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# Exploring actors' collaborations and involvement in the Namibian learner pregnancy policy

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**Introduction:** The Namibia Education Sector Policy on the Prevention and Management of Learner Pregnancy (ESPPMLP) aims to reduce the cases of learners falling pregnant and increase learner-parent completion of education. The ESPPMLP addresses the fact that learner pregnancy and school drop-out are collaborative efforts between parents, the community, schools, and non-governmental organizations. However, Namibia continues to have had a problem with the high rate of learner pregnancy and school drop-out for many years. Previous studies reported the absences and limitations of both internal and external actors' collaboration in its implementation. This paper aims to clarify the lack of stakeholder involvement and cooperation in the ESPPMLP activities within selected rural schools in Namibia.

**Methods:** Using the qualitative approach mixed with phenomenological and content data analysis, the study conducted 19 individual interviews with schoolteachers, one school board member, one NGO representative, and six focus group discussions with 27 parents.

**Results and findings:** Among others, results show the limited life skills of teachers in schools, the attitude of the community toward schoolteachers, making them feel devoid of influence in collaborations, and the lack of sexual reproductive activities programs in school settings. The findings reveal the reliance of the activities of prevention and management of learner pregnancy on donor-driven initiatives, the lack of task forces at the community level, the shortage of knowledge and understanding about the ESPPMLP and the lack of policy implementation guidelines. Establish learner pregnancy leadership structures at the community level for coordination, introduce community parenting, and execute partnership of monitoring activities to boost stakeholder collaborations.

## KEYWORDS

stakeholders, collaboration, prevention, management learner-pregnancy, actors

## Introduction

The Namibia Education Sector Policy on the Prevention and Management of Learner Pregnancy (ESPPMLP) is a framework the Ministry of Education (MoE) rolled out in April 2013 to reduce the cases of learner's pregnancy and increase learner-parent completion of education. Despite its existence, the Education Management Information System (EMIS) Reports showed that the number of pregnancy-related school drop-outs rose from 1,560 in 2019 to 2,291 in 2020 and 3,658 in 2021, leading to public outcry and media coverage in the country (Shiningayamwe, 2023). The

ESPPMLP stresses that addressing learner pregnancy and school drop-out requires a coordinated approach that involves relevant stakeholders such as parents, families, the community, churches, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) (MoE, 2012). ESPPMLP further stresses that various stakeholders, including learners, Namibian Ministries of Gender, Health and Social Services, Safety and Security, Sport, Youth, and National Service, have a shared responsibility upon its implementation. However, a study by Shiningayamwe (2023) revealed that the absence of stakeholder involvement and collaboration in the implementation of the ESPPMLP was established from the survey of the learners' perspective in addressing learner pregnancy and school drop-out (Shiningayamwe, 2023).

This paper serves as a follow-up to examine the absence of stakeholder involvement and collaboration in ESPPMLP implementation. The term stakeholders or actors in this context refers to individuals and organizations assumed to be involved in the activities of the ESPPMLP at the school and community levels. As adopted by Hophmayer-Tokich (2012) and Owens (2008), internal actors are schoolteachers and leading implementers in this study. External actors are representatives of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), parents, and school boards. The life skills teachers and principals were also commonly referred to as schoolteachers. Learner pregnancy and school drop-out refer to an incident where a learner dropped out of school due to pregnancy. Learner-parent (learner-mother or learner-father) refers to any learner who becomes a parent while attending school (MoE, 2012; Shiningayamwe, 2023).

The absence of stakeholder collaboration is attributed to poor policy performance (Gcelu, 2019; Michel, 2021; Ramalepa et al., 2021; Chinkondenji, 2022). When stakeholders are not collaborating in policy implementations, they may duplicate resources, fail to address policy issues, and ultimately hinder policy from achieving its intended purpose (Scott and Gong, 2021). Where stakeholders engage, they bring diverse perceptions and learn from one another by sharing knowledge, resources, ideas, information, and tasks (Gcelu, 2019). Therefore, exploring stakeholders' collaborations and involvement in policies addressing learner pregnancy and school drop-out in rural communities and school settings may provide insights into opportunities, barriers faced, and required support.

Previous studies conducted in sub-Saharan African countries and elsewhere revealed the absence of stakeholder collaboration within adolescent and sexual health programs (Calvès, 2002; Wekesa and Coast, 2014; UNESCO, 2017, 2018; Nyariro, 2018; Mutua et al., 2019; Zuilkowski et al., 2019; Ahinkorah et al., 2020; MoE, 2020; World Vision, 2020). The studies in Namibia also highlighted the shortage of stakeholder collaborations in the prevention of learner pregnancy (Burton et al., 2011; Eloundou-Enyegue and Shirley, 2011; Nekongo-Nielsen and Mbukusa, 2015; Pearson and Van Der Berg, 2015; Legal Assistance Centre, 2017). However, there remains a lack of clarification in the literature as to why stakeholders are absent from the involvement and collaboration in implementing the prevention and management of learner pregnancy, particularly the ESPPMLP. Information from internal and external actors' forms dialogues in the public domain to tackle the plight of learner pregnancies in rural schools. Therefore, this paper aims to clarify the absence of external and

internal actors in collaborating to implement the activities of the ESPPMLP.

## The Namibia education sector policy on the prevention and management of learner pregnancy

The Ministry of Education administers and oversees the ESPPMLP activities and programs at the national level. According to the MoE (2012), the ESPPMLP emphasizes shared responsibilities with relevant line ministries, such as the Ministry of Gender Equality and Child Welfare, which must offer social workers for learners' counseling. The Ministry of Health and Social Services provides adolescent-friendly health services through mobile services in school settings, offering pre- and post-natal care, Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV and AIDS (acquired immunodeficiency syndrome), counseling, and related services. The Ministry of Safety and Security Services offers prompt and sensitive social services and investigates cases of rape and other crimes. The Ministry of Sport, Youth and National Service provides safe entertainment for learners in an alcohol-free environment (MoE, 2012).

