Analysis of the ALP policy	78
5.3 Interviews	81
5.3.1 The implementation of ALP in schools	81
5.3.2 Teachers' understanding of learner promotion	81
5.3.3 The use of ALP in schools	81
5.3.4 The decision to promote the learners	82
5.3.5 Prevalence of ALP use in schools	84
5.3.6 Support programmes for automatically promoted learners	85
5.3.7 The effects of automatic learner promotion on the learners and teacher	86
5.3.8 The implications of ALP on educational quality	91
5.9 Chapter summary	93
Chapter 6: Conclusion	95
6.1 Introduction	95
6.2 Summary of main findings	95
6.3 Implications of the ALP on quality education in Namibia	98

6.4	Contribution and significance of the study	99
6.5	Recommendations emerging from the study	101
6.6	Recommendations for future studies	101
6.7	Conclusion	102
	References	104
	Addendum A: Consent to participate in research	112
	Addendum B: Research permission from the Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture ...	118
	Addendum C: Interview schedule for teachers, HODs and principals	119
	Addendum D: Notice of approval	122

ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

ALP	automatic learner promotion
ASCD	Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development
B. Ed	Bachelor of Education
BETD	Basic Education Teaching Diploma
COVID-19	Corona Virus Diseases discovered in 2019
COE	College of Education
ED	executive director
EFA	education for all
EI	education international
HIV/AIDs	Human Immunodeficiency Virus/ Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome
ICT	information communication technology
IOE	inspector of education
MoEAC	Ministry of Education Arts Culture
MEd	Master's degree
NIED	National Institute for Educational Development
NSA	Namibian Statistical Agency
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SACMEQ	The Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Education
SU	Stellenbosch University
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UPE	universal primary education
UNDP	United Nations Development Programmes
UNAM	University of Namibia
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation

Chapter 1:

Overview of the study

1.1 Introduction

Primary education forms the foundation for learning that develops children's ability to read, write, comprehend numeracy, and foster good communication skills. Primary education also develops an individual emotionally, spiritually, mentally and physically (Etor, Mbon & Ekanem, 2013). Researchers have proven that primary education promotes the achievement of seven of the eight millennium development goals, namely: poverty reduction, universal primary education, gender equality, reproductive health and lower maternal mortality, HIV/AIDS prevalence and infant and child mortality (World Bank, 2002:11). Primary education is the foundation for high-quality primary and higher education, and the subsequent attainment of professions such as engineers, doctors, teachers, lawyers and any other high professional skills that every country would require, irrespective of its demographic, economic situation or geographical location (Etor, Mbon & Ekanem, 2013).

With the above in mind, Namibia has put in place policies that would support and advance learners in completing their education. This includes the 'Sector Policy on Inclusive Education', which was implemented in 2013, and the 'Universal Education Policy' (UPE) implemented in 2015 (Ministry of Education [MoE], 2013). The chapter, therefore, paves the way towards exploring the policies of automatic promotion of learners as a means to quality education. This chapter begins by sketching the study's background and context and continues by providing an overview of the research rationale or motivation, the research problem, significance of the study, the research design and methodology, as well as delimitations and ethical considerations.

1.2 Background of the study

Automatic promotion refers to the practice of allowing learners to progress from one grade to the next irrespective of their academic performance (Okunit, 2015:3). According to Okunit (2015:3), automatic promotion is practised in both developed and developing countries. The adoption and

implementation of this policy in developed countries are to respond to the growing evidence of the negative effects of retention on the learners' self-esteem. In contrast, in the developing countries, it was introduced to make education accessible after the attainment of political independence in African countries as well as Namibia (Chohan & Qadir, 2011:2). Article 2 of the Constitution of the Republic of Namibia declares that every child has a right to education. This means that all children under the age of sixteen, irrespective of race, colour, or creed, have the right to education (The Namibian Constitution, 2013:12). However, certain children may find themselves in school even though they are beyond sixteen. This may be attributed to several factors, such as repeating a grade or starting primary school at a very late age. This struggle is notable at grade 10 level, where the national statistics over the past five-year period (2014–2018) fluctuate between 53% and 54%. (New Era Newspaper, 2015; 2018). Hence, ALP is indeed affecting the provision of quality education in Namibia.

Research reveals that grade retention has a harmful psychological implications and other negative effects, such as lower self-esteem and motivation, a prolonging of the actual school completion time and wasting time to engage productively in the labour market (Aron & Itana, 2015; SACMEQ III report, 2007). In addition, Chohan and Qadir (2011) also indicated that grade retention results in a high failure rate, overcrowding and high dropout rate. The above factors contribute to implementing automatic promotion in all public schools. The ALP is a policy guide with a new, revised curriculum, which was implemented in 2015, replacing all the previous circulars on promoting learners in the primary school phase (Ministry of Education, 2015). Since the implementation of the ALP, there have been mixed reactions as to how ALP impacts the learners' performance and the reasons for the high failure rate. New Era (2015) reported that ALP had proven to be a dismal failure that must be stopped for the betterment of the learners and the whole education system. In another study by Schombe, Nambira, Tjipueya and Kapenda (2011), it was found that most learners who were automatically promoted to the next grade without attaining some competencies failed at the exit points of grades 10 and 12 at that time. The report also noted that making a learner repeat a grade or phase slightly impacts learners' performance when compared to transferring them to the next grade. The debates on the implications of ALP prompted investigations to find out how the automatic promotion of learners affected the provision of quality education in Namibia.

As a teacher working in the Erongo region, I believe that the ALP policy affects many education stakeholders, especially in decision-making. I also believe ALP has made teachers overburdened and burnt out due to overcrowding. Furthermore, it seems as if ALP creates little or no relief for teachers because of learners needing extra support or remedial activities to catch up with others in the higher grade. This research study is interested in gaining insights, firstly, into how teachers use the ALP policy; secondly, the effects of ALP on learners' academic performance; and thirdly, the implication of ALP on quality education in Namibian schools. The research was carried out in three primary schools in the Erongo region, Namibia.

1.3 Motivation/rationale for the study

As a current junior secondary school teacher, I am concerned about the ALP policy in Namibia, which promotes learners to the next grade without meeting the prerequisite knowledge set for a particular grade. My experience as a teacher is that the syllabus is built on acquiring and building knowledge as learners progress from one level to the next. The focus of the study was to identify and explore the effects of ALP on quality education and how teachers manage and respond to the policy of automatic promotion. My passion is driven by the fact that the application of automatic promotion will only work for learners whose achievements are not up to standard, and this has created problems where learners are automatically promoted to the next level after failing to grasp the concepts of a particular grade or level. In addition, as a teacher, I have had experiences with learners that struggle to master concepts of a specific grade, becoming demotivated and discouraged to work hard. Such students are being promoted to the next grade even if they are not competent to progress.

It is of great concern that learners are progressing to the next grade without sufficient skills to comprehend the content of the next grade level. Hence, the focus of my study was to explore the implications of ALP on the quality of education. The study's primary goal was to explore how the teachers manage and respond to the policy of automatic promotion. My concern is that the ALP policy is being implemented without due consideration for the automatic promotion criteria or assurance of quality education. A familiar scenario involved learners who had failed the grade minimum competencies, moving on to the next grade with no prescribed mechanisms to support the learners or the teachers to ensure the quality of the education is maintained or improved. Not

all learners recover when they are promoted to the next grade, which they do not qualify for. In addition, as a teacher, I have had experiences with learners who struggle to master concepts of a specific grade. I have witnessed some of them becoming demotivated and discouraged from working hard. I believe there are serious consequences for both learners and teachers. Therefore, there are necessary questions that need to be asked about the practices of the ALP policy in Namibia and its implications for quality education.

1.4 Research problem

Most Namibian public primary schools face the challenges of high-grade repetition, overcrowding and high dropout rates. To resolve these challenges, the ministry of education decided to introduce ALP policy, which enables the automatic promotion of primary school learners to the next grade without achieving the required basic competencies of the grade. Specifically, learners who fail for the second time in a phase cannot be held back again (National Promotion Policy Guide, 2015). In terms of this policy, learners have to be promoted to the next grade without meeting the minimum academic criteria of their existing grade. The ALP policy is criticised for promoting learners who have failed to meet the required competencies of a particular grade. Many teachers maintain that it compromises the provision of quality education in the Namibian public primary school education system. Thus, this research study was interested in gaining insights into, firstly, how teachers use the ALP policy; secondly, the effects of ALP on the academic performance of learners; and thirdly, the implication of ALP on the provision of quality education in Namibia.

1.5 Research context

The study was carried out in the Erongo region, located in the Western geopolitical zone of Namibia. The Erongo region is one of Namibia's fourteen political regions with a shoreline of the Atlantic Ocean. Erongo region, on its inland borders, is surrounded by the Kunene Region in the North, Otjozondjupa Region in the East, Khomas Region in the Southwest and Hardap Region in the South. According to the Namibia Statistical Agency (NSA, 2014), the region was named after the famous Erongo mountain range stretching across the plains between the towns of Omaruru and Karibib.

Figure 1.1: The map of the Erongo region

The study was focused on the Erongo region because this is the region I work in as a teacher. It was more convenient to conduct the research in a familiar region. Regarding education administration, the Erongo region is divided into three circuits: Swakopmund, Walvis Bay and Omaruru. The regional head office is located in the regional capital, Swakopmund. Each circuit consists of public and a few privately-owned schools. Table 1 shows the distribution of government and private schools in each circuit according to the 15th day regional statistics of the year 2021 (MoEAC, 2021)

Table 1.1: Distribution of private and government/public schools in the Erongo region

	Omaruru circuit	Swakopmund circuit	Walvis Bay circuit	Total
Private schools	6	9	10	25
Government schools	24	16	15	55
TOTAL	30	25	25	80

There are 80 schools in the Erongo region, of which 50 are primary schools. The distribution of primary schools is as follows: Swakopmund circuit, twenty-five schools (nine are private, 16 are public), Walvis Bay circuit, twenty-five schools (ten are private and 15 are public schools), and Omaruru circuit has thirty schools (six private schools and twenty-four public schools). The data was gathered from three conveniently selected primary public schools, schools A, B and C, one from each circuit.

The study focused on public schools because they constitute the majority of the primary schools in the region. For public schools, it is mandatory to follow all the ministerial policies and regulations as published by the Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture. The policies include the ALP policy. Public schools also have a well-defined and policy-regulated administrative structure that the Regional Education Director at the head office and IOE at the circuits monitor. The school's supervision and administration are done by the school principals and HODs, who also ensure that the policies are implemented appropriately.

In this study, the three schools identified as schools A, B and C are located in middle- and low-income communities within urban areas. Although most parents are employed, their income is not high enough to adequately provide for their families. Most learners attend primary schools as part of universally free primary education. Most of the schools in the region are within walking distance of communities, although a few travels by taxis, buses or private vehicles to school. However, like in every urban society, some children do not go to school, and some even live on the street. All public schools in Namibia involve parents in the governance and decision-making process by allowing parents to elect the school board members. School boards are committees, comprising a majority representation of parents. Generally, the communities perceive the three selected schools, as catering for the less privileged community members who cannot afford to send their children to private schools.

Schools A and B are urban primary schools in the towns of Karibib and Swakopmund, while school C is a boarding school located in an informal settlement about 74km outside Walvis Bay. All three schools have running water, electricity, internet, telephone and good road accessibility. In terms of enrolment, school A has 956 learners and 53 teachers; school B has 622 learners and 38 teachers, and school C has 648 learners and 41 teachers.

A brief description of the three schools and the characteristics of their surrounding communities are given below:

School A is located in the informal settlement of Karibib. Most of the parents of learners who attend school A are self-employed, unemployed or occupying a very low-income job. This informal settlement is very small, so most of the learners (95%) walk to and from school daily. Water availability and electricity provision in the settlement are inadequate, as some households prepare food outside. However, regardless of the community's poor living standard, the school is well-resourced with all the essential school necessities. The primary school has grades 1 to 7. Although English is the medium of instruction, some languages are used as first languages, such as Oshindonga, Otjiherero, Khoekhoegowab and Afrikaans.

School B is located in the middle-income residential area of Swakopmund. It's a multi-cultural and multi-racial school, and most learners go to school by taxi, private car or bus. 60% of the

parents of the school fall in the middle-income class. Apart from English used as the medium of instruction at school, there are optional first languages used such as Afrikaans, German, French, Otjiherero, Khoekoegowab and Oshindonga

School C is located in the Topnara communities' part of the Nama people. Although this is the case, the majority (85%) of learners at this school are Oshiwambo-speaking people whose parents work in the mines and factories or are self-employed in the nearby towns of Walvis Bay, Swakopmund, Henties Bay and Arandis. Only about 10% of learners are from the Topnara communities staying in the hostel. Some learners stay with their parents and walk to school every day. School C has optional first languages subjects, such as Afrikaans, Oshindonga and Khoekhoegowab.

The three schools have most of the basic needs provided by the state to public schools, such as adequate furniture, classrooms, textbooks, human resources and other equipment such as printing and photocopy machines, ICT resources etc., essential for effective teaching and learning. The selected primary schools from the Erongo region are all mainstream schools with a few learners with severe special needs. Although the inclusive education policy is applied, schools do not have teachers trained to handle special needs learners. Noted during the school visits, most of the schools do not have infrastructure that is easily accessible to learners with some physical disabilities

Due to the universal free primary education policy introduced in 2013 by the then Minister of Education Arts and Culture, Dr Abraham Iyambo, the parents who have children in public schools are not required to pay school fees. However, the school can, if needed, request parents to contribute towards the school development out of their own will or generosity. In this policy, the school provides stationery and textbooks to the learners. The school is also expected to communicate the learners' progress or any other school-related matter through the report cards, newsletter attached to the report cards and meetings. In addition, school board members serve as parent representatives and take decisions on behalf of all the parents in case of need.

1.6 Research objectives

The study's primary objectives were to:

- Gain insights into teachers' understanding of the ALP policy at three schools in the Erongo region.
- Understand how teachers are implementing ALP policy.
- Ascertain the effects of ALP on learners and teachers, and hence, learning and teaching.
- Determine the implications of ALP policy on the quality of education in the Erongo region.

1.7 Research questions

The primary question driving this study is:

What are the implications of ALP on quality education in Namibian primary schools?

1.7.1 Sub-questions

- What are teachers' understandings of the ALP policy at their schools?
- How is the ALP policy implemented at schools?
- What are the effects of ALP on learners and teachers?
- What are the implications of the ALP policy on teaching and learning?

1.8 Research methodology

According to Kothari (2004), research methodology is a way to solve the research problem systematically. Guba (1990, cited in Johnson & Christensen, 2014) defines research methodology as a design that looks at how the inquirer finds out knowledge, or more specifically, methods used in research. Christensen, Johnson and Turner (2015) urge that a research design should be planned and conducted based on what will help the researcher answer their research questions. The main objective of the research methodology, according to Kapur (2018:3), is to generate productive findings.

The phenomenological research design informed the proposed study to understand how the ALP policy is implemented and how it affects three primary schools in the Erongo region, Namibia. Christensen and Johnson (2014) define phenomenology as a form of qualitative research in which the researcher attempts to understand how one or more individuals experience a particular

phenomenon. Denscombe (2007) asserts that phenomenological research deals with people's perceptions or meanings, attitudes and beliefs, and feelings or emotions. He continues that phenomenology describes how things are experienced first-hand by those involved (2007). Hancock, Ockleford and Windridge (2009), in agreement with Denscombe (2007), report that the phenomenological approach encourages the researcher to provide a detailed description of experience and advocates the need to do so with a minimum reliance on the researcher's own beliefs, expectations and predispositions about the phenomenon under investigation. For this research, adopting a phenomenological approach best served the focus and interest, as it helped the research to understand how the ALP policy was implemented in three primary schools.

Methods refer to the techniques and approaches used in the implementation of research (Kapur, 2018:3). The study applied document analysis and semi-structured interviews to gather data from the participants.

1.8.1 Document analysis

Document analysis is a form of qualitative research in which the researcher interprets documents to give voice and meaning to an assessment topic Bowen (2009). Analysing documents incorporates coding content into themes (2009). According to O'Leary (2014), a researcher must consider whether the author was a first-hand witness or used second-hand sources. Flick, Kardorff and Steinke (2004), in differentiating primary and secondary documents, report that researchers collect primary data while secondary data are collected and archived or published by others. According to Bowen (2009), it is of paramount importance when evaluating documents not to consider the data as necessarily precise, accurate or complete recording of events. He urges researchers to maintain high levels of objectivity and sensitivity for the document analysis results to be credible and valid (2009).

In this study, the 'National Promotion Policy Guide for Junior and Senior Primary School Phase' (National Institute for Educational Development (NIED) (2015) was analysed to acquaint myself with the policy aims, principles, rules and regulations and promotional requirements for the researcher to have a better understanding on how the policy should be fully implemented. The end of year promotional schedules of learners were analysed in order to determine whether the policy on promotion is applied in practice. The quantitative data derived from the promotion

schedule allowed me to correlate any commentary from teachers regarding the academic performance of learners. It provided insights into whether there is any improvement in the academic performance if they are automatically promoted. The data drawn from the documents were analysed qualitatively together with primary data from interview for interpretation and triangulation purpose in order to achieve coherence/validity/reliability of the study.

1.8.2 Semi-structured interviews

Data for this study was also gathered by conducting semi-structured interviews. According to Bowen (2009), a semi-structured interview is used in qualitative research to gather relevant information. Savin-Baden and Major (2013) confirm that semi-structured interviews are often used in qualitative research. Flick, Kardorff and Steinke (2004) describe semi-structured interviews as in-depth interviews where the conversations oscillate among the researcher's introduction of the topic under investigation. This study employed semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions for participants to share their experiences. Interviewees were allowed to raise their own views regarding particular subjects. It also helps the participants convey and disclose relevant information about the topic. The semi-structured approach also allows the researcher to ask follow-up questions to generate more data and elaborate points of interest (Kapur, 2018).

Kapur (2018) adds that the advantage of using the interview method is that it is a powerful tool to gain insights into education issues by understanding the experiences of individuals whose lives are centred around education. According to Denscombe (2007), this type of interview allows interviewees to use their own thoughts. To understand how the ALP policy implemented, the researcher conducted face-to-face interviews with teachers, heads of departments and the principals of the selected schools who are expected to be directly involved in the administration of the policy. The selected participants had the experience or expertise to provide quality information and valuable insights on the research topic.

1.8.3 Sampling

This study employed a purposive sampling method because it provides a way of getting the best information through the selection of items or people most likely to have the experience or expertise to provide quality information and valuable insights on the research topic (Kapur, 2018)

According to Kapur (2018:162), “sampling is a process of drawing a sample from a population”. The sampling design utilised to select the site and people in this study was purposive sampling. The researcher selected three schools from each circuit in the Erongo region. The selected participants were: two teachers, two HODs and the principal from each of the three public primary schools. Teachers were invited based on their teaching experience and experience implementing the ALP policy.

The study focused on primary schools because this phase is the beginning of the education and schooling of learners. I believe that completing a full-cycle primary education ensures the acquisition of basic numeracy and literacy skills and promotes cognitive development. This is also the phase in which the researcher is more familiar with in terms of promotional requirements.

The HODs and the school principals of the respective primary schools were included in the sample because they are the supervisors, managers, monitors and key decision-makers in implementing the ALP in school. Their contribution to data collection corroborates the data generated from the teachers' interviews in the Erongo region's primary schools. The HODs and principals as supervisors ensure that the rules and regulations of implementing ALP are followed (MoE, 2015). They are also responsible for ensuring that the teachers use the correct learner performance levels and promotion requirements. Therefore, in a study that aims to analyse the implementation of ALP, they are the key respondents who can view the policy implementation from a retrospective side that differs from the teachers who assess the learners in the classrooms.

1.8.4 Ethical considerations

Rule and John (2011: 179) indicate that “the key aspects of the quality of research are the ethical relationships and its practices”. Therefore, conducting research in an ethically sound manner enhances the quality and trustworthiness of the study. That is why the researcher applied for ethical clearance before the research began. It is the responsibility of the researcher to inform the participants about their rights. The participants have rights to privacy and confidentiality. The researcher assured the participants that the information they provided would be treated with confidentiality and that their privacy would be respected.

Babbie (2001:471) states that “the ethical norms of voluntary participation and no harm to participants should be formalised in the concepts of informed consent”. Therefore, the researcher reminded the participants about their right to privacy and confidentiality of the information they provided and that their names would remain anonymous.

All participants were made aware of the study’s purpose. They were also informed about their right to withdraw from the study if they wished with no prejudice. Finally, all the participants in the study signed a consent form.

Permission was requested from Namibia's Permanent Secretary of Education and the Director of Education in the Erongo region. The respective school principals also granted permission to conduct research in the schools. Data was collected after authorisation from Stellenbosch University’s Research Ethics Committee.

Due to the outbreak of Covid-19, the following protocols were strictly adhered to by both participants and the research investigator to contain and suppress the spread of Covid-19 in Namibia:

1. Social distance: a distance of 1.5 metres between a participant and the researcher was strictly observed during the course of the interviews to minimise the potential risk of infection.
2. Hand sanitiser: the researcher applied hand sanitiser every time before and after meeting with a participant as the researcher visited participants’ classes or offices. The sanitiser was also made available to the participants.
3. The research investigator and the participants wore face masks, as defined by the World Health Organisation.
4. The researcher also used a contact register, where the participants wrote their details. The record was kept confidential since it carried personal identifiable information.