The ESPPMLP states that the Ministry of Education is also responsible for allocating funds and educating relevant stakeholders about the ESPPMLP (MoE, 2012). The stakeholders may partner with schools to execute activities regarding preventing and managing learner pregnancy. For example, as part of the stakeholder collaborations, the Ministry of Education, in partnership with the funding of UNICEF and Global Fund, rolled out My Future is MY Choice (MFMC) and Window of Hope (MoE, 2012). MFMC is a curriculum program that aims to deepen the secondary learners with extensive sexual information and communication, negotiation, and decision-making skills to avoid risky behaviors. The Window of Hope is for primary school learners to increase their self-esteem, knowledge, and abilities against HIV and accept those living with it (MoE, 2012).

At the regional level, the Regional School Counselor, and School Inspector monitor, supervise, and support ESPPMLP school-based activities with other relevant regional stakeholders (MoE, 2012). The ESPPMLP mandates schools to provide sexual and reproductive health education, counseling, and support for learners through life skills. Life skills is a non-promotional subject that covers a holistic of age-appropriate issues in reproductive and sexual health education. The Life skills subject is part of the primary, junior, and secondary Namibian school curricula. The ESPPMLP further entrusted school principals and life skills teachers to facilitate the prevention of learners' pregnancy in school settings and the community. The principal heads the school and is responsible for the overall management, administration, and operations of primary, junior, and or secondary school-level activities (MoE, 2012). The life skills teacher is responsible for providing counseling and support activities to pregnant and learner parents in school settings. Life skills teachers are appointed full-time personnel from a pool of trained and qualified teachers. Once appointed, life skills teachers must undergo in-service training facilitated by the

Regional School Counselor on basic counseling skills, the process of counseling, counseling for difficulties, and bereavement counseling (Mushaandja et al., 2013). The ESPPMLP stipulates that every school with more than 500 learners must have a dedicated full-time life skills teacher.

According to the ESPPMLP, schools should maintain contact with the broader community, including NGOs, families, school boards, and community members, seek input, arrange gathering opportunities, and form partnerships. To prevent resistance or misunderstandings and make parents feel welcome, schools must orient parents on topics such as HIV, AIDS, and Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) (MoE, 2012). The ESPPMLP further states that “parents can contribute to learner pregnancy education if desired” (MoE, 2012, p. 9). Strictly, the ESPPMLP mandates parents of pregnant learners and learner-parents to inform the school about the pregnancy promptly. Also, they must strictly submit a signed statement confirming their commitment to care for the infant while the learner-parent continues attending classes (MoE, 2012).

Equally, the ESPPMLP is also under the leadership of the school board. The Namibian Education Act (16 of 2001) defines a school board member for a public school as an individual who administers the affairs and promotes the development of the school and learners of the school. Subject to this Education Act, the powers and functions of a school board are to advise the school’s management on the extra-mural curriculum of the school. A school board consists of individuals, who must be school parents but who are not employed at the school.

## Theoretical framework of the study: contextual interaction theory

Several scholars, such as Gcelu (2019), Ramalepa et al. (2021) and Chinkondenji (2022) explored the prevention of learner pregnancy and school dropout using collaborative efforts. Gcelu (2019) applied the collaborative leadership framework developed by Chrislip and Larson (1994), drawing on the African adage that “It takes a village to raise a child,” and the practice resulted in a decline in learner pregnancies and dropout rates in two schools was observed. Chinkondenji (2022) proposed the concept of the African philosophy value “Umntu Ngumuntu Ngabantu” (meaning humanness). Ubuntu underscores communal interconnectedness, home support, empathy, collective community responsibility, mutual support, and recognition of every individual’s role in preventing learner pregnancy. Ramalepa et al. (2021) emphasized establishing partnerships between teachers, school health nurses, and midwives to address the challenge. This study could utilize Gcelu (2019), Ramalepa et al. (2021), and Chinkondenji (2022) for stakeholder involvement and collaborations but needed an element of policy implementation—an additional element to this study. Therefore, in considering the implementation of the ESPPMLP, we selected the Contextual Interaction Theory (CIT) to unpack clarification on the absence of actors’ involvement and collaboration in the ESPPMLP.

The CIT is one of the third-generation policy framework theories initially developed by Dutch policy researcher Hans Bressers in the 1980s. CIT provides an empirically tested framework

for determining obstacles in policy implementation and emphasizes the importance of involving many actors in environmental protection policies (Bressers, 2007; Owens, 2008; Hophmayer-Tokich, 2012; Owens and Bressers, 2013; Natesan and Marathe, 2015). The CIT stresses that interactions among actors are crucial “whether a “government administrator as an implementer or an “on-the-ground stakeholder” as the beneficiary” (Owens and Bressers, 2013, p. 205), and actions exerted by different actors can either boost or obstruct the desired policy outcomes, shaping policy processes to succeed or fail (Devaney and Spratt, 2009; Javakhishvili and Jibladze, 2018).

The CIT has identified three variables; motivation, power, and information that influence the policy implementation and actors’ collaborations (Bressers, 2007; Owens, 2008; Devaney and Spratt, 2009; Hophmayer-Tokich, 2012; Owens and Bressers, 2013). Scholars such as O’Toole (1986), Owens (2008), and Hophmayer-Tokich (2012) provided contextual descriptions of the following three elements. CIT assumes that information is essential for successful policies as it encompasses critical aspects such as the clarity of policy directives, accuracy in decision-making and communication, clarity about tasks, and unambiguous mandates. Also, it is part of the availability of resources and staff training, providing staff training and capacity-building programs to equip actors with the knowledge and skills required to execute their roles and responsibilities within the policy framework.

According to the CIT theory, power pertains to resources such as time, budget allocation, and personnel, enabling actors to carry out policy activities effectively. It also encompasses the power structures within the implementation process; when roles and responsibilities are defined, it facilitates accountability, reduces ambiguity, and enables actors to focus on their specific tasks. This clarity of responsibility empowers individuals and organizations to take ownership of their roles and contribute effectively to policy implementation. Motivation refers to an actor’s drive and commitment to perform policy tasks and activities. Scholars like Hophmayer-Tokich (2012) and Javakhishvili and Jibladze (2018) describe motivation as actors’ values, interests, attitudes toward policy implementation, prioritization, self-efficacy, and the influence of external pressures. CIT assumes that when actors know their roles and responsibilities, they will likely be motivated to perform their tasks with dedication and enthusiasm and to allocate time and effort to policy activities.

In their global and sub-Saharan African research contexts, several authors applied this theory to health, gender, and environment, Owens (2008), Bakari and Frumence (2013), Javakhishvili and Jibladze (2018); and Michel (2021) and yielded valuable insights on factors hindering and boosting policy performance, such as the lack of coordination and advocacy, lack of access to information and leadership and the presence of active stakeholder interactions. Therefore, employing CIT’s lens may uncover the reasons for the absence of stakeholder collaboration among the actors involved in implementing the ESPPMLP.

## Methods

The study utilized a qualitative phenomenological research design to investigate and elucidate the stakeholder collaborations

and involvement in the Namibian ESPPMLP. Employing a phenomenological approach allows researchers to delve deeper into understanding the essence of the participant's experiences and the contextual factors contributing to those experiences (Alase, 2017; Creswell and Poth, 2018; Shiningayamwe, 2023). The data presented in this study are for schoolteachers (mainly school principals and life skills teachers), parents and guardians, and school boards in selected primary, junior, and secondary schools in a rural northern Namibian region.

## Sampling and instruments

This study applied three sampling techniques: criterion sampling, non-probability purposeful sampling and convenient sampling. Criterion sampling entails the selection of cases that meet specific pre-defined characteristics for eligibility, inclusion, and quality assurance (Patton, 2015; Creswell and Poth, 2018). We used the criteria to select one public school per educational circuit focusing on those with a consistent record of high learners' pregnancy school drop-out incidents in three academic years, namely, 2017, 2018, and 2019 [Education, Management Information System (EMIS) reports]. On the other hand, purposive sampling involves selecting a sample based on knowledge of a population (Babbie, 2004; Patton, 2015).

The study employed non-probability purposive sampling to select schools and individuals who could offer valuable insights into the research problem (Creswell and Poth, 2018). The participating schools were determined by the number of educational circuits in the region [targeting one school per circuit (the region under investigation has 10 educational circuits)].

The criteria for selecting schoolteachers included being the life skills teachers and school principals at each school. Schoolteachers (life skills and school principals) are educators trusted with roles and responsibilities of management and prevention of learner pregnancy at their respective schools. The life skills teachers are those teaching non-promotional subjects in schools covering holistic age-appropriate issues in reproductive and sexual health education in school and are trusted to engage with the community. The parents are primary caretakers and guardians of the learner's parents or adolescent learners. The principal heads the school and is responsible for the overall management, administration, and operations of primary, junior, and or secondary school-level activities (MoE, 2012). The NGO representatives are staff members working at the NGO or faith-based organization engaged in learner pregnancy programs or supporting learners' parents at the selected schools in that specific region. Thus, obtaining perspectives from these specific groups, who are believed to possess valuable insights into stakeholder collaborations in implementing ESPPMLP activities, could provide a comprehensive analysis.

A sub-sample of schoolteachers was determined on the number of participating schools. The criteria for selecting schoolteachers included being a life skills teacher or principal at each school. One life skills teacher refused to participate, resulting in 19 schoolteachers from nine primary, combined and secondary schools. One life skills teacher refused participation, resulting in 19 schoolteachers from nine primary, junior, and secondary schools.

Schoolteachers had diverse educational backgrounds, ranging from diplomas degrees to master's degrees, and had teaching experience ranging from five to over 20 years. Although the schoolteachers spoke different Namibian languages, interviews were conducted in English. Parents were selected based on the criteria of being a parent or caregiver of a learner at the participating schools, being a school board member, residing in the school community, and being willing to provide informed consent and share their experiences regarding stakeholders or actors collaborating to prevent learner pregnancy and school drop-out. Hence a school board consists of members who must be school parents who are not employed at the school, the participating member was interviewed on school premises. The selection criteria for participating NGOs included any NGOs directly involved in CSE programs with the schools participating in the study. The study interviewed one senior representative from an NGO that provided CSE among the selected schools. The NGO's representative took place in their office's outlets.

This data was collected between August and October 2021. The study followed a set of semi-structured interviews, face-to-face individual interviews, and the focus group interview guide. The study conducted face-to-face interviews with 19 schoolteachers, one with a school board member, and one NGO representative. Face-to-face individual interviews were conducted in private school settings, such as storerooms and principal offices, to ensure privacy and address sensitivity. Additionally, the researcher facilitated six focus group discussions with 27 parents, each involving a group of 4–8 parents. The parent's focus group discussion occurred around the open school premises, with some under a tree or kitchen. In all interviews, the researcher engaged participants in structured conversations about the research topic under the guidance of the researcher.