1.9 Significance of the study

The study outcomes will help to improve the teachers’ understanding of the ALP policy and its implementation in Namibian schools. The study will also assist teachers in ascertaining the effects of the ALP policy on the teachers and learners as well as the teaching and learning

process. It is presumed that an understanding of the challenges associated with ALP will help to develop the most suitable programmes needed to support the affected learners and teachers. The study's outcome will also help determine the implications of the ALP policy on the quality of education in the Erongo region. The quality of education is expected to improve when the teachers are equipped with a better understanding of implementing the ALP. Furthermore, the quality of education will also be improved when the learners automatically promoted are provided with adequate support in the form of remedial activities that will help them cope with the academic challenges of the next grade.

1.10 Chapter outlines

Chapter 1: Introduction and background

This chapter explains the contexts that gave rise to the research project: the background of the study, research context, objectives, research questions and the significance of the study.

Chapter 2: Literature reviews

The chapter presents the dominant debates and trends related to the core research focus of this study, which is the promotion of learners, automatic learner promotion (ALP). After providing conceptual clarity on automatic learner promotion, grade retention, and quality education, the chapter continues by looking at global conceptions and practices of ALP, followed by a focused consideration of ALP in the research context of Namibia.

Chapter 3: Research methodology

This chapter outlines the research design and methodology used in this study to gather and analyse the data used to provide answers to the research questions. It also provides the details of the research methods used to construct the data and describe the study population and the sampling procedure used to select the participants. The chapter also explains how data reliability and credibility were ensured and ethics and limitations addressed. Finally, the chapter describes how the data gathered from a case study was analysed.

Chapter 4: Data presentation

This chapter presents the research findings (data) that were raised through semi-structured interviews of six primary school teachers, six primary HODs and three school principals of

primary schools from the Erongo region. The data was generated from an analysis of the following documents: The 'National Promotion Policy Guide for Junior and Senior Primary School Phase' and some end-of-year promotional schedules of learners. The data was presented following the research questions and organised according to themes emerging from the data analysis.

Chapter 5: Data discussion and interpretation

Here the researcher established continuity in the research by linking the results of a given study with those of another and establishing some relationship with the collected data. Interpretation provides theoretical conception, which can serve as a guide for further research work. The discussion and interpretation followed the themes and sub-themes that emerged in the previous chapter as follows:

- Implementation of ALP
- Understanding ALP
- The decision to promote learners
- Parental involvement
- Support programmes
- Effects of ALP
- The implications of ALP on quality education

Chapter 6: Conclusion and recommendations

In this chapter, conclusions and recommendations are derived from the findings of this study on the exploration of ALP at three schools in Namibia. The implications for quality education are described. The conclusions based on the study's purpose, research questions and results are outlined, and the implications of these findings and the resultant recommendations are also described based on the study's conclusion and purpose.

1.11 Chapter summary

The chapter presented an overview of a study that investigated the implications of implementation of the ALP policy in the primary schools in Erongo. First, the chapter covered the study's introduction, motivation, research problem, significance, and background. The

chapter also presented the research question, ethical considerations employed, and a summary of the chapters in the thesis. The next chapter presents the literature review of the study.

Chapter 2:

Literature review

2.1 Introduction

The previous chapter focused on the introduction and background of the study. This chapter presents the dominant debates and trends related to the core research focus of this study, which is the promotion of learners through the ALP policy and its effects on the provision of quality education in Namibia. After providing conceptual clarity on automatic learner promotion, grade retention, and quality education, the chapter continues by looking at global conceptions and practices of ALP, followed by a focused consideration of ALP in the research context of Namibia.

2.2 Automatic learner promotion (ALP)

Allowing learners to progress from one grade to the following, irrespective of their academic performance, otherwise called automatic promotion, has polarised education development stakeholders along the lines of those in support and those against (Okurut, 2015). According to Steiner (1986), the origin of the policy can be traced to the 1930s and is adopted and implemented in the perceived interest of a learner's social and psychological well-being. Arguments for and against automatic promotion are centred on its credibility as a viable alternative to grade retention in the search for efficiency and better learning outcomes (Chohan & Qadir, 2011).

According to Ellis-Christensen (2003), automatic promotion promotes learners from one grade to the next even though they may not have demonstrated sufficient knowledge of the grade level standards. Thus, low academic achievement isn't considered a barrier for promotion suggested by (Griffith, 2006). It is sometimes referred to as promotion based on "seat-time", or the amount of time the learner spent sitting in school, regardless of whether they learned the necessary knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes (Chataa, 2018). In automatic promotion promoting learners to the next grade even though they have not acquired the minimum competencies expected (Albridge and Goldman, 1999)

2.3 ALP versus grade retention

Taye (2003) explains that ALP and grade retention are terms used as opposite ends of continuum approaches to learners having difficulties making progress in schools. Approaching the terms independently, grade retention involves holding back learners who did not pass end-year assessments (David, 2008). Grade retention is also known as grade repetition; it restricts learners in the same grade until they achieve the required competencies at the end of the year to be promoted to the next grade alongside their age peers (Brophy, 2006). Views on whether grade repetition is good or bad has been subjected to debate on various academic fronts. However, research shows that ALP has become more favourable of late. (New Era, 2015; Chataa & Nkenbeza, 2019; Okurut, 2015)

While ALP insists that learners should proceed to the next grade irrespective of their achievement, grade retention emphasises that learners who obtained low grades should repeat until they pass. Debates on how to deal with learners with low performance in terms of policy – whether learners remain in the same grade or move to the next grade – have been swinging back and forth (Aron & Ithana, 2015). Both ALP and grade retention have advantages and disadvantages. Sichombe, Nambira, Tjipuija and Kapenda (2011) argue that promotion should be on merit instead of automatic promotion, which disregards learner achievement. Miyako and Garcia (2014) maintain that grade repetition has both beneficial and detrimental effects:

2.3.1 Positive effects of grade retention:

It provides time for weak learners to catch up because they receive extra support.

- Retaining learners make them responsible; they are forced to work hard.
- Retention encourages the teachers to work harder, so their learners are not retained.

Negative effects of grade retention:

- Loss of self-esteem, motivation and confidence may lead to depression, poor work ethic, continued failure, school dropout and low motivation.
- Retained students are taken out of their peer groups, losing friends and eventually becoming victims of bullying and ridicule.

- Retention of students is expensive for parents and the government. The relative cost of grade repetition in Belgium, Spain, Netherlands and Portugal is about 10 to 12% of primary and secondary education expenditure.
- Failure of learners could be due to their reasons, such as families; if unresolved, the learners may fail to improve.
- The teachers are also forced to slow the pace of bright learners to accommodate the repeaters who need extra help (Miyako & Garcia, 2014).

Efforts to make the right choice between ALP and grade retention have sparked highly contested debates and controversy within the policy formation and implementation principles. Empirical and non-empirical studies conducted in both developed and developing countries to estimate the implications of the ALP policy and grade retention policy on learners' learning achievements show mixed and inconclusive results (Ndaruhutse, 2008). Ndaruhutse (2008) further explains that arguments supporting the ALP policy as a better alternative to grade retention fall into three broad categories, namely: enhancing education quality, improving internal efficiency of education, and personal development of learners.

According to Nikel and Lowe (2009), enhancing the quality of education arguments point to the fact that repetition does not improve the achievement of the low achiever, nor does it reduce the range of abilities, since each grade will carry the retained learner into the next year as a source of a difference in ability. Chimombo (2005) maintains that retaining learners leads to crowding in classrooms, leading to high learner-classroom and learner-teacher ratios, thus lowering the overall quality of education.

2.4 ALP as a global practice

Automatic promotion is a widespread and controversial educational practice in developed and developing countries (Chohan & Qadir, 2011). The decision to promote learners to the next grade depends partly on promotion policies in a country's education system. Some countries, such as Ireland, the United Kingdom, Britain, Denmark, Sweden, Finland, Iceland, Portugal, Greece and Norway, systematically promote learners to the next grade with an ALP policy (Tina, 2018). In other countries such as Bolivia, Peru, Costa Rica, Chile, Venezuela and Brazil in Latin America, where class repetition has been eliminated, strict achievement criteria for promotion

are applied (Chochan & Qadir, 2011). The ALP policy is considered the most appropriate and cost-effective alternative to grade retention. It is the simplest way to reduce the repetition of learners and is beneficial for children to carry their studies with their age fellows. Advocates of this practice affirm it as more cost-effective, whereas, the opponents believe that it affects the quality of education by eliminating competition and motivation for learners and teachers (Berg, Wills, Adams & Van Wyk, 2019)

In Brazil, The General Education Act of 1996 introduced ALP policies (Koppensteiner, 2010). Section 3 of Article 32 of the Brazil General Education Act of 1996 formally distinguishes two alternatives that may be used to organise learner progression (promotion). Besides the conventional annual repetition regime to make low-performing learners repeat the grade, the alternative of automatic promotion was introduced, in which learners progress automatically to the next grade as low performers. According to Koppensteiner (2010), the General Education Act of 1996 sets fundamental criteria for organising the promotion, such as 75% minimum attendance of the learners as a general requirement for the promotion).

According to Chataa and Nkengbeza (2019), in the United States of America, ALP was introduced to counter the negative effects of grade repetition in various states, which were known to degrade the self-esteem among learners. As an alternative solution, ALP was introduced in the 1980s following the outcomes of highly contested debates. Noting the benefits of ALP, several states began to pass on some promotion policies that were very strict and based on some standardised tests (Chataa & Nkengbeza, 2019). A set of similar reasons that stimulated a policy change in the USA were also raised by Okurut (2015) and focused on the metropolitan area of Chicago. Okurut (2015) argued that grade repetition was an insufficient intervention strategy for promoting learners to the next grade. Based on these findings, in the mid-1990s, public schools had declared an end to promotional requirements based on standardised tests, thus allowing automatic learner promotion (Chochan & Qadir, 2011). In Ohio State, a study on grade retention revealed that the majority of the teachers felt that grade retention had a very negative social and academic effect on the learners' future, hence there were more calls to adopt ALP policies (Chochan & Qadir, 2011)

In India, the National Policy on Education of 1986 was used as the foundation to set up primary education promotional policies (Chataa & Nkengbeza, 2019). Functional policies for primary education were set under a five-year plan to obtain 100% literacy. Promotional policies in favour of compulsory primary learners were set up to allow more learners to progress to the next grade without satisfying the minimum promotional requirements (Chataa & Nkengbeza, 2019). In China, a study by Chen, Liu, Zhang, Shi and Rozelle (2010) found that grade retention had no positive effects on school performance in most rural areas of China. The study rejected the hypothesis that short- and long-term grade retention improves scores. In Punjab, the government in 2003 issued an order to all public schools to promote all children up to grade 3 to achieve universal primary education and reduce the dropout rate in primary schools (Chochan & Qadir, 2011). This is still being practised; no child is retained due to slow learning, only in extreme cases of illness and immaturity of the learners.

In South Africa, ALP is guided by the 'Policy for the Programme and Promotion Requirements of the National Curriculum Statement Grades R – 12' (DBE, 2011). The policy applies to educational phases. From grade R to grade 1, promotion is based on the age cohort. Grades 1-3 constitute the foundation phase; the minimum requirement is 50-59% in the official home language, 40-49% in Mathematics and 40-49% in another official language. A learner can only repeat once in this phase and should not exceed four years in the phase. Retaining learners requires extra support to these learners (DBE, 2011). In the next phase, Grade 4-6 (Intermediate phase), learners are expected to score minimum scores in five subjects (two other approved subjects are added to the list of the foundation). According to the DBE (2011), a learner may repeat once in this phase.

In the same vein, a learner may repeat once in the senior phase (grades 7-9). In the FET phase (grades 10-12), learners who fail to meet the minimum requirements of completing the school-based assessment, practical/oral assessment, and end-of-year examinations may repeat once, either in grade 10 or in grade 11 (Munje & Maarman, 2016: 186). According to the Department of Basic Education (2011), progression can be used to prevent a learner from being retained in a phase for a period exceeding four years. This implies that a learner can repeat only once in a phase. The learner is, therefore, viable for promotion once they have already repeated a grade in

a phase (Munje & Maarman, 2016). In South Africa, the ‘Policy for the Programme and Promotion Requirements of the National Curriculum Statement Grades R – 12’ (DBE, 2011), allows learners to progress with their age cohorts to help maintain learners’ dignity and self-esteem.

In Zimbabwe, the ALP policy is applied from grades 1-7, then in secondary school from forms 1-4 (UNESCO-International Bureau of Education (IBE), 2006). In cases where some underachievers are identified, they are permitted to repeat for one year. At the end of the first seven-year cycle, learners sit for grade 7 national examinations. 1995 statistics showed that only 67% qualified to attend secondary school (form one) UNESCO-IBE (2006). ALP in Zimbabwean primary schools can only be applicable up to grade 7. A grade 7 pass is needed to allow entry into secondary school. In secondary school, ALP helped learners progress to form four, where a national examination is written. Then, one needs a pass to proceed to form five. In Zimbabwe, secondary school is divided into two phases; the first four years are referred to as the ordinary level, while the last two years are known as the advanced level. There is no automatic promotion where national examinations are written – that is, in grade 7, form 4 and 6. High dropout rates are noticed at these stages (UNESCO-IBE, 2006). Usually, the learners who fail to meet the minimum requirements (or to pass) in national examinations find it hard to get placed to proceed to the next phase. At the end of the advanced level (A level) of form six, learners with good passes are easily absorbed by tertiary institutions for better professional courses; those with poor results usually go to vocational training institutes (UNESCO-IBE, 2006).

In countries like Cameroon, the implementation of the ALP has been poorly conducted in private, public, and confessionnal schools, largely due to inadequate resources (Nalova, 2016). The government of Cameroon did not invest in the universal implementation of the policy in most schools; there is no uniformity in the implementation process. In Ethiopia, the major purpose of primary education is socialisation rather than gaining academic knowledge; therefore, the policy is strictly used in primary schools because the lower primary learners are not mature enough to realise why they are retained (Mihiretie, 2011). The policy of ALP is, therefore, mainly applied at the primary school level.

A global view of the ALP policy shows that it is used in many countries, mainly because it poses some advantages that override the grade retention policy. The literature reveals that ALP policies are crafted and implemented differently from one country to another. However, the phenomenon of ALP remains at the centre of research and debates. As noted in the literature reviewed, several countries applied it in all school phases and later discovered that it may not be universally applied in all school phases. Against this background, it is also worthwhile adding to the body of knowledge on the status of ALP in the Namibian context.

2.5 ALP in the Namibian context

In Namibia, ALP is popularly known as automatic/social promotion (Chataa, 2018). Automatic promotion is passing learners from grade to grade with their peers, even if they have not complied with the academic requirements or met the performance standards of the key grades (Ministry of Education, 2015). Sometimes the automatic promotion is called “social” promotion because it is often carried out in the perceived interest of a learner’s social and psychological well-being (Chataa, 2018). According to the Namibian Ministry of Education (1996), from a social point of view, automatic promotion is necessary to offset the harmful effects of keeping a learner “back”, also known as retention.

Like many other countries worldwide, automatic promotion evolved as a shift from the opposing policies of grade retention/repetition (Chataa, 2018). Grade retention or repetition refers to the practice of having a learner repeat a grade because, in the previous year, they did not meet the promotional requirements (Chataa, 2018). “The evolution of automatic promotion policies in Namibia began in 1990 after independence as a means of ensuring continuity of the fundamental principles of the Namibian education system” (New Era, 2014: 1). According to Chataa (2018), automatic promotion policies came with a paradigm shift from teacher-centred education to learner-centred education that is focused on the intellectual development of the child. The notion of automatic promotion is based upon allowing a learner to continue to learn in warm social relationships with their peer group members. Conversely, retention or repetition is seen as a negative practice, which results in learners getting bored with schooling and ending up as high dropouts (Okurut, 2015; Chataa, 2018).

2.6 Teachers' attitude towards ALP

Unsurprisingly, teachers hold competing views on the benefits and disadvantages of ALP. Teachers who do not have a positive attitude towards ALP do not want to adjust their teaching practices. This will inevitably affect the full implementation of ALP in schools (Nalova, 2016)

According to Rivkin, Hanushek and Kain (2005:417), teachers favour ALP because it helps children to spend more years in an academic environment under the supervision of a teacher. The assumption is that more exposure to the learning environment forces a child to learn. In addition, teachers believe that spending at least four to five years in school might assist the child in finding basic employment. To Lorence et al (2002), spending at least four years in school is essential to ensure that literacy and numeracy skills are retained. This is likely to ensure a minimum level of learning, whereas if children fail in junior classes, they often leave school and start roaming outside as they are too young to start earning money (Rivkin, Hanushek & Kain, 2005).

Findings from a study carried out in Afghanistan reveal that teachers are disturbed about the low level of achievement in lower primary grades due to ALP, which is due to the high occurrence of grade repetition (Mansory, 2007a). Witmer, Hoffman and Nottis (2004: 173) found that teachers' beliefs about retention are influenced by peers rather than by research. In turn, Burkamet et al. (2007) found that teachers are more inclined to recommend retention for male learners and learners from a minority low socioeconomic background. Furthermore, Witmer et al. (2004: 173) indicated that 77% of respondents who were teachers believed that grade repetition is an effective way of preventing learners' future academic failure, while 94% of the respondents disagreed with the statement that learners should never repeat.

Eide (2004) found that second-grade teachers in Fribourg, Switzerland utilise retention to meet academic objectives and valued achievement as a decisive criterion. Ndaruhutse (2008) reports that generally, there was a positive attitude to repetition among French teachers on the basis that it is a preventative measure in helping children succeed later. This study found that teachers believe repetition has positive implications on learning outcomes, that the negative psychological implications on children are limited and that there are not really any alternatives (Ndaruhutse, 2008).

According to Ndaruhutse (2008), teachers of African countries who were spoken to regarding retention had favourable views and saw it as an essential tool to assist weaker children by giving them a chance to improve their knowledge and be more prepared for higher levels of schooling. In addition, Ndaruhutse (2008) reports that nearly 80% of Senegalese teachers thought repetition was an 'efficient' measure, and 18% thought it was 'extremely efficient'. Only 2% believed that repetition was 'totally inefficient' alternative to automatic promotion. However, it might seem that most research findings on teachers' perception of automatic promotion reveal negative perceptions.

Another study conducted in the context of Belgian and Genevan education on the teachers' perception found that they had divided views on the entire phenomenon (Crahay 2003). The mixed view of teachers indicates that some teachers felt that repetition gives some children the chance to mature and be better prepared for their future schooling; others felt that making weak children repeat the same curriculum seems wasteful. Nevertheless, the teachers did not generally believe that repetition reflected a failure in their teaching or was an unjust practice. Additionally, most primary school teachers did not think that repetition has negative implications on the children or their confidence; instead, they saw it as a way of providing remedial support to weaker learners.

Jimerson (2002) found that teachers perceived repetition as a successful educational policy for learning improvement. However, Jimerson (2002) also reported that some teachers did not support the viewpoint of repetition as a motivating incentive; rather, repetition caused children to lose self-esteem and hindered their development. Jimerson (2002) believes that teachers had limited knowledge of long-term effects and based their arguments on the immediate outcomes of repetition. Pettay (2010) found that teachers' attitudes to grade retention changed from a negative perception when they had a clearer understanding of ALP.

The literature on teachers' attitudes toward ALP promotion has proved to be negative, according to Roderick (2005). According to Roderick (2005), teachers believed retention is more beneficial than ALP to help underachieving learners improve their academic performance. The reason behind this belief of teachers is that the relative benefits that repeaters gain in the first retention over automatic promotion negatively influence automatic promotion practices in many schools.

In this regard, Nalova (2016) contends that the attitude of teachers towards ALP might determine its effective implementation in schools. Since ALP entails changing teachers' instructional practices at the classroom level, it is important to value their attitudes. In addition, teachers are expected to work hard to identify each learner's learning needs and strengths in the classroom.

2.6.1 ALP policy formulation

A policy may be defined as “aims and goals or a statement of what ought to happen” (Ball & Stevenson, 2006:14). Policies are developed through several independent stages. Some of the basic steps of the process are problem identification/policy agenda setting, policy formulation, policy adoption, policy implementation and policy evaluation (Madimutsa, 2006). When a policy has been formed and approved by necessary authorities, the next stage will be the implementation. Policy formulation and implementation are different processes and procedures which qualify or make a policy both a product and process (Ball & Stevenson, 2006). Therefore, they lie on a continuum, of the planning cycle and are different procedures occurring at different stages. “The implementation is the final stage of the planning process; actually, it is the operational phase, where the plans/projects are realised” (Meschik & Sammer, 2003: 29).

However, to Madimutse (2006), implementation is not the final stage; instead, the last is policy evaluation. When policies are made, they are usually constantly reconstructed. Therefore, rather than following a linear process, they are cyclical, systematic, goal-oriented and complex (Ball & Stevenson, 2006). According to Ball and Stevenson (2006), policies at times evolve after political pressure whose purpose is to transform a group conflict over some resources or values. This applies to ALP policy, political arguments and debates about how to enhance the quality of education, which leads to a decision. Hence, policies are a process rather than a product. Teachers are also policymakers who must be part of this process of policy development (Vidovic, 2001).

In schools, ALP is a policy designed by policymakers that are expected to be implemented by the teachers in the schools and classrooms. ALP goals are achieved when the policy is correctly interpreted and implemented in schools. However, the impact or effectiveness of a policy depends on the implementers, the teachers and the school administration. Teachers, therefore, need support in the implementation of the policies.

Another effective way of improving the implementation of ALP policies is to regard teachers as policymakers in the schools and classrooms (Vidovich, 2001). Once the teachers are accorded this role, they assume ownership of the ALP policies and strive to get quality education out of practice. According to Ball (2015), teachers eventually begin to work on themselves to make them subjects of this policy. This subordination and commitment to policy evolve out of policy ownership; hence it is imperative to involve the teachers in the ALP policy development since they are the implementers.

2.6.2 Automatic learner promotion policy in Namibia education

The policy transition from grade retention to ALP in Namibia has been an ongoing process since Namibian independence in 1990 (MOE, 2015). Since then, the policy of ALP has been continuously amended to eliminate the challenges and disadvantages of grade retention/repetition. One of the major drives that led to this policy change was the demand for access to education soon after independence (Chataa, 2018). In Namibia, most of the changes made to the education system were meant to address the ills of the colonial education system (New Era, 2015). The ALP policy allows those learners who do not meet the minimum promotion requirements to move on to the next grade. Grade retention was also found to be one of the major causes of high school dropout (MOE, 2015). The MOE (2015) asserts that learners who repeat a grade more than once tend to lose interest in education, eventually dropping out of school.

A further reflection of the policy development prior to independence reveals that a learner who failed a grade was required to repeat the grade before they could proceed to the next grade level. The document entitled 'The National Assessment Policy for Schools in South West Africa' (Department of National Education 1980:10), states that the pass requirements for any examination were supposed to be met before a learner is transferred to the next grade. Any learner who failed a grade was required to repeat that grade before they could proceed to the next level. This policy only allowed a few learners to access education; this could not be accepted in post-independence Namibia.

The demand for access to education, termed 'Education for All' (MEC, 1993), was reinforced by some policies aimed at ensuring that every Namibian citizen had equal educational opportunities and access to quality education irrespective of race, colour or creed. The Ministry of Education

embarked upon major education reforms by introducing new education policies. In the initial phase, just after the independence in 1990, the policy of grade repetition was replaced by a policy of semi-automatic promotion (MOE, 2015). The critics of the semi-automatic promotion, cited by the MOE (2015), viewed it as a compromise between grade repetition and social promotion. It was more of an attempt to balance the repercussions of the two antagonistic policies. According to the MOE (2015), the semi-automatic promotion was practised by only a few schools; there was confusion in implementing the semi-automatic promotion. Debates, criticisms, and confusion in school implementation continued until the 2011 National Education Conference (MOE, 2015).

The National Education Conference of 2011 came up with resolutions that the Cabinet should direct the Ministry of Education to ensure that each learner achieves minimum levels of learning before being promoted to the next grade (MOE, 2015). The Ministry was further directed to:

- Urgently review automatic promotion practices and provide clear guidelines that leave no opportunity for different interpretations and implementation practices.
- Provide support to repeaters and learners who have not acquired the necessary skills and competencies.
- Make special provisions for learners with hearing and visual impairments and disabilities to be assessed fairly. (MOE, 2015:2)

The changes in the promotion policy were earmarked to go along with the new curriculum to be implemented in 2016. The ‘National Promotion Policy Guide for Junior and Senior Primary School Phase’ provides a framework for uniform learner promotion, retention practices and reporting learners' progress in schools (MOE, 2015). The policy guide replaced all previous circulars on promotion requirements and guidelines used in Namibian schools. According to the policy document ‘Towards the automatic learner promotion policy’ in Namibia is commonly known as automatic promotion meaning the transfer of a learner to the next grade in case the learner fails to meet the promotional requirements for the second time in the same phase (New Era, 2015).

The resolutions of the 2011 National Education Conference redefined the automatic promotion policy. If a learner fails a grade for the second time, they should automatically be transferred or

promoted to the next grade. The document entitled, ‘The Revised Pilot Curriculum Guide for Formal Basic Education’, confirms that “[n]o learner shall repeat more than once in the Lower Primary phase and more than once in the upper primary phase” (MoE, 2005: 2).

In the circular entitled, ‘Requirements for Promotion of Learners in Grades 1–9 and 11 and Compulsory Compensatory Teaching’, the Ministry of Education (2005: 6) states that “[n]o learner shall in total repeat more than once at the lower primary level, i.e. grade 1–4. A learner, who does not comply with the minimum promotion requirements for the second time, must be transferred to the next grade. In addition, transferred learners should receive compulsory compensatory teaching in the next grade”. Similarly, no learner shall, in total, repeat more than once at the upper primary level, i.e. Grades 5–7. A learner, who does not comply with the minimum promotion requirements for the second time, must be transferred to the next grade level (MoE, 2005: 6).

The Ministry of Education Arts and Culture (MOEAC) (2016: 47), in its document entitled the ‘National Curriculum for Basic Education Development’, raised some pertinent arguments that “[l]earners benefit most by remaining with their own age group”. This is in support of the ALP. It further elaborates that “[e]xperience and research show that over-aged learners do progressively worse the longer they are kept in the same grade. Preferably, no learner should be more than two years above the appropriate age for the grade he/she is in” (MOEAC, 2016: 47). Based on several research findings, the MOEAC (2016:47) concluded that “making a learner repeat a grade will be of no benefit unless the learner receives learning support”. Similar research findings also claimed a strong positive co-relationship between school dropout and grade repetition (New Era, 2015). Researchers also lighted that those learners who are held back also develop super-low self-esteem. They feel rejected, are subjected to name-calling, and tend to disturb classroom management and cause overcrowding in the classrooms if they remain (New Era, 2015). Ultimately as stated in the ‘Convention of the Children’s Rights’ (CRC), it is in the best interest of the child to allow ALP (Wickenberg et al, 2014).

ALP in Namibia, however, has not been without criticism. In this regard, Pupkewitz (2006: 7) argues that “automatic promotion in our schools has produced a culture of entitlement, a belief that time served is the same as productive use of time”. Therefore, if a learner fails a class, they

should not be automatically promoted since not only will they hold back the group's learning at a higher level, the lesson of reward for hard work is ignored (Pupkewitz, 2006). In view of this, George Kandetu, the head of MH Greef primary school in Windhoek, advised that the whole system of automatic promotions must be abolished because "it creates the impression that we [teachers] are doing good" (The Villager, 2013: 1). The head of the school further argued that transferring a learner who has failed is transferring a problem. Hansie Hendricks, the principal of Eldorado Secondary school in Windhoek, also reinforced that "the automatic promotion policy should be abolished. It is one of the biggest reasons learners fail in grade 10" (The Villager, 2013: 1). The evidence from the school heads shows that not all are in support of ALP.

2.7 The implications of ALP on the quality of education

The decision to promote the learners to the next grade depends partly on promotion policies in a country's education system. As discussed earlier in this chapter, some countries systematically promote learners to the next grade via ALP policies, while others apply strict achievement criteria for promotion. The ALP policy is considered the most appropriate and cost-effective alternative to grade retention. It is the simplest way to reduce the repetition among learners and is beneficial for children to carry on their studies with their age fellows (Lodico et al, 2006).

Generally, Taye (2003) states that automatically promoted learners perform better than retained learners in the year after retention. By comparing retained and automatically promoted learners after they complete the same grade and same material (same-grade comparisons), Taye (2003) found that there is no large negative effect of grade repetition on the quality of education. Munje and Maarman (2016) share that, learners who progress to the next grade usually encounter the challenges of gaining the missing competencies. In addition, Nalova (2016), reports that these positive effects, however, appear to be short-term, lasting no more than two to three years. Early grade retentions were generally associated with moderate positive benefits for school performance. However, such effects are short-term (Okurut, 2015).

According to Rivkin, Hanushek and Kain (2005), supporters of ALP acknowledged it as more cost-effective, while opponents believe that it affects the quality of education by eliminating competition and motivation for learners and teachers. For example, Motala (1995: 172) asserts that "opponents of repetition suggest automatic promotion, whereas supporters of repetition

oppose this policy on the basis that it lowers academic standards, destroys incentives for pupils and teachers, and creates pedagogical problems by increasing the ability range in the classroom”. Although other researchers criticise the ALP policy, Gomes-Neto and Hanushek (1994: 130) argue that “it would produce lower achievement in later grades because there is learning that goes on through repetition”.

The empirical study conducted in the mid-1990s, in the Chicago public Schools, declared an end to social promotion and introduced promotional requirements based on standardi[s]ed test scores in the third, sixth, and eighth grades” (Roderick & Nagaoka, 2005). In this respect, the study by Roderick and Nagaoka (2005) examined the short-term effects of retention on the reading achievement of third and sixth graders who were retained under Chicago's policy from 1997 to 2000. This study found that learners retained under Chicago's high stakes testing policy struggled during their retained year and faced significantly increased rates of special education placement. Among third graders, there is no evidence that retention led to greater achievement growth two years after the promotional gate. Among sixth graders, there is evidence that retention was associated with lower achievement growth (Roderick & Nagaoka, 2005). Similarly, Mehrotra (1998), a supporter of the ALP policy, argued that “it increases the number of years low achieving learners spend in school”, and thus may increase learning, although a number of research studies have revealed that automatic promotion policy alone could not produce desired results unless other reform measures accompany it.

In the context of Panama and Puerto Rico, Mehrotra (1998: 21) reports that “these countries which once had automatic promotion reversed that policy when faced with increasing numbers of illiterate primary school graduates”. The ALP policy was implemented with no attempt to eliminate the factors associated with school failure; problems of learning in the early grades would have been passed on (Mehrotra, 1998). This idea originated from Motala (1995), suggesting that automatic promotion is only practicable if it is accompanied by other reform measures such as curriculum-development activities and reorganisation of teaching.

2.8 Conceptual framework: Quality education

“A quality education is one that focuses on the whole child—the social, emotional, mental, physical, and cognitive development of each learner regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, socio-economic status, or geographic location. It prepares the child for life, not just for testing” (ASCD & Education International (EI) cited in Slade, 2016: 1).

According to the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goal number 4, a quality education ensures the provision of resources and directs policy to ensure that each child in the school is healthy, safe emotionally and physically, and under the support of adults (United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), 2000; Slade. 2016). The UNDP contends that quality education provides the outcomes for individuals, communities, and societies to prosper. In other words, quality education satisfies the needs of the communities and makes an effort to develop the learners.

Scheerens (2004) admits that the term quality education is the most frequently used term, yet it is indefinable. He describes quality education as “international indicator systems and conclude that education quality is what these indicator systems describe and measure” (Scheerens, 2004: 115). To Garirira (2020), the quality of education may be accurately defined by the descriptions of all components used to judge the realisation of goals.

In general, the literature proclaims that quality in education is a crucial issue underwritten by the post-2015 UNESCO educational agenda as a worldwide issue (Garirira, 2020). Steyn (cited in Garirira, 2020: 3) maintains that it cannot be disputed that “quality education is the most important thing and quality makes the difference between success and failure” (Steyn, 2001). Quality education with its significance and complexity is better clarified when its perspectives and components are defined based on a conceptual framework that outlines the roles of the policies and policy implementation (Scheerens, 2004).

According to Scheerens (2004), as a productive view, the success of an education system is measured in the attainment of aspired outputs/outcomes. The productive view of education implies transmitting what is worthwhile to those who become committed to it. Quality is therefore measured in the success of the learners' outputs (Scheerens, 2004). In agreement, Sayed

and Ahmed (2011: 105) explain that quality education is understood “as encompassing the interaction between what learners bring to learning (learner characteristics), what happens in the learning space such as school/classroom setting (enabling inputs), what happens to individuals as a consequence of education (outcome) and the context within which the activity takes place”. Eze (2009) also alludes that quality education is essential because it helps create healthy learners, motivated in class, and supported by their parents within environments where children are protected.

Scheerens (2004) and Sallis (2002) maintain that quality education frameworks are made under the following assumptions:

- Quality education promotes avenues for learners to attain acceptable and internationally recognised qualifications to secure employment opportunities on the job market.
- An outcome can be predicted based on content offered, input and process. Under this assumption, one can draw reference to the conduciveness of the environment, teachers’ qualifications, parental involvement, and the curriculum chosen by a specific country.
- In quality education, inputs, processes, and outcomes are analysed for their equal or fair distribution among participants in education with different characteristics.

According to Sallis (2002), quality education can be promoted when schools are equipped with outstanding teachers. Trained or outstanding teachers use learner-centred approaches in well-managed classrooms and schools and skillful assessments to facilitate learning and reduce disparities (UNICEF, 2000). Unfortunately, among other challenges affecting quality education in Namibia, the availability of outstanding teachers has been a major handicap towards achieving quality education over the years (UNICEF, 2000).

In Namibia, quality of education is found in the national goals, namely access, equity and democracy (Ama, 2003). According to Ama (2003), quality education in Namibia is meant to develop the personality of and confidence in an individual through reinforcement of democratic rights. It encourages effective teaching and the development of quality teachers; it promotes the academic progress of the learners; and it improves the learning environment (Ama, 2003). In Namibia, the ALP policy is conceived as a means to achieve learner access, equity and democracy. Accessibility allows the learners to move to the next grade with their peers. Equity

has to do with fairness; ALP promotes fairness while democracy has to do with fundamental human rights issues such as the right to liberty, dignity and education (Namibian constitution, 1990). Quality and equity are all measures of quality in Namibian education (MoE, 1993). Although literature reveals several factors that influence the educational quality, ALP is investigated to see its influence on quality education in the Namibian school.

2.9 Chapter summary

This chapter commenced by looking at conceptions of ALP in different geopolitical contexts. Specific attention was paid to notions and practices of ALP, learner retention, and teachers' attitudes to both, while attention was given to policy formulation and implementation for the discussion on ALP in Namibia. Here, I discussed the criteria for promotion, retention or ALP. The next chapter focuses on the research design, methodology, as well as the research context and sampling

Chapter 3:

Research design and methodology

3.1 Introduction

The previous chapter expounded on different components of ALP, as discussed in the literature reviewed. This chapter outlines the research design and methodology used in this study to gather and analyse the data, in response to the research questions. It goes a step further to provide the details of the research methods used to construct the data and describe the study population and the sampling procedure used to select the participants. The chapter also explains how the reliability and credibility of data were ensured, and how the study's ethics and limitations were addressed.

3.2 Statement of the research question

According to the ALP policy in Namibia, learners can only repeat a grade once in a phase. If they fail for the second time, they will be automatically promoted to the next grade (National Promotion policy Guide, 2015). The above statement raises a highly contested controversy as the majority of teachers, theorists and policymakers believes that ALP has adversely affected the quality of education in the Erongo region. Questions arise about the academic future of the learners who are moved to the next grade without meeting the required competencies of the previous grade, especially when there are no support programmes. The study, therefore, was interested in understanding what the implications of the ALP policy is on the quality of education at three schools in the Erongo region.

3.3 Research design

Paradigms or research philosophies are defined as beliefs guiding action in a research study (Creswell, 2009). A research paradigm underlines the issues of the study that helps to clarify research designs, identify the most suitable design clarify the role of the researcher in a study (Wilson, 2013:8). Christensen, Johnson and Turner (2015) clarify that a research design should be planned and conducted based on what will help researcher answer their research questions. A research design is part of a research methodology that intends to provide an appropriate study framework (Sileyew, 2019). Guba (1990, cited in Johnson & Christensen, 2014) defines a

research methodology as a design that looks at how the inquirer finds out knowledge, or more specifically, methods used in research.

The study followed a phenomenological case study research design to understand how the policy of ALP is implemented and the effects thereof at three primary schools in the Erongo region, Namibia. The phenomenological case study was used to pave the way to gather evidence to answer the study's research questions. Christensen and Johnson (2014) define phenomenology as a form of qualitative research in which the researcher attempts to understand how one or more individuals experience a particular phenomenon (in this case, the researcher tried to understand how the teachers are implementing the ALP). Denscombe (2007: 94) asserts that phenomenology research deals with “people’s perception or meaning; people’s attitudes and beliefs as well as people’s feeling and emotions”.

The phenomenological research design was found suitable to address the research questions for this study because it allows the researcher to gain insights into the perceptions and experiences of the teachers participating in implementing the ALP. Epistemologically, the study's research questions searched for a description of personal experiences, perceptions and interpretations of the nature of the phenomenon subjectively (Neubauer, Witkop & Varpio, 2019; Cresswell, 2013). The phenomenological design also possesses the interpretive dimension that helps to provide a critique of the ALP policy. According to Neubauer et al (2019), the phenomenological design enables us to learn from the experiences of others who have experienced the same phenomenon. In this study, engaging with teachers, HODs and principals, allows us to gain valuable insights into the direct experiences with the ALP policy. Specifically, the study stands to provide lessons with regard to how ALP is understood, how the ALP is implemented, and what the consequences of for teaching and learning.

3.4 Case study as a research method

A case study is defined as an empirical enquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in-depth and within a real-life context, especially when the investigator has little control over the events (Yin, 2009; Burkholder, Cox, Crawford & Hitchcok, 2019). The case study as a research method was found suitable for this study because the research attempted to understand a complex social phenomenon about a policy implementation based on ‘what’, ‘where’ and ‘how’ questions.

Case studies are also known as a powerful tool that helps to focus research within specific confines of space and time (Burkholder et al, 2019).

In this case, the case study allowed an in-depth look at primary schools as spaces where the policy was applied over time. According to Yin (2009), a case study helps to understand a real-life phenomenon by providing an explanation, description and illustration of small group behaviour as it occurs in a real-life context. Mcleod (2019) explains that a case study allows the researcher to carry out a study in otherwise impracticable situations by helping to overcome some of the ethical issues. Yin (2006) explains that a case study requires an additional proficiency, which is doing data collection and data analysis together, as opposed to conducting data analysis as a separate stage. In this study, the case study design allowed data to be gathered in the context where the ALP policy is being applied; this helped to retain the holistic and practical implications of what is happening in schools in the Erongo region.

The case study comprised semi-structured interviews and document analysis, including policies pertaining to ALP formulated by the Namibian Education Ministry and learners' academic records. The study's bias associated with case studies was mitigated by triangulation of methodologies (semi-structured interviews and document analysis) and member checking. Member checking may be described as the process whereby the researcher provides an opportunity to the participants to ensure that their voices are accurately captured in the report by allowing them to confirm or deny the accuracy and interpretation of the data (Candela, 2019).

3.4.1 Semi-structured interviews

According to Yin (2019), evidence in case studies may be gathered through research methods such as analysis of documents or semi-structured interviews of persons (the teachers) involved in the event (implementation of the ALP). Semi-structured interviews are a type of interview in which the interviewer asks predetermined and unplanned questions. Predetermined questions are structured, present questions written on the interview guide, while the unstructured questions are questions developed during the interview either as follow-up questions or part of the probe and pounce meant to seek explanations and clarifications from the participants (Harell & Bradley, 2009). Adams (2015) also affirms that semi-structured interviews blend structured and

unstructured interviews where open- and closed-ended questions are asked, with follow-up why and how questions.

The semi-structured interview method was chosen because it provides the advantages embedded in structured and unstructured interviews. The structured part consisted of guideline questions, around which the dialogue will be focused. The unstructured component offered a more personalised approach, which allowed a free conversation and the interviewees to relax, providing more honest answers (Adams, 2015). Kapur (2018), however, argues that semi-structured interviews are a powerful tool to gain insights into education issues by understanding the experiences of individuals whose lives centre on educational activities. To understand how the policy of ALP is implemented, the researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with six teachers, six heads of department and three principals of the selected schools.

The HODs and the school principals of the respective primary schools were included in the sample because they are the supervisors, managers, monitors and key decision-makers in implementing the ALP in school. In the implementation of ALP, the HODs and principals as supervisors, ensure that the rules and regulations of automatic promotion are followed (MoE, 2015). They are also responsible for ensuring that the teachers use the correct learner performance levels and promotion requirements. In a study that aims to analyse the implementation of ALP, they are the key respondents who can view the policy implementation from a retrospective side that is different from the teachers who assess the learners in the classrooms. The teachers were included in the sample because they are the policy implementers; they carry out the assessments, produce marks, and mark schedules used in decision-making on promotion issues. The teachers also work directly with learners promoted on merit. Therefore, they can provide better information about the teaching experiences where the ALP policy is used.

3.4.2 Document analysis

Document analysis is a qualitative research method in which the researcher reviews and interprets documents to give voice and meaning to an assessment topic (Bowen, 2009). Bowen (2009) further explains that analysing documents incorporates coding content observed into themes. It is of paramount importance when evaluating documents not to consider the data as necessarily precise, accurate or complete recording of events that have occurred (Bowen (2009).

This helps to reduce the bias that may occur in the process or results. Credibility and validity in the document analysis results may also be increased by maintaining high levels of objectivity and sensitivity in the process of data collection (Bowen, 2009).

In this study, the following documents were analysed:

- The ‘National Promotion Policy Guide for Junior and Senior Primary School Phase’ (MoE, 2015) - The document provides information on the policy aims, principles, rules and regulations regarding learner performance levels and promotional requirements. The document is a guide that provides a detailed description of the policy and the guidelines defining the implementation process.
- End-of-year promotional schedules of learners from the three schools, A, B and C, respectively. These documents are used to determine whether the policy on promotion was being applied practically; they show a summary of annual assessments are used to determine whether a learner qualifies for promotion or deserves automatic promotion. In addition, the quantitative data derived from the promotion schedule was used to verify teachers' commentary regarding the learners' academic performance. It was also used to provide insights into whether there was any improvement in the academic performance of the automatically promoted learners.

In this study, the two sets of document analysis were used to corroborate the data gathered from the semi-structured interviews.

3.5 Research context

The study was carried out in the Erongo region, located in the Western geopolitical zone of Namibia. The Erongo region is one of Namibia's fourteen political regions with a shoreline of the Atlantic Ocean. The Erongo region, on its inland borders, is surrounded by Kunene Region in the North, Otjozondjupa Region in the East, Khomas Region in the Southwest and Hardap Region in the South. According to Namibia Statistical Agency (NSA) (2014), the region was named after the famous Erongo mountain range stretching across the plains between the towns of Omaruru and Karibib.