Despite the distinctions among the participants, the questions remained broadly consistent. The researcher asked central questions based on your experiences and perspectives: Why are actors absent in the involvement and collaboration of the ESPPMLP activities and programs? What makes actors' collaboration difficult in preventing and managing learner pregnancy and school drop-out in your community and school context? Some additional questions for parents and school boards: How would you explain parents' involvement in the ESPPMLP implementation? What initiatives are undergoing at the community level regarding preventing and managing learner pregnancies? Do you think there is effective communication and reinforcement of national policies in the prevention and management of learner pregnancies?

While the schoolteachers were asked questions like: What challenges do teachers face in engaging with the parents? Has your school formed any local community support or initiative to fight against the high number of learner pregnancies? What is your experience regarding the engagement of NGOs with your schools? What resources (financial, personnel, legal, and structural) have been available to you to assist in implementing the ESPPMLP? What challenges do you face in implementing the ESPPMLP?

Since the researcher was proficient in the local language (Oshiwambo) but had no prior relationship with the participants, parents with limited education found it easier to express themselves in their vernacular language. Each interview session lasted ~1 h and 30 min, with recordings for transcription.

## Research site

The study occurred in one of Namibia's 14 regions, located in the far northern area of Namibia, which borders Angola Cunene province. The region is typically rural, and most schools are in rural zones. According to the 2020 EMIS report, the area had 270 schools with 110,127 learners, of which 49.7% were female students (MoE, 2020). The region recorded the highest number of pregnant teenagers in the country from 2010 to 2022, with 23,700, at a prevalence rate of 11.6%, linked to the lowest rate of contraceptive use among teenage girls, with 13.6% (Indongo, 2020). The region had high learner pregnancies and school drop-out cases in three academic years, 2017, 2018, and 2019 (MoE, 2017, 2018, 2019).

## Data analysis

The study employed content analysis by Polit and Beck (2012) and the interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) framework of Alase (2017) to organize narratives and concepts emerging from the collected data. After data collection, the researcher repetitively listened to the recorded audio. This was followed by transcribing from Oshiwambo (local language) into English. At the same time, they were taking note of non-verbal cues, reflections, and thoughts related to the participants' narratives (Shiningayamwe, 2023). The researcher used colors to annotate notes within the transcripts, facilitating the clustering of similar topics (Ramalepa et al., 2021). The researcher further identified themes and organized them into superordinate themes, ensuring that the analysis reflected the depth of data, which was further condensed into codes—a comparative study of the emerging themes resulting in a table of themes and categories. The researcher further refined the topic by grouping related topics into sub-categories and consolidating the data related to each category. This iterative process continued until data saturation.

Throughout the analysis process, the researcher adhered to Lincoln and Guba (1985) criteria of transferability, dependability, confirmability, credibility, and trustworthiness of the study. During the interview sessions, authenticity and credibility were maintained by reiterating participants' responses and seeking clarification to capture their intended meanings. Additionally, the researcher provided the participants with transcripts to confirm their views accurately and used filed notes to document relevant information about settings, such as the interview date, the number of participants and demography, and locations of the schools. Through the process, the researcher maintained an audit trail of all research activities to enhance transparency and accountability. Using participants' words helped keep the authenticity and credibility of the findings. The identified themes were carefully aligned with the goals and directives of the ESPPMLP to enhance trustworthiness, ensuring coherence between the research findings and the study's overall purpose (Shiningayamwe, 2023). The researcher conducted additional reviews to identify overlaps and contradictions.

Reflexivity, as articulated by Cohen et al. (2007), involves examining one's biases, assumptions, and positions of power that may influence the research process and findings. In this

study, at the outset of the interview sessions, the researcher presented the information sheet to all participants, sharing the aims and objectives of the study, which focused on enhancing stakeholder collaborations and the implementation of the ESPPMLP. Additionally, participants were encouraged to provide honest contributions to the research. Moreover, the researcher disclosed their position within the research context, being a student, including social, cultural, and institutional affiliations. Throughout the research process, the researcher maintained a reflexive journal, reflecting on thoughts, feelings, and insights while engaging with the data—many of the interview questions and observations aligned with the ESPPMLP mandate. Furthermore, the study compared results and findings with existing literature and theoretical frameworks related to the research topic to facilitate the recognition of potential biases and blind spots.

## Ethics

Firstly, the researcher had permission to carry data from the Tokyo University of Foreign Studies, where the researcher is pursuing a PhD in Research and Sustainability. Secondly, they got permission from the Namibia Ministry of Education's Executive Director and the Regional Education Director. The life skills teacher and school principal facilitated the research at the school and community levels. The school principal facilitated the research to the parents around the school who were willing to volunteer and convene around the school premises. Before data collection, all participants were issued and submitted their consent forms. To ensure that participants were well-informed about the objectives, procedures, and expectations, an orientation session about the study was conducted 1 day before every school's scheduled data collection date, reiterating that their participation was voluntary and had the freedom to withdraw at any point. All participants were instructed not to use their real names. The researcher assured that all information about the site of the study would be confidential (Sim and Waterfield, 2019). The author had no knowledge of or relationship with all the participants.

## Results

This result presents the factors associated with internal and external actors' lack of involvement and collaboration in the ESPPMLP activities within selected rural schools in Namibia.

### The appointment of the life skills teachers

Numerous school principals (SP) shared their experiences of encountering challenges in recruiting life skills teachers, who are the key implementers of the ESPPMLP in a school setting. The school principals also believed the life skills teachers were not trained before being appointed, and to date, very few had been trained even after their appointment.