The regional capital of the Erongo region is Swakopmund, which also serves as a major tourist and holiday destination. Major tourist attractions are the coast of the Atlantic Ocean, the desert ecosystem and the sand dunes. The second largest town is Walvis Bay, which has the largest harbour in the country. Walvis Bay also hosts a lot of fishing and other manufacturing industries, while Walvis Bay hosts the largest harbour port for inland/land-locked countries of the SADC region. According to the 2011 Population and Housing Census 2011 results, Erongo had a population of 150 809 people, of which 70 986 were women, and 79 823 were men (NSA, 2014). The region's population is growing at an annual rate of 3.4 per cent, and 87% of the population lives in urban areas, while 13% stays in rural areas. The region experiences a large rural-urban migration as the youth and young adults move in looking for job opportunities, making the region multi-cultural and multi-racial.

Figure 3.1 shows the physical location of the Erongo region.



Figure 3.1: The map of Erongo region courtesy of Alchetron free Social Encyclopedia for the World

The study was located in the Erongo region because this is the region the researcher works in as a teacher. In addition, it was more convenient to conduct the research in a region where I was familiar with the study context and administrative structures of schools. Regarding education administration, the Erongo region is divided into three circuits: Swakopmund, Walvis Bay and

Omaruru. The regional head office is located in the regional capital, Swakopmund. Each circuit comprises public and a few private schools.

There are 80 schools in the Erongo region, of which 50 are primary schools. The distribution of primary schools is as follows: Swakopmund circuit, 25 schools (nine are private, 16 are public), Walvis Bay circuit, 25 schools (ten private and 15 public schools), and Omaruru circuit has thirty schools (six private schools and 24 public schools). The data was gathered from three conveniently selected primary public schools A, B and C – one from each circuit.

The study focused on public schools because they constitute the majority of the primary schools in the region. Public schools must follow all ministerial policies and regulations, including the ALP policy, published by the Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture. Public schools also have a well-defined and policy-regulated administrative structure that the Regional Education Director at the head office and IOE at the circuits monitors. The supervision and administration of schools are managed by the principals and HODs, who also ensure that the policies are implemented appropriately.

In this study, the three schools identified as school A, B and C, respectively, are located in middle-class communities within urban areas. Generally, parents who cannot afford to send their children to private schools, send their children to these public schools. As a result, the communities perceive the three selected schools as catering for less privileged children. Although most parents are employed, their income is not high enough to adequately provide for their families. Most learners attend primary schools as part of the universal free primary education. Most of the schools in the region that do not have hostels are within walking distance of communities. A few learners travel by taxis, buses or private vehicles to school. However, like in every urban society, some children do not go to school, with some even living on the street. All public schools in Namibia involve parents in the governance and decision-making process by allowing parents to elect the school board members. School boards are committees consisting of selected parent representatives and a few teachers.

Two schools (A and B) are urban primary schools in the towns of Omaruru and Swakopmund, while school C is a boarding school located in an informal settlement about 74 km outside

Walvis Bay. All three schools have running water supply, electricity, internet, telephone and good road network access. In terms of enrolment, school A has 956 learners and 53 teachers; school B has 622 learners and 38 teachers, and school C has 648 learners and 41 teachers.

In terms of physical location, school A is located in the informal settlement of Karibib. Most of the parents of learners who attend school A are self-employed, unemployed or occupying a very low-income job. This informal settlement is very small, so most of the learners (95%) walk to and from school daily. Water availability and electricity provision in the settlement are inadequate, as some households prepare food outside. However, despite the community's poor living standard, the school is well-resourced with all the essential school necessities. The primary school has grades 1 to 7. Although English is the medium of instruction, other languages such as Oshindonga, Otjiherero, Khoekhoegowab and Afrikaans, are used as first languages.

School B is located in the middle-income residential area of Swakopmund. It is a multi-cultural and multi-racial school, and most learners go to school by taxi, private car or bus. 60% of the parents of the school fall in the middle-income class. Apart from English used as the medium of instruction at school, there are optional first languages used such as Afrikaans, German, French, Otjiherero, Khoekhoegowab and Oshindonga.

School C is located in the Topnara communities' part of the Nama people. The majority (85%) of learners at this school are Oshiwambo-speaking people whose parents work in the mines and factories or are self-employed in the nearby towns of Walvis Bay, Swakopmund, Henties Bay and Arandis. Only about 10% of learners are from the Topnara communities staying in the hostel. Some learners stay with their parents and walk to school every day. School C has optional first languages subjects, such as Afrikaans, Oshindonga and Khoekhoegowab.

The three schools have most of the basic needs provided by the state to public schools, such as adequate furniture, classrooms, textbooks, human resources and other equipment such as printing and photocopy machines, ICT resources etc., essential for effective teaching and learning. The selected primary schools from the Erongo region are all mainstream schools with a few learners with severe special needs. Although the inclusive education policy is applied, schools do not have teachers trained to handle special needs learners. As observed during the school visits, most

of the schools do not have infrastructure that is easily accessible to learners with some physical disabilities.

Due to the universal free primary education policy introduced in 2013 by the then Minister of Education Arts and Culture, Dr Abraham Iyambo, the parents who have children in public schools are not required to pay school fees. However, the school can, if needed, request parents to contribute towards the school development out of their own will or generosity. In terms of this policy, the school provides stationery and textbooks to the learners. The school is also expected to communicate the learners' progress or any other school-related matter through the report cards, newsletter attached to the report cards and meetings. In addition, parent representatives serve as board members serve and take decisions on behalf of all the parents, with regards to certain matters, as these arise.

3.6 Population and sampling

A population is an entire group of the identified subjects the researcher is interested in studying (Goddard & Melville, 2013). A population comprises all the members who have met the criterion specified for a research investigation (Alvi, 2016). Sampling is how the researcher selects the research participants from the study population. The sample for this study was selected using non-probability or purposive sampling. Maree (2014: 178) states that “purposive sampling is used in special situations where the sampling is done with a specific purpose in mind”. This sampling method is deemed most applicable to this study as it ensures that certain characteristics of the population sample were represented to the extent that the researcher required (Archarya et al, 2013).

The target population for the study consisted of the teachers, HODs and Principals from the three circuits of the Erongo region – namely, Swakopmund, Walvis Bay and Omaruru.

The researcher purposively selected six primary phase teachers, six HODs and three principals from the three circuits in the Erongo region. Only teachers with at least five years' experience were chosen to be in the sample. Experienced teachers were presumed to know more about the implementation of the ALP policy and its advantages and disadvantages.

The HODs and the school principals of the respective primary schools were included in the sample because they are the supervisors, managers, monitors and key decision-makers in implementing the ALP in schools. The contribution in data collection corroborates the data generated from teachers of the primary school in the Erongo region. In the implementation of ALP, the HODS and principals as supervisors ensure that the rules and regulations of automatic promotion are followed (MoE, 2015). They are also responsible for ensuring that the teachers use the correct learner performance levels and promotion requirements. Therefore, in a study aimed at analysing the implementation of ALP, they are the key respondents who can view the policy implementation from a retrospective side that differs from the teachers who assess the learners in the classrooms.

3.7 Credibility and reliability of data

Credibility in research is about the worthiness, trustworthiness or the ability to make readers of the report believe that the conclusions drawn from the study are indeed supported by the research findings (Cutliffe & Mckenna, 1999). The following procedures were followed to ensure that the study is credible:

- The research questions and objectives were revised to ensure that they are well defined and projected to close the knowledge gap identified in the review.
- An appropriate methodology that allowed an in-depth study of the phenomenon was applied.
- A comprehensive review of literature that identified the knowledge gap to be filled by the study was done.
- Ethical issues were also applied during the data collection, storage, and report writing.
- An appropriate data analysis procedure was applied for case study research, and the research conclusions were drawn from the evidence and discussions.

Reliability in a study refers to the research's repeatability, replicability and consistency (Tichapondwa, 2013). For example, are the research instruments capable of producing almost similar results when used repeatedly in similar studies? Reliability in this study was ensured by consistency in the data collection, analysis and interpretation.

3.8 Data analysis and interpretation

In qualitative research, data analysis is undertaken to determine the credibility of the findings (Ryan, Coughlan & Cronin, 2007). Burkholder et al (2019) explain that data analysis in case study research involves stages: describing, interpreting, drawing conclusions and determining significance. Outlining the steps of analysing data in another way, Brink (2007) outlines that data analysis involves categorising, ordering, manipulating, summarising, accounting for, and explaining the data gathered. It can be noted from the two definitions that the purpose of the data analysis is to draw conclusions, account for and explain the meaning of the data so that answers to the research questions may be drawn out. However, according to Burkholder et al (2019), case study data analysis is unique as it followed three distinct stages to analyse data for this study.

3.9.1 Stage 1: Describing

During the first stage of describing, data collected in the form of transcripts developed from the semi-structured interviews and field notes made from the documents analysed are read several times to understand the “why, what, when and where of the situation under study” (Burkholder et al, 2019: 252). At this stage, data descriptors were broad themes or topics like the implementation of ALP in schools, the effects of the ALP on the teachers and learners, and the implications of ALP on the quality of education.

3.9.2 Stage 2: Emergence of findings

Patton (2002) explains that patterns, themes, and categories emerge when the data collected is read repeatedly. The codes, themes and categories are emerging findings that emerge when coding is applied to the interview transcripts, field notes or documents analysed. Open coding is an inductive form of qualitative data analysis applied to establish the findings in the data (Burkholder et al, 2019).

3.9.3 Step 3: Comparing

Comparing is the final step of analysing data collected from a case study. All the emerging themes (both major and minor) are identified at this stage. Then, across-theme comparisons were done to verify the conclusions and draw some answers to the study's research questions.

The data interpretation may be described as reviewing the analysed to reach meaningful conclusions. The data from the interviews will be interpreted according to the themes and topics emerging in the data analysis process. The data from the documents will be analysed according to the codes generated from the contents of the documents.

3.10 Ethical considerations

Research involving human beings can potentially cause physical, psychological or emotional damage to the participants who may be interested in the study (Marongwe, 2012). The researcher, therefore, had some ethical responsibilities to “protect, life, health, dignity, integrity, right to self-determination, privacy and confidentiality of the personal information of research subjects” (Yip, Han & Sng, 2016: 685). The following ethical considerations were applied in this study to protect the participants who provided the data used in the study.

3.10.1 Informed consent

Before conducting a face-to-face interview and document analysis in this study, the researcher had to seek permission to carry out the study from the relevant authorities in writing. Firstly, the researcher sought permission from the Executive Director (ED) of the Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture in Namibia and the Director of Education in the Erongo region to conduct research at the schools (Addendum B). Using the authorisation, the researchers approached the principals of the identified schools to obtain permission to collect data from the HODs and the teachers. In addition, the researcher obtained ethical clearance from the University of Stellenbosch (Addendum D), permission from the school principals to access the ALP document, and learner promotion schedules.

When the research sample of teachers had been finalised, all participants were asked to sign a SU consent form (Addendum A) – which assures the anonymity and confidentiality of the research study and any publication. Informed consent was obtained when participants voluntarily signed a written agreement to confirm their willingness to participate in the study (Yip, Han & Sng, 2016). Before signing, the participants were all informed of their rights in the study – the right to refuse or withdraw from the study any time they wish to do so, which would be without any reprisal.

3.10.2 Confidentiality

The study ensured and maintained privacy, anonymity, and confidentiality throughout the process to protect the participants. Notably, the report does not reveal any information regarding the participants' names and identities; this will not happen even in future publications (Leedy& Ormrod, 2015). Furthermore, in this study, the information supplied by the participants will be kept confidential (Yip et al, 2016). Thus, anonymity and confidentiality were applied in the report and data management, and pseudonyms were used.

3.11 Limitations of the study

“Sample sizes in case studies are typically small, which is common with qualitative research” (Burkholder et al, 2019: 249). This implies that sample size is reduced when case studies are applied to qualitative studies. Small samples tend to make it difficult to establish significant relationships in non-numerical qualitative data (McLeod, 2009). Qualitative data is not statistically representative, it consists of perspectives that statistical methods cannot accurately analyse; hence this is a limitation. The data gathering process in this qualitative study is also time-consuming, especially with conducting interviews, as the interview times depend on the teachers' free time.

According to McLeod (2009), qualitative research is open-ended. This implies that in the data collection process, the participants have more control over the content of the data. This is a limitation because the data gathered is subjective one cannot verify it objectively. The document analysis method also had some limitations in this study. Accessibility of the documents in schools was a challenge, as the participants were not interested in visiting the archives to look for documents such as old mark schedules pertinent to the study.

3.13 Chapter summary

Chapter 3, in a nutshell, provided descriptions of the methodology and the research design used in this study. The study followed a phenomenological case study design. The data for the study was constructed from a purposively selected sample of teachers using the instruments, interview schedules and document analysis. This was followed by a detailed description of the research context. The chapter also encapsulated the rationale for the study, the population size and the sampling method used to identify the participants. A description of how credibility and reliability

were ensured was also provided in this chapter. The data analysis, interpretation, ethical issues, and limitations of the study were also discussed. The next chapter focuses on the presentation of data.

Chapter 4:

Data presentation

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the research findings (data) following the semi-structured interviews conducted with six teachers, six HODs, and three principals at three primary schools in the Erongo region. The ‘National Promotion Policy Guide for Junior and Senior Primary School Phase’ (MoE, 2015) will be discussed in chapter 5.

The findings are presented in response to the following sub-research questions:

- What are teachers’ understandings of the ALP policy at their schools?
- How is the ALP policy implemented at schools?
- What are the effects of ALP on learners and teachers?
- What are the implications of the ALP policy on teaching and learning?

These questions support the primary research question: What are the implications of ALP on the quality of education in Namibian primary schools?

For ethical reasons of anonymity and confidentiality, the following codes were used to represent the participants, teachers T1-T6. The codes HOD1-HOD6 represent the heads of department. The codes P1-P3 were used for the three school principals. A total of 15 participants were interviewed in the study. Although all participants, including HODs and principals, are all teachers, in the context of this study, the term ‘teacher’ refers to all the participants of the study, i.e., teachers, HODs, and principals.

4.2 Biographical data of the participants

Table 4.1 shows the biographical data of the six teachers, six HODs, and three principals. The biographical information shows the gender, highest qualifications and years of teaching experience. It was imperative to consider gender in biographical data because the application of the promotional policy is gender-sensitive – boys and girls may be supported or promoted by

male and female teachers differently (Zimba, 2015). Zimba (2015) notes that in Namibia and worldwide, girls were discriminated against in education, so they received more support. Nowadays, the boys have high underachievement and dropout rates, many repetitions, and retention. Gender, therefore, affects the “characteristic attitudes and behaviours of both men and women” (Zimba, 2015: 2). The teaching qualifications and experience of the teacher may be used to analyse the potential to comprehend and apply policies. The researcher selected three public schools, A, B, and C, from each circuit, and from each school, two teachers, two HODs, and a principal were chosen to participate in the study. The participants’ biographical data is provided in table 4.1. Only the participants with some experience (at least three years) in administering the ALP were selected.

Table 4.1 Biographical data of the participants

School	Participant	Gender	Highest Teaching Qualification			Years of Experience
			BETD	BEEd(Hon)	Med	
A	Teacher 1	Male		X		5
A	Teacher 2	Female		X		6
B	Teacher 3	Female		X		5
B	Teacher 4	Male		X		5
C	Teacher 5	Female		X		4
C	Teacher 6	Female		X		6
A	HoD 1	Male	X			12
A	HoD 2	Male		X		15
B	HoD 3	Female	X			21
B	HoD 4	Female	X			26
C	HoD 5	Female		X		20
C	HoD 6	Male		X		19
A	Principal 1	Male		X		28
B	Principal 2	Female	X			30
C	Principal 3	Female	X			34

Teachers were selected to be part of the sample because they interact directly with learners through teaching and assessments and play a role in making decisions regarding ALP. In addition, the HODs and the school principals of the respective primary schools were included in the sample because they are the supervisors, managers, monitors, and key decision-makers in implementing the ALP in the school.

The second column of the table describes the participants according to their positions. The third column shows the gender of the participants. 40% of the participants were males, while 60% were females. Finally, the fourth column shows the qualifications of each participant who was purposively selected to participate in the interview. The data shows that all the teachers were qualified primary school teachers; 33% have a Basic Education Teaching Diploma (BETD) qualification, while the rest were BEd (Honours) graduates. It is also worth noting that the three BETD programmes offered by Colleges of Education (CoEs) were phased out in 2010, and a four-year Bachelor of Education (BEd) degree was introduced; Colleges of Education merged with the University of Namibia (UNAM) (MoEAC, 2017). Since the BEd (Honours) is the new essential teaching qualification, fewer graduates had work experience over six years when the data was collected.

The last column in table 4.1 shows the years of experience of the individual teachers. On average, teachers who participated in the study had five years of experience; HODs had an average of 16 years, and the school principals had thirty years of experience.

4.3 Semi-structured interviews

The face-to-face interviews were conducted with six teachers, six HODs, and three principals, using one interview schedule (Appendix C) to interview all participants. The interviews were conducted at the three respective schools; each interview lasted approximately 30 minutes.

As a point of departure, the study was interested in gaining insights into firstly, the understandings of teachers, principals, and HODs of the concept of ALP, and the ALP policy, as stipulated in the ‘National Promotion Policy Guide for Junior and Senior Primary School Phase’; secondly, how this policy was being implemented; and thirdly, what effects the policy had on the quality of education in the respective schools. In presenting the findings, I have identified three major themes and accompanying sub-themes generated from the questions posed during the interview.

Table 4.2 Major and minor themes

Major Themes	Minor Themes
The implementation of ALP in schools	Teachers' understanding of the automatic promotion The use of ALP in schools The decision to promote the learners Parental involvement Frequency of ALP use in schools Support programmes
The effects of ALP on the learners and teachers	Challenges of teaching automatically promoted learners Major differences between learners automatically promoted and those promoted on merit ALP as a suitable alternative to grade repetition
The implications of ALP on the quality of education	Understanding quality Education The implications of ALP on quality education in schools

4.3.1 Implementation of ALP policy in schools

This section addresses sub-research question number one designed to determine how the ALP policy was being applied by the teachers at the three schools A, B, and C, respectively.

4.3.1.1 Participants' understandings of ALP

The findings reveal the term automatic promotion is understood as a policy that encourages all learners to proceed to the next grade regardless of their grades or performance.

T2 said it is “a way of giving learners a free ticket to move on to the next grade without mastering the promotion requirements”. T3 believes that automatic promotion occurs “when all learners are promoted to the next grade without considering the failures”. In consensus with T3, T4, T5, and T6 explained that learners are promoted to the next grade at the end of the year without considering their capability to comprehend the competencies of the current grade. In brief, T6 explained that it means “no learner must fail and repeat the current grade”.

The HODs described ALP in almost a similar manner to the teachers. HOD1 revealed that “It refers to learners' progress to the next grade regardless of their achievements regarding the required basic requirements”. HOD2 said it is:

a process whereby a child is moved to the next grade despite failing to meet passing requirements, based on mastering relevant competencies, simply because of a policy that refuses to allow learners to repeat based on years in grade, phase, and own ages.

HOD3, HOD4, HD5, and HOD6 shared the same understanding; they indicated that in automatic promotion, learners are “moved/promoted/transferred” to the next grade regardless of performance or disregarding promotional requirements or mastery of all the required competencies. Like other teachers, the principals concurred with the meaning of automatic promotion. P1 described it as “the practice of allowing learners to progress from one class to the next irrespective of their academic performance”. P2 described it as a practice of promoting a learner to the next grade after the current school year, regardless of whether they learned the necessary material or if they were often absent.

Generally, all the participants shared almost similar perspectives on automatic promotion. According to the data, automatic learner promotion occurs when learners who failed to meet all the competencies or, for any other reason, need to repeat a grade are moved or transferred to the next grade, together with those who passed. The data shows that all the teachers understand the concept of automatic promotion.

4.3.1.2 The use of ALP in schools

When the teachers were asked if they were using the ALP policy, as stipulated in the ‘National Promotion Policy Guide for Junior and Senior Primary School Phase’ (MoE, 2015), it was found that only school A was implementing the policy as required. School B had not used the procedure due to a lack of commitment among the teachers, HODs, and the principal, and school C used the policy when it was convenient.

T3 at school B said, “No, we have never used a transfer policy”. HOD3 supported this.

T5, T6, P3 and HOD6 at school C agreed that their school had used the policy occasionally once or twice. However, T6 explained that their school used the policy once, “only during Covid-19 they promoted learners, and that was the only last year 2020”. T5 responded as follows:

The school used the policy last year at the end of the year, just like any other school in Namibia. The policy was only used to promote learners who did meet the promotion requirements.

In support, P3 also said, “We partially use automatic promotion policy”.

The participants who confirmed that they consistently used the policy in their schools were T2, T1, HOD1, HOD2, and P1 from school A. HOD1 reported:

Our school uses automatic promotion, and it works like this: Firstly, no child may repeat the same grade twice. Secondly, no child may repeat if the child is two years older than the preferred age for that grade. Thirdly, no child may repeat more than twice in a phase.

The description of how school A applies the ALP policy, according to T2, correctly followed the ‘National Promotion Policy Guide for Junior and Senior Primary School Phase’ (MoE, 2015). This was corroborated by P1, who shared:

Our school uses the automatic promotion policy stipulated by the Ministry of Education. This policy is given to all teaching staff members, and it is placed in their administration files, and they use it during the last term or end of the third term when the learners need to be promoted or transferred to the next grade (P1).

According to the school A participants that use the ALP policy, the policy is only applicable at the end of the year because learners do not change grades at the end of terms one and two. Considerations to promote learners occur at the end of the academic year. According to HOD2:

The school used the policy even last year (2020) during the Covid-19 pandemic. All learners were required to be promoted to the next grade. We also use automatic promotion when a learner has been in a phase two times or because of age.

The findings revealed that the ALP policy is not being applied in school B. School C occasionally uses the policy when they find it appropriate, for example, when the learners were affected by the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020, they promoted everyone to the next grade. School A implemented the ALP policy as prescribed.

4.3.1.3 The decision to promote the learners

There were varied responses about who is responsible for the final decision-making regarding ALP at the three schools. The reactions can be placed into three categories. The first category

identified the Ministry of Education, the second category identified the school management members and some teachers, and the third category explained that it is the responsibility of the promotional committee.

Among those who argued the Ministry of Education is responsible for making such decisions were T3, T4, and T6 at school B

The Ministry sends directives to the regional director through the inspectors' office and the school implement guided by the circular. All grades, 1-9 were automatically promoted to the next grade (T3).

T6 at school B shared a similar opinion and identified the Ministry as solely in charge of making the policies and decisions, through the Regional Director and the Inspector of Education.

Those who identified some members of management and teachers as responsible for the decision-making were T5, HoD6, and HOD5 from school C

T5 identified the school principal, HOD, or senior teacher as the persons in charge. Similarly, HOD6 explained that all the teachers and the principal are involved.

There is no existing committee; however, the principal takes responsibility for making the ruling. In cases when the principal is not available during the schedule development, an HOD or a senior teacher takes the responsibility.

HOD5 said, "All teachers and the principal are involved in the automatic promotion". This implied that the decision to promote the learners was meant to be the task of all staff members.

In the third category, all principals, HOD1, HOD2, HOD6, P1, P2, P3, T2, and T6, mentioned a committee responsible for ALP at schools A and C. Sometimes, the members who constitute the committee were identified as HODs, class teachers, subject teachers, and the principal. All the principals mentioned the committee showing that they had an understanding of the stipulations of the 'National Promotion Policy Guide for Junior and Senior Primary School Phase' (MoE, 2015).

T2 said, “The promoter committee and the registered teacher are responsible for the automatic promotion of learners at their school”.

HOD1 of school A reported:

I firmly believe the promotional committee is made out of the school’s management team. Or, in the absence of a committee, this is the mandate placed squarely on the school management team.

P3 at school C, in agreement with HOD2 and T2, and T6, also identified the composition of the promotional committee selected at the school. He said he was not part of this committee.

HOD2 shared that:

The promotional committee at the school has the responsibility to promote the learners to the next grade based on the criteria in place. I am one of those members of the said committee. We must discuss the pass requirements to determine which learners should transfer (HoD2).

P1 of School A re-emphasised that it is the responsibility of

The promotional committee at the school is responsible for promoting the learners to the next grade based on the criteria in place. I am one of those members of the said committee. We must discuss the pass requirements to determine which learners should transfer.

Speaking with confidence, P2 of school B said, “It is the promotional committee that involves the HOD, principal, and some teachers that discuss criteria one would look at before promoting the learner to the next grade”. P1 of school A also identified the promotional committee responsible for final decisions on promoting learners, as indicated in the policy document. He said the committee consists of the class teachers, HODs, and the principal.

In summary, decisions to promote learners are believed to be the responsibility of the Ministry of Education, some management members, and teachers. All principals of the three schools and two

teachers from schools A and C and their respective HODs explained that schools are expected to select a promotional committee responsible for making decisions on the promotion of learners. The participants who identified a committee revealed what is stated in the ALP policy; a school should select a promotional approach. It seems some participants did not read and understand the ALP policy in the schools

4.3.1.4 Parental involvement in the automatic promotion of learners

The study was also interested in ascertaining whether parents had any involvement in the automatic promotion of their children. The interviews revealed that all affected parents/guardians are informed individually at school A. They are called to the school and informed that their child had not met the minimum requirements of a particular grade but would be automatically promoted to the next grade because of the ALP policy. At school C, parents are usually informed by the school board. At school B, parents are not involved because the school has not been applying the ALP policy as required.

T3, T4, HOD3 and HOD4 of school B shared that their school did not involve parents in the automatic promotion of learners. As highlighted in the following interview extracts: T3 said, “Not what I know of. At my school, the two factors mentioned in the policy determine the automatic promotion, and no one is consulted”. HOD3 expressed, “For my 13 years of teaching experience, I must admit parents are not consulted nor asked for inputs whether their kids be promoted or not”. HOD4 also emphasised that,

The parents are not directly involved. However, they are well informed during parents meeting about the promotional requirements and criteria that the school looks at to promote the child to the next grade (HoD4).

T1, T2, HOD2, and P1 of school A and T6, HOD5, HOD6, and P3 of school C reported that the parents are always involved in using the ALP. T2 said, “Yes, when the committee feels that the learner did not master the competencies, they consult the parents”. HOD2 also agreed that the “parents are informed at the end of the year about the promotion of learners; they are always informed every end of term”.

P3 explained:

School board members represent other parents on behalf of the parent, such as the chairperson and treasurer. In addition, the school informed the parents about their children's progress through a parental meeting during the last term of the year or the first term of the next year.

P1 acknowledged, "Yes, parents are consulted; we inform the parents every term. We also organise a parent day whereby parents would come in to check their children's performance".

T1 and T2 of school A and T5 of school C claimed that parents of children who fail to meet the criteria of the ALP are usually informed directly or through the school board meeting. In addition, the teachers narrated that the promotional requirements are typically presented to the parents when a child has passed or is automatically promoted to the next grade.

In summary, schools A and C, which apply the ALP policy, do not involve parents in the decision-making process; instead, parents are only informed that their children failed to meet the promotional requirements, so they are beneficiaries of the ALP. While school A tends to invite affected parents to school to inform them, school C uses the school board and other parent meetings to educate parents about the ALP promotional procedures. School B does not involve parents in discussions about promoting learners, as the school does not implement the ALP policy.

4.3.1.5 Prevalence of ALP use in schools

The data shows that school A has consistently applied the ALP policy every year-end in primary school grades. School B had not applied the ALP policy, while school C applied only when convenient. For example, school C used the ALP in 2020 when all learners were automatically promoted due to the Covid-19 disruption of teaching programmes. They also applied the ALP policy, when certain classes were affected by over-crowding. Interestingly, the ALP policy was not used as a means to prevent grade repetition by certain learners, but rather to alleviate the pressure created by overcrowded classrooms.

T5, T6, HOD5, and P3 of school C said their schools only applied the ALP when the government asked all the learners to be promoted due to the implications of Covid-19. On another occasion, when the learners are coming into grade 3, and those who had failed could not fit in the

classroom. T5 said, “The policy was just used because of the Covid-19 situation when learners were at home for most of the year. It is not used every year”. T4 said they “never” use it. “Only last year due to Covid-19”. T6 said it was also used last year to compensate learners affected by Covid-19. HOD5 also said, “It was used in all grades especially this time of Covid-19 where learners were not involved fully in education due to the pandemic”. HOD6, responsible for the junior primary phase, explained that their school had once applied the ALP for convenience purposes to avoid overcrowding in grade 3 classrooms. This was supported by P3, who said,

A year we were forced to apply the policy in grade 3 when the class was overcrowded. We agreed with the teachers involved and the HOD to move all the learners who had failed in grades 3 to 4 to avoid overcrowding. (P3)

According to T2 at school A, the ALP is applied “every end of the year to the entire grade, where learners have to be promoted to the next grade”. HOD2 claimed that it is “Very prevalent in all the grades, but gets more interest as grades go up. This is all because of repeaters and more”. P1 said the frequency of use “is always at the end of each academic year. The policy is used in the entire grade”.

A summary of the prevalence of ALP revealed that school A applies the ALP once per year, in the third term in all the grades, as stipulated in the policy. At school C, the ALP was used when it was convenient to avoid overcrowding. The data also shows the school in the past year had used it once to resolve the challenges brought by the Covid-19 pandemic, and on another occasion, the school wanted to fix the problem of overcrowding in the classrooms. The frequency of the use of ALP in school B is rated at zero because it was found out that the school is not applying the ALP policy.

4.3.1.6 Support programmes for automatically promoted learners

In addition to understanding how ALP is used (if at all) at the three schools, it was also imperative to find out if schools had some support programmes to support the learners automatically promoted to catch up with others in the next grade. The data generated during the interviews shows that school A has some support programmes; although they have implementation challenges, school C also has some documented support programmes. The lack

of commitment toward implementing learner support was also noted in school A. School B has some learner support programmes; however, they are not explicitly designed to support the automatically promoted learners, given that the school does not employ ALP.

In response to this question, the participants from school A had this to say: T2 said, “There is always a learning support in place, but the commitments towards it are not satisfying, most of the learners for whom it is intended to”. This point was also revealed by T1, who said, “There are some learning support programmes at school to help any learner that needs extra help”. HOD2 reported that “most schools have sound, proper and stable learning support programmes, but just in the paper while nothing is going on at school”.

P2 said at their school, “There are supporting programmes such as reading and writing club, extra lessons, math and science club, and geosciences club”. This was also supported by HOD3, who said we always support learners who are struggling in their academic work. T3 and T4 also reported some remedial lessons and conducted extra classes in the afternoons as indicated on the school timetable. The data collected at school B shows that the ALP does not influence their support for learners because they do not use the policy. According to the participants of school B, the school always support learners who struggle to reach their competencies throughout the year. These programmes do not target automatically promoted learners because they do not apply the ALP policy.

The data gathered from school C also indicated that the school has some written programmes designed to help all learners, including automatically promoted ones. T5 said, “We must help learners who are not at the same level as others. I always give them some remedial lessons in groups in the afternoon”. HOD 6 said, “whenever we identify learners who are continuously failing to meet their competencies, we take them to the school counsellor for support”. P3 also added that they have support programmes as part of their school policy, though they struggle to implement them effectively.

We are finding it challenging to support automatically promoted and other learners with difficulties in learning due to the lack of time, commitment, know-how, and attitude of the teachers (P3).

HOD 5 reported that “the teachers are overloaded, classrooms are full, and it is difficult to get time to implement some remedial lessons”. HOD6 and T6 also explained that support programmes are well-documented on paper but not well-implemented as reinforced by the principal. The challenge in school C is how to implement the support programmes effectively.

In summary, the data shows that all schools have some learner support programmes such as remedial lessons, extra lessons, school support clubs, and counselling services. These programmes already existed; they were not necessarily influenced or created to assist automatically promoted learners. The automatically enabled learners do not have specific support programmes in the schools. The data gathered from all schools also revealed that the support programmes are not being effectively implemented in all three schools due to a lack of proper supervision and knowledge of how the teachers can conduct effective learners’ support.

4.3.2. The effects of automatic learner promotion on the learners and teachers

The question on how learners were affected by ALP generated an array of responses presented in the sub-themes below.

4.3.2.1 Understanding quality education

Participants shared different understandings of quality education.

According to T2, quality education is reached when the “learners obtain optimum knowledge of each level or grade before moving to the next level”. (T2)

T3 said it was about “having learners mastered their competencies and can apply the knowledge and skills to solve problems and passing with quality symbols as extra achievement” (T3).

Making further emphasis on what learners should attain, T1 said, “Quality education is that education that provides all learners with capabilities they need to become productive citizens”.

In agreement with T5, HoD1 said quality education is achieved when “the learners master all the basic competencies and can reason properly”. From another perspective, HOD4 also explained,

Quality education is more than a slogan; it is about the outcomes, the results, and standards of your final productions (learner) and who and where they can be after schooling. Quality education is inclusive, fair, and not just judgemental.

HOD4 described quality education as enabling learners to acquire skills that make them potential human beings in society. HOD5 shared the same remarks when she said it is “preparing learners for the outside world to solve problems and add to sustainable development” P2 emphasised societal needs.

Quality education is the education that focuses on societal needs development, social problem solving, empowerment of human rights, and economic empowerment (P2)

P1 added,

Quality education is attained when the objectives of an education system are met; that is, when an education system is satisfying the needs of the country, politically, economically, and socially.

The data shows that the participants understand some of the expectations in quality education. The data indicates that individual participants hold a set of different criteria for deciding what quality education is, such as the satisfaction of society's expectations, empowerment of human beings, inclusive education, acquisition of knowledge and skills needed to solve problems, and achieving the objectives of an education system. The data shows that quality is an achievement of what is expected.

4.3.2.2 Challenges of teaching and handling automatically promoted learners in the classroom

According to the participants' responses, managing learners who have passed and those promoted on merit, together with learners who have not met the minimum criteria of a previous grade and have been automatically promoted, create challenges for teachers and learners. Therefore, the data on the effects of automatically promoting learners will be presented in two parts, first, the implications on the learners, followed by a look at the implications on teachers.

4.3.3 Effects of ALP on the learners

The data reveals that both the positive and negative effects of ALP are not limited to those learners, who have benefitted from being automatically promoted. Learners who have met the grade requirements and do not rely on automatic promotion, are also affected by learners who have been automatically promoted. The following interview extracts show the adverse implications of ALP on the learners that were shared by T1, T2 of school A; T4, HOD4, and P2 of school B; HOD5 and HOD6 of school C

Learners (especially those that have been weak) do not take school seriously as they feel there is no need to work hard if they are promoted. This also discourages hardworking learners as they feel no need to be at their best. (T1)

The view of T1 was shared by HoD5, who claimed that “automatic promotion kills the spirit of competition among the learners, working hard or not gives the same results, promotion”. In agreement, T2 explained that they ended up seeing no benefits of working hard to be promoted and not putting in the effort since they all go to the next grade at the end of the year. HOD2 noted that most “learners who are automatically promoted do not fully commit to school”. HOD4 added that “the importance of being a good learner is now nullified”. Learners, who work hard and perform well academically achieve the same outcome as learners, who are academically weak, or who have not worked hard enough to attain the minimum criteria of a grade.

According to T4, the automatically promoted learners have the following characteristics.

They cannot read correctly; they cannot read at all; they cannot write. I have also observed some with dyslexia-related conditions, and their place in the mainstream makes it difficult for themselves and the teacher (T4).

HOD6 said, “some do not complete tasks, dodge classes, have high absenteeism, and lack parental involvement (in that situation, parents are more needed, but they are hardly involved)”.

P2 explained that the “use of ALP pushes all the learners with learning difficulties up the ladder until the final or exit grade, where they will all fail. This affects the quality of education in our

schools”. In turn, the pressure created by learners, who needed additional support, meant that teachers could not always attend to learners, who had been promoted on merit.

Other participants, however, identified the positives of the ALP policy. HOD2 explained that ALP “reduces school dropout and absenteeism If learners are kept for too long in a grade, they lose interest in school. They begin with regular absenteeism and end up as school dropouts”.

Similarly, T3 added that “ALP enables learners to stay with their peers, instead of facing the humiliation, segregation, and isolation when they repeat a grade”. P3 cited an issue of children’s rights; He explained that “keeping a child in one grade for several years is an abuse of the rights of the child”. The last point was raised by P1, who said, “When learners move with their peers, they receive more academic support from their friends, and eventually, they catch up. Instead, they move out of their peer group and lose all their friends when they repeat.”

The data shows that the participants have different perspectives on the implementation and effects of the ALP policy. Both positive and negative effects were identified. However, the data shows that more participants identified the adverse effects when compared to those who recognised the positive implications.

4.3.4 Effects of ALP on the teachers

The effects of ALP are not limited to learners. Teachers, too, are affected by managing automatically promoted learners together with those who work hard and are committed to passing their grades.

T2 reported that “it hurts the teachers as they have to teach contents to learners who do not have sufficient prior knowledge of the subject/topic”. In the context of T3, automatically promoted learners create additional work for teachers: “Teachers have to do extra work in lesson preparation to support automatically promoted learners”. T4 narrated several effects.

There are changes in everything you do regarding teaching methods, learning materials, and instructions... [I]t would help if you started with what they missed for you to add new knowledge and skills; this requires new teaching aids and different teaching methods... [M]ore time is needed to plan and implement the teaching

methods to cater to all the individual learners' needs... [The] teacher has to come up with different assessment strategies as well to integrate these automatically promoted learners.

T6 of school C also added that the use of ALP tends to “decrease [the] morale in teaching. Teachers develop a tendency of as long as I have covered the prescribed content”. T6 further explained that “different teaching and learning approaches should be employed to help them cope with learning and progress. This approach might derail navigation towards the completion of your teaching schedule.”

HOD1 of school A also noticed that when ALP is applied, “different teaching is needed to accommodate learners who were promoted automatically because they did not perform well before”. HOD3 from school B reported that “it slows down the teaching back to accommodate those that are slow who have been promoted”. According to HOD5 of school C, the demand for remedial teaching increases when learners are automatically promoted. This point was also supported by HOD6 of school C, reiterating that.

Teaching learners who are promoted automatically have a lot of effects on me. I have to re-teach the essential competencies for the previous grade before I continue with the one for the current grade.

P1 raised some of the effects of automatically promoted learners' time and classroom management,

Time management is always a problem when planning a lesson; you have to only include one or two essential competencies from the syllabus, which you might not finish even due to the nature of learners. Furthermore, the automatic promotion has also created large classroom overcrowding, making it hard for the teachers to manage the classes (P1).

P3 added that there is more workload on the teachers,

Extra works are ever there if you are teaching learners who are automatically promoted; you have to organise additional classes, group learning, and individual consultation for each learner to understand the competencies (P3).

In a nutshell, the participants believe that the automatic promotion of learners has adverse effects on the teachers; it brings about more work on their shoulders regarding planning, teaching strategies, assessments, and classroom management. In addition, the perception was that automatically promoted learners delayed the pacing of lessons as teachers try to accommodate learners who did not achieve the competencies of the previous grade.

4.3.5 Major differences between learners automatically promoted and those promoted on merit

The implementation of the ALP enables the learners who have achieved the competencies to be in the same class as those who would have failed. To interrogate the effects of implementing the ALP policy in schools in-depth, it is also imperative to assess how the learners automatically promoted differ from those who are not. The significant difference noted is recorded in the following table 4.3

Table 4.3 differences between learners promoted on ALP and those promoted on merit

Learners promoted by ALP	Learners promoted on merit
Usually and mostly the ones who disrupt classes (T1)	Usually pay more attention in class(T1)
Not very serious they rely on ALP (T2, HoD2, HoD3)	Work hard to be promoted; they are more committed (T2, HoD 2, HoD3)
Did not achieve the essential competencies of the previous grade (T3, T6, HoD4)	They have some skills, achieved all the essential competencies of the previous grade (T3, HoD6, HoD4)
Lack the mastery of essential subject content(T2)	Good basic understanding of the subject content. Can analyse, evaluate different learning materials and apply the content accordingly (T4)
Find the work, content, and more challenging. They require more constant support to learn (T5)	Mostly independent, find the work, task, and content interesting. They need little support to learn (T5)
Lowly motivated, high likelihood of dropping out of school (T6)	Highly motivated, so is the performance
Promoted due to age or number of years in a phase (T1)	In schools A, B, and C, they are enabled based on performance, a pass in a grade (HoD6)
In most cases have low self-esteem and confidence (P1)	always want to discover/learn new things, they are ever pushing for new topics (P1)

Table 4.3 describes the differences between the automatically promoted learner and those promoted on merit. The data shows that the learners promoted on merit are more prepared for the next grade. They are motivated and ready to encounter the challenges of the following grade; teachers also find them easy to manage these learners. T5 claimed that the learners who benefit from ALP later struggle to meet the academic demands of the following grade when compared to those promoted on merit.

4.3.6 ALP as a suitable alternative to grade repetition

The introduction of the ALP policy replaced the grade repetition policy in schools. The participants were asked to share their opinions on this decision. Some participants said the decision was the most appropriate because it reduced school dropouts, solved the challenges brought on by Covid 19, and automatically promoted learners gained motivation to perform better. However, some participants adamantly rejected the ALP as a suitable alternative to the grade repetition.

Those who supported the ALP argued as follows, T2 at school A said,

It is not a great option at all. The ministry should review this policy with immediate effect. It serves as a redundant to the economy because resources are invested in these, but they cannot perform.

T5 at school C explained,

It is suitable for over-aged learners because repeating them might force them to drop out of school. Learners will be motivated, and as a result, the possibilities of their results improving are high.

HoD2 at school A also pointed out that

It is a solution for outbreaks like Covid-19 or when learners did well in all their subjects but failed one promotional subject.

HOD1 at school A said, “It is ideal in cases of over-aged learners with severe learning difficulty”. HOD5 supported this at school C highlighted that retaining learners is not ideal and leads to classroom overcrowding. The principal P1 at school A also endorsed the use of ALP policy implementation; she explained that

it is a second chance for some learners to do better and prosper. It re-boosts self-confidence, self-esteem, and motivation (P2).

Those who argued against the use of ALP were HOD4 at school B, who said

ALP should not be in school. Instead, they should find other means of helping them cope and catch up. This was supported by HOD5, who argued that “automatic promotion is not an adequate alternative because the learner did not meet the essential requirement to be promoted to the next grade”.

P2 shared that

it is not adequate as grade repetition because it does not give room for learners to achieve the essential competencies as the grade repetition. Automatic promotion of learners will let learners’ complete school and enter society with zero content. The automatic promotion policy destroys society as pupils will end up with nothing to solve societal problems.

Principal P2 also indicated that “automatic promotion is going on with many negative factors (variables) such as poor quality of education”. Similarly, HOD4 explained that automatic promotion lowers the quality of the education standards because “a learner is supposed to meet basic requirements before moving to the next grade”. HOD3 argued that “for teachers, ALP is a burden, diversion of focus and frustration to cater for automatically promoted learners”. T3 also lamented that,

The automatic promotion policy demolishes the Namibian economy, is the suit of lack of commitments, promotes laziness, destroys educational goals, and is not helpful.

The data generated in this part of the interview showed that the policy of ALP is a highly-contested phenomenon where teachers do not have a consensus. In other words, not all the participants involved in the ALP policy implemented approve of it as fruitful.