The appointment of life skills teachers was haphazard, and they had not been trained in learner support, counseling, or community engagement before the appointment, nor were they qualified in the

field. It was surprising to see mathematics teachers being recruited as life skills teachers. Even after their appointment, no training was provided. Only a few had received training before 2017 (Paavo, male, Secondary School principal).

Equally, the life skills teacher expressed their dissatisfaction with the content of the in-service training conducted by the Regional and Assistant Regional School Counselors. They lamented that the training sessions are only 1 or 2 weeks, which is inadequate for introducing and raising awareness about counseling and sexual reproductive health. The training is supposed to give them a deeper understanding and comprehensive knowledge to fulfill their responsibilities as expected by the community. This factor may limit their performance in engaging with stakeholders.

## The information about the ESPMLP to the actors

The study also uncovered insufficient information about the ESPMLP processes and practices among the schoolteachers. Some schoolteachers revealed an absence of refresher courses to ensure that the life skills teachers, parents, and the community are well acquainted with the policy. According to schoolteachers, despite repeated requests to the regional offices, school principals insisted that such activity rarely occurs. Some schoolteachers felt that soliciting input from the community was separate from their mandated responsibilities. They were uncertain if the information was being misinterpreted, disputing whether they were teachers or community educators.

*Currently, we need more knowledge to provide specific answers. It is difficult to delegate something that we are not familiar with. Sometimes, we can only demand what we already know. This policy addresses a public health issue, and only some have a background in this area. Some of the terminology in the policy requires translation and clarification (Henry, male, School Principal).*

*A lot needs to be done in distributing information. Parents and the community out there do not understand the policy. I think there is a breakage of information somewhere somehow. From time to time, all educational stakeholders must come together and give the information in the newspaper, on the radio, or at the school level (Loide, Female, Life skills teacher).*

## The absence of community initiatives

Also, some schoolteachers felt that the absence of community efforts or village task forces to facilitate the activities of learner pregnancy at the community level poses a challenge to coordinate with parents. The schoolteachers argued that everything is left entirely to them despite their efforts, including utilizing available resources like writing newsletters. This makes it harder to improve the execution of the activities in the community.

*The Ministry of Education should handle the ESPMLP the same way as community social issues, not limited to schools only, involving community leaders, such as the headman, who should also participate in these activities. Currently, there are no committees or initiatives at the village level to address the issue of learner pregnancies (Toivo, male, School principal).*

*If necessary, we need our people to reach out. I am still determining the specific criteria, but we must educate our communities. Train individuals, including life skills teachers and some community members, to collaborate with the Ministry of Safety and Security to visit different villages and alcohol spots. We should meet them where they are and engage with them on their level. Gather them (“ohaka hekwa naashi kehole” (direct translation, catch them with what they like (Anna, Female, Life skills teacher).*

## Intimidating attitudes from the community members

Furthermore, in the study, the schoolteacher claimed being intimidated when executing tasks. For example, schoolteachers feared being victimized by the parents and the community for reporting cases of statutory rape perpetrated against their learners or any sexually ill behaviors perpetrated by their learners again. They further lack the power to persuade parents to act and or compel them to cooperate. In instances where schools report cases of rape to relevant authorities, family members and caregivers are not willing to cooperate with the arrest of the suspect. The schoolteacher could do nothing to intervene.

*At times, we live in fear of victimization. If community members discover you reported a rape case to the police, you could face trouble. Worse, the burden remains with you if the case fails to proceed successfully in court. We have encountered instances of learner pregnancy related to statutory rape in our school, but we could not take any action. A minor could be visibly pregnant; parents are aware but choose not to come forward. Who are you to intervene? (Tilo, male, School principal).*

*Another one lamented: Our hands off to influence the whole process. For example, there are learners raped by family members at home; but schools are not involved nor further conducted in providing evidence on the case on behalf of the state. Once you report, the Ministry of Safety and Security takes over; you will never be updated again on the investigations (Etu, Female, Life Skills teacher).*

## The inability to reinforce parents and stakeholder involvement

In the study, schoolteachers noted that parents are not adequately guided and informed about their roles in the policy and are often absent in learner pregnancy activities. Unless a proper system is put in place, they encounter situations where parents

cannot effectively intervene in the policy. Also, nothing seems to compel their participation.

*Apart from reporting a case of pregnancy and signing off the guardian letter, the ESPPMLP lacks guidance on actions that parents can do to participate. It is easy to say that parents should be involved, but the practical implementation requires empowering them with the necessary knowledge. If learner pregnancy is a serious matter, the Ministry of Education should compel the involvement of parents, too. Some parents do not attend meetings despite our efforts to convince them, including phone calls and written letters. There was nothing one could do to bring them on board (male, Steve, School principal).*

Equally, some schoolteachers mentioned that to include parents effectively; they appoint school boards based on the structure of the community to balance monitoring learners' behaviors.

*Our school boards are structured to include representatives from the community surrounding the school. This way, whatever happens at home, we can better understand the learners' behavior at school and vice versa (Simon, male school principal).*

Moreover, in the study, schoolteachers highlighted the need for more support to reinforce and garner support from other relevant stakeholders assigned to share the responsibility within the ESPPMLP. This makes it harder to collaborate with them.

*We work with the Ministry of Health and Social Services; poor linkage is the challenge; sometimes, we travel to get them using our transport. We are also supposed to work with Gender, but we hardly get them. Safety and Security are constantly unavailable. We should also have a combination of pregnancy committees in the community with other experts, where police officers and the headman are (Ndapa, Female, life skills teacher).*

*Those NGOs have programs that are donor-based. They have their plans. Our school is small, and our cases are few. Nobody is interested in coming over to discuss your specific problem at your school. I tried inviting them to educate my learners on the sexual reproductive issue. This year, I asked them again, but there was no turn-up. They come for their specific targeted programs only (Ude, Female, school principal).*

## The shortage of sexual reproductive in school settings

A further factor that emerged was the shortage of sexual reproduction health programs. According to the schoolteachers, the previous supplementary programs that used to support their active engagement with the community have yet to be made available. As a result, they have resorted to implementing time-consuming programs that require fewer stakeholders' involvement, such as morning assemblies as platforms and organizing in-house arrangements for activities.

*Previously, schools benefited from sexual education programs like "My Future is My Choice" and "Window of Hope," funded by UNICEF and the Global Fund. Unfortunately, these programs ended several years ago, and the Ministry of Education did not renew or take over the agenda after the funding ceased. As a result, teachers are left without options to initiate our supplementary programs (Taati, Female, life skills teacher).*

Many organizations have withdrawn from Namibia, assuming we can sustain these programs independently. However, programs like Window of Hope and My Future have ceased. It is easier for us to continue implementing programs with proper training. There are concerns regarding the lack of sexual education programs in schools (Etu, female, life skills teacher)

## The absence of monitoring framework

In the study, the absence of monitoring and follow-up of activities by the Ministry of Education also affects stakeholder involvement. While some schoolteachers mentioned having a good relationship with their school inspectors, others felt there needed to be more monitoring and evaluation of the activities of the ESPPMLP by the Ministry of Education in collaboration with the community and the parents.

*I believe proper coordination between the Ministry of Education, the school, and the community needs to be improved. For instance, how often do we receive visitors? Well, they gave us a policy and then left. However, we annually report the number of pregnant learners in our region. They should come back and monitor and evaluate the situation with the community and help us minimize the cases so that we do not end up blaming each other (Taati, Female, life skills teacher).*

*We forward all the information and statistics to the regional office year in and year out. I have not seen any team from the Ministry of Education, Inspector of Education, or Regional Office visiting our school regarding the issue of learner pregnancy to ask why your cases are very high (Simon, male, school principal).*

## Resources

The shortage of time and resources to mobilize the community for the activities of the ESPPMLP, in addition to the already demanding workload, was identified as a hindrance to collaborations. The schoolteachers emphasized that the life skills subject is non-promotional and often remains unfilled for 2–3 years. School principals assign additional workloads of life skills subjects to teachers from different academic fields, presenting a challenge as these teachers will juggle their dual responsibilities of teaching and community engagement.

As the head of a school, I am already burdened with various tasks. How and where am I expected to engage the community for those demonstrations? It becomes overwhelming to handle additional responsibilities (Popya, male, school principal).

*We need help finding time to implement the ESPPMLP activities. We need dedicated full-time life skills teachers in our schools. Instead, we rely on individuals with a full workload, and whether they prioritize life skills or their other social science subjects becomes unclear. It is challenging, unlike having a full-time life skills teacher (Toivo, male, school principal).*

In addition, schoolteachers mentioned that there is no designated budgetary allocation for the activities of the ESPPMLP. Although the schools operate from the Education Act funding, the prevention and management of learner programs are not part of school budgetary allocations.

*Although we understand that it is part of education, schools heavily rely on donor-driven activities and support from other line ministries to carry out initiatives. The educational grant has no provision specifically covering the incidentals related to the ESPPMLP, except for the safety framework. Schools only have a budget for sanitary pads, not learner pregnancy activities (Simon, male, school principal).*

## The views of the external actors: parents, school boards and NGO representatives

### The lack of understanding of the activities of the ESPPMLP

The need for more understanding of the activities of the ESPPMLP among the parents also arose. When asked to rate their level of comprehension of the ESPPMLP, the interviewed parents rated their understanding as one out of five on the scale. Many interviewed parents perceived the ESPPMLP program's activities as merely facilitating the return of pregnant and learner-parents to schools. In addition, some parents attributed the mandate of the ESPPMLP activities to Section 56(1) of the Education Act of 2001 (MoE, 2012), which prohibits corporal punishment that aims to create a violence-free society while safeguarding children's rights, reluctant them as they feel schools have removed their caregiving roles and undermined their authority over their children. With disdain, some parents blamed the government for not maintaining order in schools, asking how they could contribute when everything, including their children, was reported to the law for disciplining them.

### The absence of community parenting

In the study, the school board particularly cited that in the past, it was a standard practice for school boards within the community to provide guidance and discipline any child. However, nowadays, parents feel less valued, and instructions involving government officials are perceived to possess greater power and influence than ordinary community members. This dynamic has discouraged parents from reporting misbehaviours or collaborating with schools, fearing backlash from their fellow villagers for interfering without evidence to support their claims. A school board lamented:

Nowadays, things are different in the community upbringing; we used to raise people in the village as one. If I find your child misbehaving, I intervene. Currently, there is no way you can discipline or gather people; worse, if mine were also pregnant, I would be reminded about all my flaws in my village (Silas, male, schoolboard).

Another pressing issue was the disrespect school teachers display toward parents, making them feel excluded and devoid of influence in collaborations. Parents believed that the authority to make stakeholder collaboration solely rests with the school administration. Additionally, some parents felt inferior to correct schoolteachers due to their low level of education, income, and social status. Some parents expressed that academic meetings were uncomfortable platforms for openly discussing learner pregnancy issues, particularly with parents of pregnant and learner-parents' learners who are vulnerable as schoolteachers view them as failures in raising children. Also, some volunteering parents in the school feeding programs cited experiencing a heightened vulnerability due to their limited access and being prone to food and nutrition in their families. Other parents indicated that when events occur in collaboration with NGOs on school grounds, they are not actively invited to participate in programs and activities.