4.3.7 The implications of automatic learner promotion on quality education

This section of the data presentation focuses on research question three, where the focus was to review the implications of the ALP policy on the quality of education in Namibia. The data is presented in two major themes as follows:

4.3.7.1 Understanding quality education

In response to the question on teachers' understanding of the concept of quality education, the participants had a basic knowledge and understanding of what quality education entails with regards to learners' and teachers' expectations. Some participants argued that education is of good quality when it meets the needs of society. T2 defined quality education as, "when learners achieve optimal/adequate knowledge of each level or grade before moving to the next level". T3 said it is "having learners master their competencies and can apply the knowledge and skills to solve problems and passing with quality symbols as an extra achievement". To T4, "quality education is that education that provides all learners with capabilities they need to become productive citizens".

In agreement with T3, HOD1 said quality education is "when the learners master all the basic competencies and will be able to reason properly". From another perspective, HoD2 explained that

Quality education is more than a slogan, [it] is about the outcomes, the results, and standards of your final productions (learner), and what, who, and where they can be after schooling. Quality education is inclusive, fair, and not just judgemental

HOD4 described quality education as enabling learners to acquire skills that make them potential human beings in society. HOD5 shared that quality education involves "preparing learners for the outside world to be able to solve problems and add to sustainable development". P2 emphasised societal needs.

Quality education focuses on societal needs development, social problem solving, empowerment of human rights, and economic empowerment.

The data shows that teachers understand what quality education is, although they differ in their criteria for describing it.

4.3.7.2 The implications of ALP on quality education in schools

When the participants were asked to comment on how the ALP affects the quality of education in schools, all the participants unanimously agreed that ALP does not assist in improving the quality of education in schools. This included participants from schools A and C and those from schools B that were not implementing ALP. Therefore, ALP is said to be compromising the quality of education in Namibia rather than promoting it as an approved policy.

According to T2 at school A, “ALP helps keep more learners in school, but it rather compromises the quality of education, not all learners automatically promoted recover in the next grade”. This point was also reinforced by T4 and school B, who said, “the defined expected results for education are not met with the existence of this policy”.

According to T5 at school C,

This policy... does not advance nor contribute toward quality education but is simply an insult to quality education because 99% of learners who are automatically promoted forever remain members of this club – the ‘APC’ automatically-promoted club.

HOD1 at school A revealed: “I do not think it is advancing the quality of education but rather compromising since the learners only move to the next grade without achieving the competencies”. HOD3 said, “it is not considered advancing quality education because learners who did not meet the basic requirement they are/were supposed to attain in that certain grade”. HOD4 at school B also argued that it lowers the standards,

It lowers the quality of education because instead of letting the learners achieve essential competencies for quality education, the automatic promotion policy allows

learners to leave the education system with few skills and knowledge needed for us to pronounce that quality education took place/offered in Namibia.

According to HOD5, the ALP policy “compromises the quality of education because it places learners in the wrong classes, it compromises, and it serves as a control approach to teaching and learning”. It reduces performances and, as a result, places learners in grades that are not equivalent to their IQ. P1 at school A said it hinders and obstructs efforts to reach quality education, as noted below,

It is hindering and obstructing quality education. Learners who fail to master relevant basic promotional requirements are pushed ahead and yet expected to deal and cope with more challenging work and content, which is a contradiction on its own. ‘How come you struggle to count 1-10, and you are expected to count from 1-200’ (P1)

Principal P3 at school C said,

The policy lowers the goals of quality education by giving too much work to teachers and making teaching a profession difficult. Besides that, the procedure sends too many learners to the streets after failing their senior secondary grades (P3).

Regardless of whether the research participants had actually implemented the ALP policy, they were in agreement that although it has some positive effects on the learners, it compromises the quality of education in schools. The participants argued that the ALP policy generally lowers the standards and quality of education.

4.4 Chapter summary

The chapter presented the data generated from the interviews with the research participants, which were presented in three major themes outlining how the automatic learner promotion policy is being implemented at schools and the effects of ALP on both the learners and teachers. The last part presented data that focused on the implications of automatic promotion on quality education in Namibian schools. The data shows that school A applied the ALP as stipulated in the policy document, school B did not use the policy at all, and school C used it occasionally when they found it convenient. The participants unanimously reported that ALP does very little

to improve Namibia's education quality. The next chapter focuses on analysing the data of the study.

Chapter 5:

Analysis of findings

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents an analysis of the findings, as presented in chapter 4. The analysis seeks to address the following primary and sub-research questions:

What are the implications of ALP on quality education in Namibian primary schools?

Sub-research questions:

- What are teachers' understandings of the ALP policy at their schools?
- How is the ALP policy implemented at schools?
- What are the effects of ALP on learners and teachers?
- What are the implications of the ALP policy on teaching and learning?

The findings will be analysed by comparing and contrasting existing literature on ALP (as discussed in chapter 2) through a phenomenological lens (as discussed in chapter 3). The phenomenological analysis will be “based on the discussion and reflections of direct sense perception and experiences of the research phenomenon” (Pathak, 2017: 1719). Following are the findings presented in chapter 4 through a phenomenological lens. The lived experiences of the participants will be analysed under the following points:

- ALP policy analysis
- The implementation of the ALP in Namibian primary schools
- The effects of ALP on the learners and the teachers
- The implications of ALP on the quality of education in Namibia primary schools.

5.2 Analysis of the ALP policy

5.2.1 Introduction

This section of the thesis provides the results of the document analysis. The study analysed the ‘National Promotion Policy Guide for Junior and Senior Primary School Phase’ (MoE, 2015). The framework of Ball (1993) was used to conduct the policy analysis. The analysis will begin

against the backdrop of what a policy is, what it does, why, and how problems arise in policy implementation. The analysis will also provide a summary of the key elements of the ALP. The last part document analysis looks at what the policy says leveled against the participants' experiences or what they are saying.

5.2.2 What a policy is? Why and how problems arise in the policy implementation

According to Ball (1993:10), "One of the conceptual problems currently lurking within much policy research and policy sociology is that more often than not analysts fail to define conceptually what they mean by policy". Ball and Stevenson (2010) characterise policies as a declaration of what should happen, formulated in response to political pressure to resolve a group disagreement over values, resources, and ideals.

Ball (1993) conceptualises a policy as both a text and discourse. In a text, Ball (1993) argues that the literacy theory influences a policy. People interpret the meanings of the policy differently according to how much they are influenced by their experiences, skills, resources, and contexts (Ball, 1993). Policy developers in this context have no control over the meaning of their text to the implementors. As a discourse, the meaning of policy may be contextualised in speech. It's not only about what can be spoken but about when, where, and with what authority (Ball, 1993). According to Ball (1993), problems also arise because it is difficult to identify analytically what a policy is and what it intends to do. Policies also tend to shift and lean their meaning to political representations continuously; hence policy intentions and purposes are always reworked and reorientable time.

However, due to the nature of social policy as a text and a discourse, problems usually arise before, during, and after implementing a policy. According to Ball (1993), when a policy is defined as a text, policymakers/authors have no control over the meaning of their text; hence problems arise because some users (teachers, principals, and HODs) may fail to understand the policy in context uniformly. This leads to policy interpretations that vary according to the teachers' background, experience, skills, or resources. This was revealed by how differently the policy is used in the schools. The implementation/use and prevalence of the ALP policy at the three schools in the Erongo region vary.

School B had not used the ALP policy due to a lack of commitment among the teachers, HODs, and the principal. T3 at school B said, “No, we have never used a transfer policy”. This was supported by HOD 3. School C had used the policy when it was convenient – such as during the Covid-19, when learners had missed school for extensive periods. T6 explained that their school used the policy once “only during Covid-19 [when] they promoted learners. That was the only last year 2020”. Only school A consistently applied the ALP policy at the end of the year. The discrepancies in the implementation of the ‘National Promotion Policy Guide for Junior and Senior Primary School Phase’ (MoE, 2015), meant that depending on which schools’ learners attended, they were subjected to different educational experiences and opportunities. If the policy was not being applied, as was the case at school B, it meant that learners at the school, who had not met the minimum criteria of a grade, were required to repeat the grade. A similar process was followed at school C. The disruption in the academic year caused by Covid-19, created to an exception. Other times, the ALP policy was not necessarily implemented as a means to avoid grade repetition, but to alleviate the pressure created by overcrowded classrooms.

In sum, the ‘National Promotion Policy Guide for Junior and Senior Primary School Phase’ (MoE, 2015), was not being implemented as prescribed at the three schools.

5.2.3 What the policy does and its implications on ALP

According to Ball (1993:16), when a policy is implemented in an organisation, it performs the following basic functions:

- It guides and controls instructional practices.
- It changes the structure and order of an organisation.
- It influences accessibility, opportunities, and social justice.

The ‘National Promotion Policy Guide for Junior and Senior Primary School Phase’ (MoE, 2015) is the primary document that outlines ALP in Namibia. In addition, the policy guide sets out the framework for ALP, retention, and progress report of the learner (MoE, 2015). This policy has an overarching mandate to improve the quality of education in Namibian primary schools by ensuring

- uniform learner promotion;

- uniform grade retention;
- reduction inconsistencies in learner grading;
- alignment to major educational goals of access, equity, and efficiency; and
- compliance with inclusive education and learner-centred education (MoE, 2015: 4)

The policy (MoE, 2015: 4) is underscored by principles directed at ensuring quality education in Namibia:

- Learner-centred education assumes that all children can learn and develop given the right circumstances.
- Learners will progress through basic education in as near to standard time as possible despite their differences in performance.
- Learners benefit most by remaining with their age group. The gifted and the less gifted learn together collaboratively, supporting each other.
- In cases where the promotion committee is convinced that a learner would not benefit from progressing to the next grade, a learner should repeat a grade.
- Parents/guardians must be kept fully informed of why their child must repeat a grade, what will be done by the school to ensure that they achieve the necessary competencies, and what the home can do to support the learner.
- Learners who do not progress to the next grade must receive counselling to help them understand their situation and receive learning support, focusing on the competencies they did not achieve.
- All repeating and struggling learners receive learning support.

Besides the highlighted policy principles, the foreword of the document, which was written by the Minister of Education, states that the policy was crafted specifically to address “the automatic promotion of learners who did not achieve a minimum number of competencies to be considered to the next grade” (MoE, 2015).

Ball (1993) says a policy guides and controls instructional practices in implementing ALP. This implies that in Namibian schools where the ALP is prescribed, there should be changes in teaching methodologies to accommodate automatically promoted learners. Teachers should adapt

their pedagogical practices so that I can meet the expectations of learners, who had the promotional requirements of a grade, as well as those who have been automatically promoted. Ball (1993) also contends that a policy changes structure and organisation. In the context of ALP, the policy demands that a school sets up a promotion committee that consists of some teachers, HODs, and the principal (MoE, 2015). The committee is expected to take responsibility for monitoring and making decisions on the promotion of the learners. In addition to promotional committees, learning support programmes that are set up to support the automatically promoted learners have changed the instructional practices of the school setting, especially at school A, where ALP is recorded to be implemented fully. In addition, to adapting pedagogies, and providing the necessary structures and support for the ALP policy and for learners, who benefit from this policy, teachers, need to show an greater interest and commitment to the policy. This, however, can only be done, if everyone in a school is aware of policies and policies are properly led and managed.

5.2.4 Analysis of the ALP policy

Like any other social policy, the ‘National Promotion Policy Guide for Junior and Senior Primary School Phase’ (MoE, 2015) was developed to resolve arguments and conflicts that had emerged on whether to use grade retention or automatic promotion of learners to enhance the quality of education in the Namibian primary schools. The ALP was promulgated as an ideological position that would improve the quality of education in Namibia's primary schools. It was designed to be uniformly applied in all government schools as a guide for promoting learners who fail to achieve the essential competencies of a grade (MoE, 2015).

In this study, school A implemented the ALP policy as stipulated, which implies that the teachers, principal, and HODs shared the same policy understanding with policy developers. A similar discourse about the policy is used and reinforced by the leadership. P1 said, “Our school uses the automatic promotion policy stipulated by the Ministry of Education. This policy is given to all teaching staff members” In school B, the policy as text is interpreted as an insignificant command that has no dominant discourse (authoritative voice) of the leadership. There is awareness of the policy, but a discourse of disbelief about ineffectiveness compromised the policy implementation. The school does not use the ALP at all; T3 from school B said, “No, we

have never used a transfer policy”. In school C, the policy as a text is understood as a tool applicable to solve problems at convenient times. The policy is understood as a means to resolve challenges such as overcrowded classrooms, albeit through complications caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. This was attested to by P3, who said, “We partially use automatic promotion policy”. The discourse in school C is divorced from improving the quality of education.

Understandings and interpretations of a policy were found to be varied from school to school. These variations were revealed when the participants were asked to explain who is responsible for making school promotional decisions. The policy stipulates that it is the responsibility of a promotional committee that is set up at school. Interview results show that the participants at school A had a correct interpretation of the policy. “The promotional committee at the school has the responsibility to promote the learners to the next grade based on the criteria in place” (HoD2). The participants from the school where ALP was not being used said, “the ministry sends directives to the regional director through the inspectors” (T3). At school C, HOD6 noted, “There is no existing committee; however, the principal takes the responsibility to make the ruling”. This qualifies the argument of Ball (1993) that the way policies are understood and interpreted by users is different; hence this has affected the implications of the policy in the schools.

T2 highlighted the disconnection between what the policy states and what happens in reality, as experienced in the classroom – “there is always a learning support in place, but the commitments towards it are not satisfying, most of the learners for whom it is intended to”. P2 said at their school, school A, “there are supporting programmes such as reading and writing club, extra lesson, math and science club and geosciences club”. T3 and T4 also reported some remedial lessons and conducted extra classes in the afternoons, as indicated on the school timetable. All these practices required a change and adjustment in the school's operation/setting, and this qualifies the argument of Ball (1993), who attested that a policy guides and controls instructional practices. The social nature of policy influences accessibility, opportunities, and social justice. In the context of ALP, this implies that the promotion of learners should be done fairly; there must be equal resources and opportunities for learners in the schools. In other words, a policy like the ALP is mandated to regulate learner promotion fairly under equal access and opportunities. But,

as revealed through the study, only two schools (A and C) implemented the policy. Only school A implemented it consistently, but due to the perceptions and experiences of the teachers regarding the added burden of accommodating learners, who had been automatically promoted, the necessary support was not provided. In turn, school C conceived of the ALP policy as a tool to alleviate overcrowding or as a response to the circumstances created by Covid-19 - “the policy was just used because of the Covid-19 situation when learners were at home for most of the year. It is not used every year” (T5). Here, too, learners required additional support from those who had been automatically promoted but were not forthcoming. So, the policy was implemented differently at these two schools (A and C), while at school B, it was not.

The outcome of the interviews also shows that not all learners had equal opportunities to be automatically promoted due to the non-uniform implementation of the policy in schools. Schools B and C did not fully accord the learners equal opportunities to be beneficiaries of ALP. The participants were also asked to comment on how the policy had affected the teacher and the learners. Speaking from experience, T1 and T2 at school A, T4, HOD4, and P2 of school B, and HoD5 and HoD6 of school C saw ALP as retardation of performance among the learners. T3, HoD3, and P2 of school B and T6 and P3 at school B argued that ALP provides multiple learner advantages. T2, T3, T4; HOD1, HOD5, HOD6; and principals P1 and P2 showed an unreceptive attitude towards the policy. They felt they were not consulted; it was just imposed upon them. The policy set a higher workload on the teachers already struggling with variation of learner’s ability in classrooms and an inadequate understanding of supporting the automatically promoted learners. They contended that because most automatically enabled learners failed to pass the exit exams, the policy harmed education quality rather than improving it.

Data from the interviews show that schools B and C did not implement the policy as expected. An analysis of the policy indicates that it lacks some mechanism to assist the implementer in enforcing the policy uniformly in the schools. The policy also did not recommend training teachers on handling automatically promoted learners or conducting learner support programmes. This was echoed by P3: “We are finding it challenging to support automatically promoted and other learners with difficulties in learning due to the lack of time, commitment, know-how, and attitude of the teachers”. Vidovich (2007) argues that teachers are policymakers; they participate

in both interpretation of policies in schools and classrooms. When the teachers are not involved or consulted in policy-making, they lack confidence in the policy on achieving quality education; as indicated by P1, P2, P3, HOD5, and T5 in chapter 4. The study revealed that quality education might not be improved by ALP policy in this context.

5.3 Interviews

This section of the chapter provides an analysis of the data generated through the interviews of the participants (teachers, HODs, and principals).

5.3.1 The implementation of ALP in schools

To explore the implications of the ALP policy on the quality of education, it was imperative to find out how ALP was being implemented in schools. The findings of this research question are discussed under the following sub-themes as indicated in chapter 4.

5.3.2 Teachers' understanding of learner promotion

In the literature, ALP is described as a practice (Griffith, 2006; Okurut, 2015), an act (Ellis-Christensen, 2003), and simply the promotion of learners (Chataa, 2018). The study's findings revealed that the term "automatic learner promotion" (ALP) is understood by all the participants in one way or another as a policy that "allows, encourages, or permits" learners to proceed to the next grade regardless of their grades or performance. The participants also said it's like "a free ticket; to move on to the next grade without mastering the promotional requirements" (T1-T5, HOD1-HOD6, P1-P3). It was also described as a "no learner must fail and repeat the current grade" policy (T6). Although there are variations in the wording, an almost similar understanding of ALP was shared.

5.3.3 The use of ALP in schools

One of the central questions in this research concerned whether the school implemented ALP, as stipulated in the 'National Promotion Policy Guide for Junior and Senior Primary School Phase' (MoE, 2015). Although teachers understand the ALP policy, their lived experiences of who they are as teachers, and the additional workload created by learners who are automatically promoted, make it difficult for them to implement the policy properly as stipulated. Stated differently, the social contexts of their teaching are not conducive to them providing the necessary and

additional support to learners, who have been automatically promoted. By employing a phenomenological lens – that is, a lens that may be used to view and study people’s perceptions and understanding of a phenomenon (Pathack, 2017), the teachers at the schools, especially at schools B and C, teachers struggled to implement the ALP policy, and hence struggled to understand the value of ALP. Although some understood the policy as a text, they did not necessarily have a clear understanding of the benefits and how to implement the policy in their classes practically. That is why T3 at school B said, “No, we have never used a transfer policy”. And this was supported by HoD3. The participants said ALP “creates additional work for teachers” (T3): “Teachers have to do extra work in lesson preparation to support automatically promoted learners” (HOD4). T5, T6, P3, and HoD6 at school C agreed that their school had used the policy occasionally once or twice. T6 explained that their school used the policy at the end of the year last year, just like any other school in Namibia. The policy was only used to promote learners who did not meet the promotional requirements. T6 further expressed, “It hurts the teachers as they have to teach content to learners who do not have sufficient prior knowledge of the subject/topic”.

5.3.4 The decision to promote the learners

According to the ‘National Promotion Policy Guide for Junior and Senior Primary School Phase’ (MoE, 2015: 8), "in each school, there should be a promotion committee comprising the school principal, heads of department, and class/subject teachers. The committee has overall promotion responsibilities by, among other things, ensuring consistency in dealing with borderline cases. All recommendations by the committee should be endorsed by the Regional Education Office". The participants from school B, who were not using ALP, said the Ministry of Education makes decisions (T3, T4, and HOD4). “[T]he Ministry sends directives to the regional director through the inspectors’ office and the school implement guided by the circular. All grades 1-9 were automatically promoted to the next grade”. The policy stipulates/demands the formation of a promotional committee at each school. From the teachers’ perspectives, however, it is the responsibility of the Regional Education Officer and the inspector of Education’s office to ensure that the policy is implemented and monitored.

Participants noted that the willingness to take full responsibility for implementing the ALP policy is lacking, and this could be attributed to the negative implications of the ALP policy. Participants have experienced/they have failed to read and understand the policy in text/they are rejecting to implement the policy as they feel it is being imposed on them and ultimately overloading them. The participants from school A echoed the following, “I firmly believe the promotional committee is made out of the school management team. Or, in the absence of a committee, this is the mandate placed squarely on the school management team”, said the HOD1. This showed that they read and understood the policy. Principal P1 had given every teacher a copy of the ALP policy. At school C, where the policy has been used on several convenient occasions, members of management and teachers were identified as being responsible for decision-making (T5, HOD5 & HOD6). P3 from school C states, “the promotional committee at the school has the responsibility to promote the learners to the next grade based on the criteria in place. The participant further states: “I am one of those members of the said committee”. We must discuss the pass requirements to determine which learners should be transferred”. Decision-making in the promotion of learners depends on the promotional policy of the country. A policy usually explains the role of the implementers. In most African countries, decisions for promoting learners are made at school (Okurut, 2015).

The study’s findings revealed that at school A, all the parents/guardians of affected children are informed individually that their child did not meet the basic requirements of a particular grade but has been promoted to the next grade because of the ALP policy. P1 said, “Yes, parents are consulted; we inform the parents every term”. At school C, they said parents are usually informed through the school board (HoD5). In other words, parents at school C are informed as a collective, and this could be that participants from school C see his practice of informing parents of the affected children individually as another extra workload added to the ALP policy's work created. Parental involvement helps maintain the quality of education in schools (Scheerens, 2004; Salis, 2002). At school B, parents are not involved because the school has not been applying the ALP policy as expected.

The Education Act, No. 16 of 2001, stipulates that the principal of a state school must ensure that the parents of each learner are provided with regular reports in writing on the academic progress, general behaviour, and conduct of the learner (MoE, 2015:9).