### The prioritizing of academic activities over the prevention and management of learner pregnancy

The interviewed NGO representative reported a lack of understanding of the detailed processes of the ESPPMLP among life skills teachers and school principals, believing that for collaboration to be effective, schools, particularly life skills teachers and principals, must receive comprehensive training and in-depth knowledge about the program. Similarly, the representative mentioned that organizing to access the entire school with community members on activities related to learner pregnancy was further highlighted as a challenge. Schools prioritize and value academic performance over extracurricular activities.

Although not all school principals refuse, we struggle to access learners on school grounds. We are typically only permitted to host our activities after school. By then, most learners want to rush home, and those non-boarding learners may have already left, leaving only the boarding residents to participate (Stella, Female, NGO representative).

### Donor-driven target

The study revealed that the dependency of NGOs on donor-funded priorities and interests deters collaborations. According to the representative, NGOs focus on meeting the specific objectives and targets set by the donors for funding and reporting. Since they are directed toward fulfilling donor-driven objectives, it is challenging to foster collaboration when each one is prioritizing their donor-driven purposes.



## Discussion

This study's results have established factors such as the reliance on donor-driven initiatives, the lack of parents' consent among the schoolteachers, the shortage of knowledge and understanding about the ESPPMLP among external and internal actors, the lack of implementation guidelines, the unclear roles, and responsibilities assigned to the actors within ESPPMLP, the absence of leadership and task forces at the community level and the shortage of resources allocated to the ESPPMLP activities hinders the absence of stakeholder collaborations in the activities of the ESPPMLP.

### The reliance on donor-driven initiatives

The interviewed internal actors in this study claimed that schools rely on donor-funded initiatives to carry out ESPPMLP-related activities. Previous studies mentioned that in Namibia, schools depended on external funding provided through partnerships between UNICEF and the Global Fund in collaboration with the Namibia Ministry of Education (UNICEF, 2017, Paris, France). The current study further established that the previously implemented donor funded CSE programs, My Future, My Choice (MFMC) and Window of Hope, are no longer in operation. The MFMC content focused on imparting extensive sexual education and communication, negotiation, and decision-making skills to help students avoid risky behaviors. The Window of Hope program aimed to enhance self-esteem, knowledge, and skills related to HIV and other CSE (MoE, 2012). In 2018, the Namibia Minister of Gender and Equality and Child Welfare also shared the concern about the discontinuing of the My Future is My Choice and Window of Hope programs on high school learners when they were active (Kapitako, 2018; Mwetulundila, 2019). The Minister urged the Ministry of Namibian Basic Education, Arts, and Culture to revive the two programs.

Relatively, in 2019, the World Bank classified Namibia as an upper-middle country. Several prominent donor funding has been reduced, with some closing their support in the country. The late President of Namibia, Dr. Hage Geingob, also raised a concern about the classification of Namibia as an upper middle-income country by the Bretton Woods Institutions for denying the country access to grants for poverty eradication and inequality (Angula, 2023). The middle-income countries are assumed to be self-sufficient and require less donation and assistance. Our finding matches with previous studies that also confirmed that SSA activities related to teenage pregnancy programs often rely more on funding from NGOs and international organizations rather than support from the state (Calvès, 2002; Ahinkorah et al., 2020; Bash-Taqi et al., 2020). This study determined the reliance on the ESPPMLP stakeholder collaboration for funding from NGOs rather than the state results in fragmented efforts and limited ownership at the local level. Thus, hindering the establishment of cohesive and sustainable partnerships. Zulu et al. (2019) illuminate a landscape where voices of religious leaders, civic representatives, parent groups, and youth remain conspicuously absent from the policymaking discourse surrounding learner pregnancy prevention. This absence not only undermines the

inclusivity of the policy formulation process but also diminishes the legitimacy and resonance of the enacted policies within the broader societal fabric.

Drawing upon the insights provided by Zulu et al. (2019), it becomes evident that Zambia's approach, guided by the International Technical Guidance on Sexuality Education (ITGSE), has inadvertently marginalized key stakeholders, thus hindering effective policy implementation. The lack of sustained funding may create gaps in ongoing efforts to maintain collaborative efforts between the actors aiming to address learner pregnancy. This points to a need for more sustainable financing. Relying on donor-driven initiatives may challenge internal actors to solicit input, initiate actions, and mobilize stakeholders for ESPPMLP activities. It may also lead to dependency, making the implementation of ESPPMLP vulnerable to fluctuations in external funding. Besides, this study revealed that due to the targets and requirements set by their donors, NGOs face obstacles in collaborating with other stakeholders within educational settings. The reliance on donor-driven funding sources may also impede the autonomy and collective ownership of internal actors within educational institutions.

### The schoolteachers lack parental consent

The study establishes that ESPPMLP mandates that schools refer cases of suspected unsafe environments at home or within the school's premises to the appropriate agencies (MoE, 2012). The Namibian Childcare and Protection Act 3 of 2015 provides consent for the medical examination of abused children, even if the parent or guardian may be the culprit or wish to protect the perpetrator (Legal Assistance Centre, 2017). However, the current study reveals a limitation in the ability of schoolteachers to open cases of rape perpetrated against their learners without parental involvement. The study further established that schoolteachers do not have the authority to provide parental consent on behalf of learners without the involvement or consent of the learner's biological parents. In cases where parents are unwilling to cooperate, schoolteachers are unable to compel parental involvement. This highlights a gap in the Namibian education system. Similar findings have resonated in the Namibia public sphere. In 2021, a Senior Ministry of Education official expressed frustration with communities and families for their reluctance to report cases of girls being impregnated, protecting perpetrators (Nuukala Emmency, 2021). The reluctance to report cases of girls being impregnated indicates a failure to protect vulnerable individuals, particularly minors who may be victims of abuse or exploitation, perpetuating cycles of vulnerability and harm.