As part of the ‘National Promotion Policy Guide for Junior and Senior Primary School Phase’ (MoE, 2015), the Education Act No. 16 of 2001 emphasises that parents should be regularly informed about their children's progress, behaviour, and conduct in writing. On the one hand, certain expectations are created through policy, juxtaposed against the lived experiences of teachers at the three schools. On the other hand, although school A is making an effort by inviting affected parents to school, none of the schools in the study informs parents about the automatic promotion of their children in writing. I think parents have a right to be officially informed when their children are automatically promoted so that they can also render support. The ALP policy makes it mandatory for parents to support their children throughout their schooling (MoE, 2015). Informing parents about promotional issues is also noted by Scheerens (2004) as a recipe for achieving quality education in schools. Both perceptions and experiences influence the decision not to inform parents because parents do not or cannot play a meaningful role in their children's education. But this perception also entrenches the perceived lack of involvement of parents, thereby creating a cycle of broken communication between teachers and parents.

5.3.5 Prevalence of ALP use in schools

According to the MoE (2015), ALP is a decision made at the end of the year when all the assessment marks for the year are put together. As a phenomenological study, the lived experience attested that these policy requirements are consistently applied at school A in every grade yearly (T2, HoD2, and P1). School B had not used the ALP policy, while school C applied it only on two occasions for convenience, once in 2020 during the Covid-19 disruption of teaching programmes, and at another time when retaining learners would've caused overcrowding in the classrooms (T5, T6, HoD5, and P3). School A yearly applied the policy to all the grades, while school C only used it on all the grades when schools were affected by the Covid-19 disruptions. As noted in school A, consistent use of a policy is an experience of awareness of policy statutes. In school A, the policy use is seen as a mandatory requirement. At

school B, the policy is perceived to be an irrelevant contribution toward quality education. At school C, the ‘National Promotion Policy Guide for Junior and Senior Primary School Phase’ (MoE, 2015) is used when it is convenient for the school, and not for the benefit of learners.

However, a policy may not be labelled ineffective when its prevalence has not been exercised as required. According to Ball (1993), failure to follow a policy with an expected prevalence is inescapable when the meaning and interpretation are not understood. In a similar perspective, the experience of schools B and C could imply that the meaning and prevalence were not understood. In countries like Cameroon, the prevalence of the ALP was severely affected by a shortage of resources (Nalova, 2016).

5.3.6 Support programmes for automatically promoted learners

The ALP policy recommends and prescribes the nature of learner support for automatically promoted learners. According to the ‘National Promotion Policy Guide for Junior and Senior Primary School Phase’ (MoE, 2015), learners must receive counselling and learning support, focusing on the competencies they did not achieve. The support should be individualised and take place outside the regular teaching time offered by the subject teacher (MoE, 2015). Firstly, however, if teachers are not capacitated on how to provide additional individualised support, they cannot be expected to meet the stipulations of the ALP policy. Secondly, teachers already have responsibilities outside their regular teaching time, it is questionable, how and when they are supposed to accommodate the additional responsibilities created by learners, who have been automatically promoted. Thirdly, most learners at the three schools have to walk home after school. What are the safety implications for automatically promoted learners, if they have to extend their school day?

Hence, while the teachers’ experiences at school A confirmed a dire need for support programmes for automatically promoted learners, these programmes did not materialise due to a lack of teachers’ commitment and time. T2 from school A said: “There is always a learning support in place, but the commitments towards it are not satisfying”. T1 said, “There are some learning support programmes at school to help any learner that needs extra help”. HOD2 said, “Most schools have sound, proper, and stable learning support programmes, but just on the paper while nothing is going on at school”. At school C, T5 said: “I always give them some remedial

lessons in groups in the afternoon”. HOD 6 from school C also gave the lived experience that “whenever we identify learners who are continuously failing to meet their competencies, we take them to the school counsellor for support”. School B also has some learner support programmes, although they did not automatically promote learners.

Regardless of whether the schools implemented the ‘National Promotion Policy Guide for Junior and Senior Primary School Phase’ (MoE, 2015), all the research participants highlighted the necessity of support programmes. From experience, the teachers need support to overcome the challenges such as lack of time, commitment, overload, negative attitudes, and know-how. Lamenting his experience, P3 said: “We are finding it challenging to support automatically promoted and other learners with difficulties in learning due to the lack of time, commitment, know-how, and attitude of the teachers”. HOD5 shared her experience: “The teachers are overloaded, classrooms are full, and it is difficult to get time to implement some remedial lessons”. The teachers, therefore, perceive the implementation of learner support programmes as difficult. This experience makes the teachers avoid supporting the learners who need help, although they know it is important to achieve quality education. The significance of learner support is given credence by Munje and Maarman (2016), who argue that quality education is only achieved when automatically promoted learners receive enough support.

However, teaching learners who have been promoted to new grades without meeting the minimum pass requirements, as stipulated by the education authorities, is a serious challenge,” says Chataa and Nkengbeza (2019: 1742). The teachers’ experiences convince us that the automatically promoted learners are not receiving adequate learner support that can help them cope with the challenges of the next grade. Even though the ALP policy recommends and prescribes the nature of learning support to be given to the learners, the experiences, specifically at school A, confirm, that support is not provided.

5.3.7 The effects of automatic learner promotion on the learners and teacher

The teachers’ experiences revealed that there are merits and demerits in putting learners who have passed and those automatically promoted in the same classroom.

5.3.7.1 Effects of ALP on learners

Aron and Ithana note that the debate on dealing with learners with low performance has been swinging back and forth between whether learners remain in the same grade or move to the next grade. These same debates and tensions were evident in the participants' experiences and observations of the implications on ALP on their classrooms and all learners, whether automatically promoted or not. Similarly, the merits or not of ALP were experienced by the teachers, leaving them divided about whether or not to be for the ALP policy. These same tensions probably account for the discrepancies in how the ALP policy is understood in terms of implementation and management, and how it ought to be supported in practice. While the ALP policy appears theoretically clear, it is in the educational reality of a classroom where it becomes messy. This experience probably created an option for schools like school A to use the policy and school B not to use the policy. Moreover, the 'National Promotion Policy Guide for Junior and Senior Primary School Phase' (MoE, 2015) is framed as acting in the best interests of advancing quality education in Namibia. However, participants' experiences showed that in the absence of adequate support for the implementation of the ALP policy, the disadvantages outweigh the advantages, bringing into question notions of quality education.

In terms of the negative effects or disadvantages, T1, T2, T4, HOD4, HOD5, and P2 agreed that, "automatically promoted learners see no need to work hard; they are not committed. While hard-working learners feel discouraged, the importance of being a good learner is destroyed". This observation speaks to the implications on learners' morale and motivation to work hard. Automatically promoting learners, who do not meet the minimum criteria of a grade, devalues the hard work of other learners. It undermines the very idea and expectation that achievement or success relies on hard work. It also brings into question the very quality of education on offer, if learners can simply be automatically promoted. These kinds of understandings and arguments contribute to the negative attitudes of teachers, HODs and principals regarding ALP – aptly captured by T4, ALP "kills the spirit of competition among the learners; excellent and poor learners end up the same". HoD5 qualifies from experience that "automatically promoted learners often struggle to read and write, complete tasks, and have a high absenteeism rate". HoD5, describing the demerits of ALP on the learners, also said: "Struggling learners are pushed up to the next grade with their challenges until they fail in the exit grade. This affects the quality

of education”. The negative perceptions of the teachers gained from experience have overshadowed any purported advantages of the ‘National Promotion Policy Guide for Junior and Senior Primary School Phase’ (MoE, 2015).

On the other side, T3, T6, and HOD2 found positive effects of ALP on the learners. T3 said it “reduces the rate of absenteeism and school dropouts”. T6 reported that “learners are to stay with their peers instead of facing humiliation, segregation, and isolation”. Similarly, HOD6 argued that “[l]earners who move with their peers receive more academic support from their friends”. P3 added that “[i]t [shows] a respect for children's rights to keep them among their peers”. The teachers' experiences show that some teachers developed wrong perceptions of ALP; they think both teachers and learners are meant to benefit from the use of ALP. They miss the point that ALP was crafted in the children's best interest, not the teachers’.

Evident from this study, is that ALP is a contested phenomenon – a view shared by Taye (2003), as well as Aron and Ithana (2015). According to Taye (2003), grade retention and ALP exist at opposite ends of a continuum. This dichotomy confuses the policymakers and teachers who implement the policy, resulting in a non-uniform implementation of ALP in the schools. The decision to choose grade retention or ALP is a significant cause of inherent tension found in the implementation of the ALP policy in Namibia. This tension left some participants, especially from school B, seeing no need to implement the ALP policy in their school. Nharuhuste (2008), however, emphasises that the criterion for selecting grade retention or ALP should be based on which one enhances quality education. Evidence found in the ‘National Promotion Policy Guide for Junior and Senior Primary School Phase’ (MoE, 2015) showed that the Ministry of Education was convinced that quality education could be achieved if ALP were properly implemented in Namibian primary schools. Miyalo and Garcia (2014) also raised arguments similar to the teachers’ lived experiences. According to Miyalo and Garcia (2014), promoting learners removes them from the demise of low self-esteem, low motivation, depression, and the risk of dropping out of school. Learners who keep up with their peers are protected from shame, bullying, and ridicule (Miyalo & Garcia, 2014).

Another interesting discovery from the literature and this study is the lack of in-depth analysis of why learners fail to the extent of the requirement of ALP. This missing dimension was not

addressed by this study or in the literature reviewed. But some of the research participants raised a concern that an ALP policy distracts from attending to the real problem – that is, why learners are not coping academically, and what should be done to support them, without having to resort to an ALP policy. In this regard, Myako and Garcia (2014) caution that promoting learners to the next grade level or keeping them in the same grade level will not improve educational quality unless learner failure is identified and addressed.

5.3.7.2.1 ALP policy's influence on teachers

The participants' lived experiences revealed that the implementation of ALP also has some effects on the teachers. The participants said managing learners who have been automatically promoted in the classrooms is challenging. T1 noted that, “It hurts to teach learners who do not have sufficient or expected prior knowledge of the subject or topic”. T2 said: “ALP created more work for teachers; they needed to prepare learners’ support activities and deliver them as extra lessons as required by the policy”. HOD1 expressed that the “teaching methods, learning materials, assessment strategies, and instructions must be changed to accommodate automatically promoted learners”. Similarly, HOD3 shared that, “The attitude and spirit of teachers are dampened. They are forced to spend more time teaching and reteaching competencies of the previous grade”. HOD5 added, “Classroom management is also difficult when learners of mixed abilities are put together. Automatically promoted learners tend to disturb teaching”.

In terms of a phenomenological lens, the lived experiences show that participants perceived ALP as negatively affecting the teachers. These negative effects are similar to the negative experiences of Miyako and Garcia (2014), who said the teachers are also forced to slow the pace of bright learners to accommodate the automatically promoted learners who need extra help. Eventually, they will find it hard to complete the syllabus. None of the participants spoke of any positive effects of the ALP policy on the teachers; they all perceived it as a source of extra work or load. Jimerson (2002), however, believes that only teachers who have limited knowledge of the long-term effects of grade repetition are the ones who have such an attitude of not accepting ALP as advantageous. This opinion was shared by Pettay (2010), who explained that teachers’ attitudes towards grade retention improve when they understand ALP. Phenomenology relates to individuals' experiences and perceptions and what they are conscious of. As such, teachers

struggle to see the benefits of ALP because, in their own experiences, they have encountered only more problems, specifically additional workloads. As such, they developed a negative attitude toward the policy.

5.3.7.3 Differences between learners who are automatically promoted and those who are promoted on merit

Another lens for looking at the pros and cons of implementing the ALP policy is to use the teachers' lived experiences to assess how the automatically promoted learners differ from those who are not. The significant differences notable may also assist in determining the group of learners most likely to improve the quality of education in Namibian schools. The participants' verbatim analysis is presented in table 5.1.

Table 5.1 Differences between learners promoted on ALP and those promoted on merit

Learners promoted by ALP	Learners promoted on merit
They are mostly the ones who disrupt classes and usually do not pay attention.	Pay more attention in class.
Very serious when they rely on ALP to move to the next grade.	They work hard to be promoted; they are more committed.
Did not achieve the essential competencies of the previous grade.	They have some skills and completed all the critical competencies in the final grade.
Mastery of actual subject content is lacking.	Basic understanding of the subject content. Can analyse and evaluate different learning materials and apply the content accordingly.
Find work that is both interesting and challenging. They require more constant support to learn.	Mostly independent, I find the work, tasks, and content engaging. However, they need a little support to learn.
Low motivated, with a high likelihood of dropping out of school.	Highly motivated, and so is the performance.
Promoted due to age or number of years in a phase.	Results-driven promotion.
In most cases, they have low self-esteem and confidence.	They always want to discover or learn new things, so they constantly push for new topics.

Table 5.1 outlines the weaknesses that are found in automatically promoted learners. These learners are transferred to the next grade with academic shortfalls or lack of competencies. Quality education is enhanced when automatically promoted learners are given enough support to gain the missing competencies of the previous grade, as explained by Myako and Garcia

(2014). A comparison between the learners promoted on merit and those automatically promoted may be to develop strategies for closing the gap between the two categories of learners. A comparison of the teachers' experiences with automatically promoted learners and those promoted on merit in the classrooms shows a strongly negative perception towards automatically-promoted learners. They are perceived to be a problem; hence they tend to be neglected.

5.3.8 The implications of ALP on educational quality

The implications of ALP on quality education are discussed under two sub-themes: understanding quality education and the implications of ALP on quality education in schools. Therefore, it was essential for the participants to demonstrate how they understand quality education before assessing the effects of ALP on the quality of education.

5.3.8.1 Understanding quality education

In terms of a phenomenological lens, P2 perceived quality education as “the optimum knowledge required for the learner to progress into the next academic grade”. P2 said: “it is a mastery of competencies and applying knowledge and skills to solve problems and facilitate sustainable development as expected by society”. HoD4 said that “the standard of achievement of the learners defines quality education”. The participants' verbatim shows that the meaning of quality education is subjective. Every participant had their standards of what constitutes quality education. T2 said quality education is achieved when learners "become productive citizens".

The principals of schools A and C provided other interesting insights into quality education. To P1, “Quality education is education that focuses on societal needs development, social problem-solving empowerment of human rights, and economic empowerment.” P3 shared that, "quality education is achieved when an education system's objectives are met; that is, when an education system meets the needs of the country politically, economically, and socially."

The experience of the teachers shows that quality education is a subjective phenomenon that depends on the criterion set by an individual, a group, or an organisation. When one society or group sees an achievement of their expected goals, they declare the education system as of good

quality. Conversely, when teachers perceive the ALP policy as ineffective in enhancing quality education, they speak from their own unpleasant experiences.

The teachers' experiences resonate with the study's conceptual framework, which views quality education as the holistic development of a learner socially, emotionally, mentally, physically, and cognitively regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, or geographic location (Slade, 2016). The meanings of quality education given by the participants are also similar to the definition of Garirira (2020), who stated that the quality of education might be accurately represented by the descriptions of all components used to judge the realisation of goals. Merging the teachers' experiences and the literature reviewed on quality education is conclusively a subjective phenomenon. It depends on what one wants an education system to do. Some schools misconstrued this view as an option to use or not use ALP to enhance quality education. Once those objectives or realisation of goals are attained, quality education is eventually obtained; these are the general perceptions of the participants.

5.3.8.2 The implications of the ALP on quality education in schools

The experiences of ALP implications on the quality of education came from the teachers of school A using ALP, school C where ALP was not being well implemented, and school B where the policy was never implemented. Despite the disparities in terms of the implementation of the ALP policy, it is interesting to note that all the research participants from all the schools unanimously agreed that ALP does not improve the quality of education in schools in the Namibian context. ALP is generally perceived to compromise the quality of education in Namibian schools, rather than advancing it, as proclaimed in the 'National Promotion Policy Guide for Junior and Senior Primary School Phase' (MoE, 2015). The reasons put forward by the participants T2, T4, T5, HOD4, HOD5, P1, and P3 can be consolidated in T1's assessment: "Not all learners are automatically promoted to recover in the next grade". T4 said, "The defined expected results for education may not be met with this policy alone. It is not the sole determinant factor". HOD4 argued that "99% of learners who are automatically promoted forever remain members of this club, progressing by favour, not by merit". T5 said, "When learners who have not achieved the required competencies advance to acquire more complex competencies, they may lack prior knowledge, so quality may not be expected". P1 said: "It

places learners in the wrong classes – those that do not match the IQ of the learners creating mixed-ability groups that are difficult to teach, assess, and control. “How come you struggle to count from 1-10, and you are expected to count from 1–200?” said one of the principals. P3 added that “The policy gives too much work to teachers without training or extra time. This makes teaching a profession difficult”.

Although the literature outlines successful stories of ALP around the globe (Okurut, 2015; Chataa, 2019), the participants' lived experiences contest the narrative that ALP improves the quality of education in all academic environments. Some environments like Namibia are perceived as unfavourable to harnessing the benefits of ALP. Such findings are not new. Mehrotra (1998) reports that Panama and Puerto Rico recalled ALP policies when faced with increasing illiteracy among primary school graduates. In turn, Taye (2003) claims that grade repetition had a higher negative implication on education quality than ALP. To Motala (1995), ALP is only practical if it is accompanied by other reform measures such as curriculum-development activities and reorganisation of teaching.

In this study, the teachers expressed the view that the Ministry of education did not prepare teachers prior to introducing the ‘National Promotion Policy Guide for Junior and Senior Primary School Phase’ (MoE, 2015). As such, teachers were not consulted or included in discussions pertaining to the ALP policy, and therefore, had no ownership of the policy, despite being the only ones to implement and experience the effects of it. However, Vodvich (2001) argues that teachers can make a policy function or be implemented profitably if they are treated as policymakers. So, too, Ball (2015) contends that the teachers become subjects of the policy when involved in the policy formulation, they become subordinate and committed to the policy, and they take ownership and accountability for the policy.

5.9 Chapter summary

In summary, the chapter analysed the findings through a phenomenological lens; the discussion was presented under the following themes: implementation of the ALP in the schools, the effects of ALP on teachers and students, and the implications of ALP on the promotion of quality education. The findings revealed that only one school implemented the ALP as expected from the three schools under study. The policy was found to have a more significant positive

implications on learners than on teachers. The policy was also found to make very few contributions to the quality of education in the schools. The chapter also analysed the findings generated from the document analysis, the 'National Promotion Policy Guide for Junior and Senior Primary School Phase', and the interviews of the teachers, HODs, and principals.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

6.1 Introduction

The previous chapter presented an analysis of the study's findings obtained from the interviews and document analysis. This chapter summarises the main findings and discusses the implications of ALP on the quality of education in Namibia. It highlights the contributions and significance of the study. The chapter goes further to present some recommendations that emerged from the study and recommendations for future studies.

6.2 Summary of main findings

The key findings of the study may be summarised as follows:

- **The implementation of ALP.** The study's findings revealed different practical understandings of the 'National Promotion Policy Guide for Junior and Senior Primary School Phase' (MoE, 2015). The three schools had different understandings about whether the policy should be implemented and how it should be implemented. School A implemented it in line with the policy guidelines, which included the establishment of an ALP committee and informing parents of learners who would be affected by the policy.

At school C the policy was implemented once within three consecutive years to alleviate the implications of the Covid-19 pandemic. School C does not adhere to the guidelines stipulated in the 'National Promotion Policy Guide for Junior and Senior Primary School Phase' (MoE, 2015). Specifically, they inform parents of the promoted learners through the school board instead of contacting the affected parents individually. The policy was used to move some learners to the next grade to avoid overcrowding. The policy was not applied according to the guidelines; it was used at convenient times. At school B, the policy was not used at all; evidence shows that the teachers and HODs did not read the policy document because they were unaware of the existence of a promotional committee,

which is the policy's requirement. In summary, only school A implemented the ALP policy, as prescribed in 'National Promotion Policy Guide for Junior and Senior Primary School Phase' (MoE, 2015).

- **Support programmes for automatically promoted learners.** The study found that school A has some learner support programmes designed to assist automatically promoted learners to catch up with the missing competencies. However, these programmes were not effectively implemented due to the teachers' lack of time and knowledge of how to assist learners who had been automatically promoted. Moreover, the teachers' attitude towards automatically promoted learners revealed a lack of commitment and interest. School B has remedial lesson programmes designed to support learners who need help but not necessarily because of ALP. However, the programmes were not implemented, mainly because of a lack of management. At school C, learners with learning difficulties are referred to a counsellor for extra support.
- **Effects of ALP on the learners.** The study found that ALP has positive and negative effects on the learners. The positives include that ALP can reduce the rate of absenteeism and school dropout. Retaining learners in one grade makes them lose motivation in schoolwork; this leads to absenteeism and attrition. It also emerged that learners who progress to the next grades with their peers receive more academic support from their friends. Moving with their peers means that these learners are also protected from humiliation, segregation, and isolation repeaters usually face.

In terms of negative effects, the study found out that automatically promoted learners did not see a need to work hard; they were not committed, because they realised that they would automatically be promoted regardless of their academic performance. In turn, this behaviour tends to discourage hardworking learners; they have no reason to work hard. This kills the spirit of competition among the learners as excellent and poorly performing learners end up the same. Automatically promoted learners were described by most of the research participants as struggling to read and write. The study noted that when the

learners who struggle to read and write are promoted to the next grade via the ALP process, their academic challenges are compounded. The study's outcome shows an almost balanced list of ALP's positive and negative effects, which qualifies the use of ALP as a highly contested phenomenon.

- **Effects of ALP on the teachers.** While the ALP policy is directed at learners, teachers are not only directly responsible for implementing and managing the policy, but have to carry the additional responsibilities, which emerge from supporting automatically promoted learners. Other than highlighting the necessity of providing support for automatically promoted learners, the 'National Promotion Policy Guide for Junior and Senior Primary School Phase' (MoE, 2015), does not address what this means for teachers. To some extent, the effects on, and perceptions, and attitudes of the teachers, determine how much the learners can benefit from ALP. The teachers, HODs, and principals of school A and school B, where the ALP policy was implemented, revealed their scepticism about the ALP policy – not only because it granted promotion to learners who seemingly did not work for their promotion, but also because the policy placed additional pressures onto the workload of teachers.

Working with learners of mixed ability made it difficult for the teachers; learners with inadequate prior knowledge made it difficult to manage teaching and learning. Teachers think ALP brought in extra work because ALP demands new teaching strategies, assessments, and dynamic classroom management skills, which the teachers did not believe they had. Teachers from school A noted that the pacing of their lessons was reduced to accommodate automatically promoted learners who lacked several competencies from the previous grade. However, due to the slowed pace, they are now finding it difficult to complete their syllabus.

- **The effects of the ALP policy on the quality of education.** According to the study, quality education is a subjective phenomenon described differently by the teachers, HODs, and the principal. Although quality education was expressed in different ways, the

participants tended to agree that quality education improves the lives of the learners as expected by the members of society. Armed with this understanding of quality education, the study's key findings showed that the current implementation of the ALP policy at the three schools did not contribute to quality education. The policy's objectives are to promote quality education by automatically promoting learners who fail to meet the required competencies of a grade. Despite these objectives, learners who have been automatically promoted continue to encounter serious academic challenges.

Based on the 2020 end of year promotional schedules that were analysed in this study, learners who were automatically promoted to the next grade ended up failing to meet the minimum promotional requirement. Results from the promotional schedules also reveal that learners' academic performance did not improve as many of them obtained below 40% (D symbols) in all subjects. The above findings show that learners who are automatically promoted to the next grades find it difficult to master the basic learning competencies and learning content. The learning syllabuses in Namibia are organised in a way that learners build on the knowledge gained from their previous grades. The difficulties experienced by these learners are compounded by a lack of interest, support, and motivation from teachers. While the participants at all the schools acknowledged the importance of ALP, and their roles in ensuring quality education, this position was not evident in their responses to learners, particularly in schools A and C, where the ALP policy had been implemented. Moreover, it is important to note that the resistance to providing adequate support to learners, who had been automatically promoted, stems from the participants' understanding that ALP did not necessarily contribute to quality education. In other words, several participants expressed the view that the ALP undermines quality education.

6.3 Implications of the ALP on quality education in Namibia

The following implications of ALP on quality in Namibia were drawn from the study.

The study found that not all the automatically promoted learners could recover and gain outstanding competencies in the next grade. This affected the quality of education because

advancing learners who have not acquired the required competencies to the next grade made it more difficult for them to acquire more complex competencies in the next grade. The study also noted that the ALP policy applied on its own without other factors and policies put in place may not improve the quality of education in Namibia. Better and quality education requires support for the ALP policy. Specifically, due attention needs to be given to why learners are failing to meet the minimum criteria of a grade, and why they are struggling academically. Moreover, automatically promoted learners need specialised academic support, which teachers cannot necessarily provide. The use of ALP should also be accompanied by adequate support for the teachers involved in the implementation process.

ALP placed learners in grades that mismatch their ability level; this creates mixed groups that are difficult to teach, manage and assess. This compromised the quality of education. On the one hand, ALP created additional workloads for teachers, compromising the quality of teaching assessments and classroom management. On the other hand, ALP, created the impression for both automatically promoted learners, and those who had progressed that applying oneself to academic work was not necessary to succeed. For learners, who had met the minimum criteria of a grade and who had progressed, there was seemingly no point in working hard, if those who had not achieved the requisite results, also proceeded to the next grade. Teachers (particularly at school A) highlighted how this perception affected understandings of quality education.

6.4 Contribution and significance of the study

To date, very little is known about the ALP policy implemented in Namibian schools, whether it leads to learners' academic success, and whether it contributes to cultivating quality education.

This study constitutes the first of its kind in exploring understandings of ALP and investigating whether the 'National Promotion Policy Guide for Junior and Senior Primary School Phase' (MoE, 2015) is being implemented. Building on a limited corpus of research by Chataa and Nkengbeza (2019), and Schombe et al (2015), this study focused its attention on the implementation of the 'National Promotion Policy Guide for Junior and Senior Primary School Phase' at three schools in the Erongo region. The key contributions and significance of this study are as follows.

Firstly, although all the participants understood the concept of ALP and had knowledge of the ‘National Promotion Policy Guide for Junior and Senior Primary School Phase’ (MoE, 2015), the schools implemented ALP in differentiated ways. While school B did not implement it at all, school C only implemented it as required (during Covid-19 or to alleviate overcrowded classes). Only school A understood that the policy needed to be implemented annually, as a response to learners who had not met the minimum criteria of a particular grade. From these responses, it becomes apparent that not only are different procedures followed at these three schools, but there is seemingly no oversight from the Ministry of Education to monitor the implementation of ‘National Promotion Policy Guide for Junior and Senior Primary School Phase’ (MoE, 2015).

Secondly, the differentiated implementation of ALP at the three schools originates from certain attitudes towards learners, who are automatically promoted, and what constitutes quality education. Several teachers pointed out that the learners who had been automatically promoted were demotivated and disinterested in their education. They also pointed out that they neither had the skills nor interest to assist learners who had been automatically promoted – even while recognising that these learners needed additional academic support. The teachers justified their lack of interest by pointing out that the necessary support referred to in the ‘National Promotion Policy Guide for Junior and Senior Primary School Phase’ (MoE, 2015) was not provided by the Ministry of Education. Correctly, they noted that certain learners had learning difficulties, and teachers were not necessarily skilled in managing these learners. In sum, they shared a view that the policy succeeded only in pushing unprepared learners through a school system, with little regard for whether they were receiving an education.

Thirdly, variations in the implementation of the ‘National Promotion Policy Guide for Junior and Senior Primary School Phase’ (MoE, 2015) originated from the teachers’ attitude towards the policy. Because the teachers at school B found no substance in the ALP policy, or because they did not adequately understand it, they chose not to use it. In school C it was used sparingly, while in school A it was used, as prescribed. Although the ALP policy was used differently, all the teachers’ expressed scepticism about the policy. They all felt it was imposed upon the school without prior consultation, training, and implementation workshops. Teachers at schools B and C lacked a detailed understanding of the structures of the policy; at school A, where the policy was

being fully implemented, teachers lacked adequate skills, time, and resources needed to support automatically promoted learners without disadvantaging the learners, who had successfully progressed. Factors such as class sizes and timetabling of support programmes were considered. Overwhelmed with challenges, teachers are unable to see or experience the benefits of the ‘National Promotion Policy Guide for Junior and Senior Primary School Phase’ (MoE, 2015).

6.5 Recommendations emerging from the study

The following recommendations have emerged from the study:

- Policymakers (in this case, the Ministry of Education) should engage and consult the policy implementers (the principals, HODs, and teachers) when they develop the policies to develop ownership and accountability when they use policy, rather than imposing policies upon them.
- Teachers should be equipped to manage the ALP policy and automatically promoted learners in their class. This involves providing teachers with teaching strategies, assessment methods, as well as classroom management skills.
- Programmes or workshops are necessary to assist principals, HODs, and teachers to understand the potential benefits of ALP.
- Overcrowded classrooms should be reduced, as this might be one key factor as to why learners struggle academically; smaller classes will also assist teachers in managing classes, which consists of automatically promoted learners.
- The Ministry of Education needs to fulfil its mandate of providing educational oversight and monitoring to ensure quality education.
- Greater consultation with and involvement of parents not only with regard to the ‘National Promotion Policy Guide for Junior and Senior Primary School Phase’ (MoE, 2015), but with academic concerns pertaining to learners, so that learners actually pass, and do not have to rely on being automatically promoted.

6.6 Recommendations for future studies

The study’s outcome identified some research gaps. Hence, recommendations for further research are made.

- It is imperative to conduct another study to determine why learners are failing, to the extent of requiring the support of ALP policy.
- A longitudinal study that follows automatically promoted learners from primary school until the exit grade in high school is essential to trace the performance of these learners.
- Just like the teachers, learners are also directly affected by ALP policy; a study that involves learners is necessary to investigate their perspective on this policy and the quality of education.
- The study was based on three primary schools in the Erongo region. The outcome showed that the use of ALP was not the same. A further study involving more schools selected from different regions could help provide a broader perspective of how schools implement ALP.
- A comparative study comparing the standard of the quality education among schools implementing ALP and those that have never used the policy could also bring fascinating results that could help in decision-making on whether ALP should continue or not.

6.7 Conclusion

In conclusion, the study found that one of the three schools was implementing the ALP policy, as required in the ‘National Promotion Policy Guide for Junior and Senior Primary School Phase’ (MoE, 2015). The study also found that the ALP policy has both positive and negative benefits for the learners. When properly implemented, it reduces the rate of absenteeism, and learners who progress into the next grades with their peers receive more academic support from their friends. Moving with their peers means that these learners are also protected from humiliation, segregation, and isolation usually faced by the repeaters.

However, in terms of its negative effects, the ‘National Promotion Policy Guide for Junior and Senior Primary School Phase’ (MoE, 2015) discouraged a spirit of competition among learners to perform academically. Regardless of how learners performed, the outcome was the same, particularly at school A, where the policy was being implemented, as prescribed. The teachers, HODs, and principals argued that under the existing teaching and learning environment in Namibian primary schools, the ALP had negative effects on them. Specifically, increased workloads; inadequate support in managing automatically promoted learners; insufficient time

for learners, who had met the minimum criteria of a grade and had progressed. These negatives could be offset, if the Ministry of Education provides the necessary support in terms of explaining the benefits of the ALP policy; training teachers in how to manage automatically promoted learners, reducing class sizes; and providing additional resources.

Unless broader attention is given to the education system in terms of ensuring optimal class sizes, adequately training teachers, and providing the necessary support for policies, such as the 'National Promotion Policy Guide for Junior and Senior Primary School Phase'(MoE, 2015), quality education in Namibia will continue to be compromised.

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Addendum A: Consent to participate in research



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jou kennisvenoot • your knowledge partner

STELLENBOSCH UNIVERSITY

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

An exploration of automatic learner promotion at three schools in Namibia: Implications for quality education

You are invited to take part in a study conducted by Liina Frieda Mbudhi, from the Department of Education Policy Studies at Stellenbosch University. The results of the research will contribute to the fulfillment of a Master's degree.

You were selected as a possible participant in this study because you are directly involved in administering the policy and most likely have the experience or expertise to provide quality information and valuable insight on the research topic.

1. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of the study is to gain an understanding of the practice and implementation of education.

2. WHAT WILL BE ASKED OF ME?

If you agree to take part in this study, you will be asked to participate in an individual interview with the researcher at a venue convenient to you. The interview schedule containing the interview questions will be made available to participants beforehand. The researcher thinks that if participants have questions beforehand, they will have plenty of time to decide about their willingness to participate and also to be better prepared to give much more well-rounded answers and avoid giving an incomplete answers. The duration of the interview will be between 1 and 1.5 hours. Due to the requirements of the study, this interview will be recorded with a voice recorder but only with your permission. In addition, the researcher would want to have access to the end of the year promotional schedules of the learners, as it will provide insights into whether there is any improvement in the academic performance if the learners are automatically promoted. The data drawn from the documents will be analyzed qualitatively together with primary data from an interview for interpretation and triangulation purposes to achieve coherence/validity/reliability of the study

3. POSSIBLE RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

The outbreak of Covid-19 and the contraction of the virus are regarded as possible risks for this research study. Therefore, the following protocols will be strictly adhered to by both participants and the research investigator to contain and suppress the spread of COVID-19 in Namibia:

1. Social distance, a distance of 1.5 meters between a participant and research investigator will be strictly observed during the project to minimize the potential risk of infection.
2. Hand sanitizer, the researcher will have a hand sanitizer at all times to sanitize her hands before and after meeting with each participant as the researcher visits participants' classes or offices. The sanitizer will be also made accessible to the participants.
3. Both the research investigator and the participants will be required to wear a facemask as defined by the World Health Organisation.
4. The researcher will design a contact register, where participants will be required to write their name, contact details, and date to assist with tracing if it becomes necessary. As the register will contain personally identifiable information it will be secured and stored under the strictest conditions. Participants will be responding to the interview questions in a professional capacity, therefore, there is no risk of discomfort. All experiences shared during the interview will be gathered with respect for the participant's dignity. The researcher will strive to remain as subjective as possible during the data construction.

4. POSSIBLE BENEFITS TO PARTICIPANTS AND/OR TO THE SOCIETY

The interviewee could gain professional insight and reflection on the automatic learner promotion practice and implementation and the implications for quality education in Namibian primary schools. The findings and feedback can be made available to the participants should they require this information. The study is significant to society as it

aims to provide valuable feedback on how effectively an automatic learner promotion policy will be implemented. The findings and recommendations made, as a result of this study are significant as they will solve some of the major problems which may affect the proper implementation and practice of automatic learner promotion.

5. PAYMENT FOR PARTICIPATION

Involvement in this study comes without remuneration as the participants will participate voluntarily.

6. PROTECTION OF YOUR INFORMATION, CONFIDENTIALITY, AND IDENTITY

Any information you share with me during this study that could identify you as a participant will be protected. This will be done using the removal of identifying details wherever required. The data collected during the interview will be safeguarded in a research file. The data will remain in a secure file and will only be seen and used by the researcher and the research supervisor. The interview recording and identifying details will not appear anywhere in the research report. The participant has the right to request to view the transcripts of the recordings.

7. PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

You can choose whether to be in this study or not. If you agree to take part in this study, you may withdraw at any time without any consequence. You may also refuse to answer any questions you don't want to answer and remain in the study. The researcher may withdraw you from this study if circumstances arise that warrant doing so.

8. RESEARCHERS' CONTACT INFORMATION

If you have any questions or concerns about this study, please feel free to contact; Principal Investigator: Liina Frieda Mbudhi at 0817214969 or liimbudhi@gmail.com, and/or the supervisor Prof. Nuraan Davids at 021 808-2877 or nur@sun.ac.za

9. RIGHTS OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. You are not waiving any legal claims, rights, or remedies because you participate in this research study. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, contact Ms. Maléne Fouché [mfouche@sun.ac.za; 021 808 4622] at the Division for Research Development.

~~~~~  
DECLARATION OF CONSENT BY THE PARTICIPANT

The information above was described to me by Liina Mbudhi in English and I am in command of this language. I was allowed to ask questions and these questions were answered to her to my satisfaction.

I hereby consent voluntarily to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

\_\_\_\_\_

**Name of Subject/participant**

\_\_\_\_\_

**Name of Legal Representative (if applicable)**

\_\_\_\_\_

**Signature of Participant**

**Date**

***DECLARATION BY THE PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR***

I declare that I explained the information given in this document to \_\_\_\_\_ *[name of the participant]* and/or *[his/her]* representative \_\_\_\_\_ *[name of the representative]*. *[he/she]* was encouraged and given ample time to ask me any questions. This conversation was conducted in English and no translator was used.

\_\_\_\_\_

**Signature of Principal Investigator**

\_\_\_\_\_

**Date**

## Addendum B: Research permission from the Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture



REPUBLIC OF NAMIBIA

### MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, ARTS AND CULTURE

Tel: +264 61 -2933202  
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Enquiries: G. Munene  
Email: gm12munene@yahoo.co.uk  
File no: 13/2/9/1

Luther Street, Govt. Office Park  
Private Bag 13186  
Windhoek  
Namibia

Ms Liina F. Mbudhi  
P. O. Box 15  
Ondangwa  
Email: liimbudhi@gmail.com

Dear Ms Mbudhi,

#### **SUBJECT: PERMISSION TO CONDUCT AN ACADEMIC RESEARCH IN ERONGO REGION**

The Ministry wishes to acknowledge receipt of your email seeking permission to conduct an academic research at schools for your Masters' study which is focussing on: "*An Exploration of Automatic Learner Promotion at three Schools in Namibia: Implications for Quality Education*" in Erongo region, Namibia.

Permission is hereby granted to you to access the end of the year promotion schedules provided you seek for further clearance from the Regional Director of Education, Arts and Culture at the Erongo Region where you wish to conduct your research to ensure that:

- That permission is sought from the Inspectors of Education and school principals;
- Should not interrupt teaching and learning;

Furthermore, you are kindly requested to share your research findings with the Ministry after completion of the research project. You may contact Mr G. Munene at the Directorate: Programmes and Quality Assurance (PQA) for submission of your research findings at the above indicated details.

We wish you the best in conducting your research and the Ministry looks forward to hearing from you upon completion of your study.

Yours Sincerely,

  
Sanet L. Steenkamp  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



16/10/2020  
Date

## **Addendum C: Interview schedule for teachers, HODs and principals**

**Research Title:** An exploration of automatic learner promotion at three schools in Namibia: Implications for quality education.

The purpose of this interview is to collect information about automatic learner promotion and the implication for quality education in Namibian primary schools. Based on the findings, possible ways for the effective implementation of automatic learner promotion will be suggested. It is, therefore, hoped that your responses would be very rigorous and sincere. Rest assured that, your responses will be used only for the academic purposes. Consequently, you will not be responsible for the research outcomes, and all the information obtained will be kept confidential. Thus, you are kindly requested to respond honestly for the achievement of an authentic research's results.

### **Part 1: Implementation of automatic learner promotion policy**

1. What is your understanding of automatic promotion?
2. Does your school use the automatic promotion policy? (Probe, if they do have the policy in their file/ when and how does your school use the policy/ process involving automatic promotion)?
3. Who is involved in the automatic promotion of learners? (Probe, do you have a promotional committee at school? or are you part of the promotional committee? If so, what does the committee discuss)?

4. Do parents consulted or involved in automatic promotion of their children? (Probe, at what stage does the school inform the parents about the progress of their children and how often are they updated on the performance and progression of their children at school)?
5. How often is this policy used? (Probe, is it used more prevalent in some grades than in others)?
6. Are there any learning support programmes at school, which cater for learners, who have been automatically promoted? (Probe what types of support does the school offer/ when does this support offered/ how is the attendance of learners)?
7. Who manages the learning support programmes?
8. How many times are learners allowed to repeat a grade? (Probe, do you have learners who are three years older or more than their class mates? Why do you think this is the case/ why has automatic promotion not been used in these cases)?
9. What else you would like to share with me about the implementation of automatic promotion policy?

## **Part 2: Effects of automatic learner promotion on learners and teachers**

10. What are the effects, if any, on your teaching in terms of having learners, who have been automatically promoted in your classroom? (Do you find that you need to employ different pedagogical practices?) elaborate
11. What are the differences between learners who have been automatically promoted and those who have been promoted by merit to the next grade? What are these differences?
12. Based on your experiences as a teacher, how would you describe the levels of interest and motivation of learners, who have been automatically promoted?

13. If there are any, what challenges do you encounter in teaching and learning with learners, who have been automatically promoted? (Probe, how do you address these challenges)?
14. In your opinions, what do you think about automatic learner promotion with regards to adequate alternative to grade repetition?
15. What else you would like to share with me about the effects of automatic learner promotion on teachers and learners?

**Part 3: The implications of automatic learner promotion on quality education**

16. What are your understandings of a quality education?
17. How does policy of automatic promotion as practised at your school considered advancing quality education? (Please elaborate)
18. What are the effects of the policy of automatic learner promotion on the provision of quality education? (Do you think it improves or hinders the quality of education?)
19. How does automatic promotion policy advance or hinders the educational experience of learners?
20. What else would you like to share with me about the implications of automatic learner promotion policy on quality education?

## Addendum D: Notice of approval

### NOTICE OF APPROVAL

REC: Social, Behavioural and Education Research (SBER) - Initial Application Form

1 December 2020

Project number: 15208

Project Title: An exploration of automatic learner promotion at three schools in Namibia: Implications for quality education

Dear Ms Liina Mbudhi

Your REC: Social, Behavioural and Education Research (SBER) - Initial Application Form submitted on 24 November 2020 was reviewed and approved by the REC: Social, Behavioural and Education Research (REC: SBE).

Please note below expiration date of this approved submission:

#### Ethics approval period:

| Protocol approval date (Humanities) | Protocol expiration date (Humanities) |
|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| 1 December 2020                     | 30 November 2021                      |

#### GENERAL REC COMMENTS PERTAINING TO THIS PROJECT:

There is one sentence in the informed consent form that needs to be reviewed: *The researcher will strive to remain as subjective as possible during the data construction.* Does the researcher mean "objective"?

#### INVESTIGATOR RESPONSIBILITIES

Please take note of the General Investigator Responsibilities attached to this letter. You may commence with your research after complying fully with these guidelines.

**If the researcher deviates in any way from the proposal approved by the REC: SBE, the researcher must notify the REC of these changes.**

Please use your SU project number (15208) on any documents or correspondence with the REC concerning your project.

Please note that the REC has the prerogative and authority to ask further questions, seek additional information, require further modifications, or monitor the conduct of your research and the consent process.

#### CONTINUATION OF PROJECTS AFTER REC APPROVAL PERIOD

You are required to submit a progress report to the REC: SBE before the approval period has expired if a continuation of ethics approval is required. The Committee will then consider the continuation of the project for a further year (if necessary).

Once you have completed your research, you are required to submit a final report to the REC: SBE for review.

#### Included Documents:

| Document Type          | File Name                                            | Date       | Version        |
|------------------------|------------------------------------------------------|------------|----------------|
| Data collection tool   | Promotion_Policy_approved_Primary_phase_2015         | 01/01/2015 | pdf            |
| Request for permission | A letter to the Principal of Katora primary school   | 02/06/2020 | Words document |
| Request for permission | A letter to the Principal of Swakop primary school   | 11/07/2020 | word document  |
| Request for permission | A letter to the Principal of Tutaleni primary school | 11/07/2020 | Word document  |
| Default                | contact Register                                     | 01/08/2020 | word           |