### Shortage of knowledge and understanding about the ESPPMLP among external and internal actors

Despite the ESPPMLP emphasizing information sharing and education among stakeholders (MoE, 2012), this study revealed a shortage of knowledge and understanding about the ESPPMLP

among both internal and external actors. This was evident as internal actors claimed they had not received the necessary training and skills to meet the expectations of their schools and the community. An earlier study by [Mushaandja et al. \(2013\)](#) also highlights the lack of comprehensive training for school counselors in Namibian schools to address the diverse needs of learners. Without adequate training and support, counselors may struggle to provide effective guidance and support to students facing various challenges, including issues related to sexual and reproductive health.

Moreover, the misunderstanding among parents that the prohibition of corporal punishment diminishes their role as caregivers and disciplinarians signifies a gap in knowledge regarding the purpose and scope of the ESPPMLP. It may lead to resistance or non-compliance with the policy, hindering its effectiveness. Additionally, if parents feel their authority is undermined, it may affect their engagement with schools and support for their children's education. Also, the parents' assumption that ESPPMLP is merely meant to facilitate learner-parent reintegration into schools indicates a lack of awareness about the goals of the policy. This might result in overlooking other crucial aspects of the policy, such as the prevention of teenage pregnancies, ensuring access to sexual education, and providing support services for pregnant learners.

The unwelcoming behaviors directed at NGOs by internal actors who prioritize academic activities over preventing learner pregnancies indicate a failure to recognize the importance of addressing reproductive health issues in education. This misalignment may lead to insufficient attention and resources to prevent and manage learner pregnancies. Effective policy implementation demands collaboration among all stakeholders. Tensions or resistance from internal actors can hinder successful implementation. Also, in the study, internal actors cited limitations in the language used within the ESPPMLP, which is dominated by public health could pose a barrier to understanding, inconsistencies in enforcement, and a lack of coordinated efforts to prevent and address learner pregnancies. This calls for ESPPMLP language adjustments or supplementary material. Clear and accessible language is essential for effective communication and collaboration in policy implementation.

Our findings are also consistent with [UNESCO \(2018\)](#), which reports a need for more knowledge and awareness of the practices of the ESPPMLP among Namibian schoolteachers and parents. The lack of knowledge and information may be a barrier for external and internal actors to mobilize and understand one another. They may have limited awareness of the implemented measures or initiatives. If actors are on the same page regarding processes, goals, or expectations, it may lead to communication and increase morale and engagement. [Mutua et al. \(2019\)](#) caution that stakeholders must fully comprehend the policies and their provisions. How can they implement a policy they are unaware of? Our findings agree with the ICT theory that posits that actors' collaboration requires technical knowledge to remain self-motivated and collaborate in its implementation ([Bakari and Frumence, 2013](#); [Javakhishvili and Jibladze, 2018](#); [Michel, 2021](#)). The current study affirms that

collaboration within ESPPMLP might be challenging as actors who seem very influential need more understanding and information about it.

## ESPPMLP has no implementation guidelines and a limited monitoring and evaluation model

This study established the absence of implementation guidelines for the ESPPMLP to guide actors on detailed activities. This was evident as some internal actors raised concerns and uncertainty about executing specific tasks without detailed information. The absence of implementation guidelines may result in varied interpretations, inconsistent execution, and conflicting views of the ESPPMLP. Such uncertainties in implementation could break down communication between actors and consequently impede collaborations among stakeholders. These findings align with previous studies in SSA, asserting that when policy implementers lack knowledge of what actions to take, it may lead to conflicting perspectives on policy implementation ([Mwenje-Macharia and Kessio, 2015](#); [Mutua et al., 2019](#)). Kenya's school pregnancy policy suffered from a similar issue, lacking guidelines that resulted in a lack of awareness about the policy among teachers, learners, parents, and other relevant stakeholders ([Mutua et al., 2019](#)). We concur with [Ahinkorah et al. \(2020\)](#), who suggested that policies incorporate specific implementation guidelines, define the scope of activities, and streamline the timeframe for public awareness and effective execution.

Furthermore, this study revealed a need for more monitoring and evaluation tools in the ESPPMLP. It emerged that the content related to monitoring and evaluation within the ESPPML document was too brief. As part of the monitoring and evaluation, the Namibian Ministry of Education conducts the Annual Education Census (AEC) on the first Tuesday of the third term of each year. The AEC offers information for yearly monitoring of the state of education ([Ministry of Education, 2020](#)). However, this study confirmed that data on the AEC does not report on the number of learners who returned to school after getting pregnant. A factor that could impede tracking the progress and performance of the ESPPMLP. [Kennedy \(2017\)](#) provides an example from Jamaica, where a post-integration monitoring system effectively tracks teen mothers, ensuring continuous support until they complete their secondary education. The system involves scheduled sessions and follow-up visits to homes and schools to assess the integration policy's effectiveness.

## The absence of leadership and task forces at the community level

The study further revealed that ESPPMLP functions under the auspices of the Ministry of Education under the Directorate of School of Inspection. The internal actors report implementation activities to the Regional Office via the Inspector of Education

(MoE, 2012, p. 15). However, leadership or a dedicated task force at the community level still needs to be provided to mobilize parents to support the policy, apart from schoolteachers. External actors claimed the lack of a community task force comprising all stakeholders, such as police office officers, traditional authorities, and churches, to foster collaboration on the activities of the ESPPMLP. The external actors, particularly parents, also felt that many of the activities seemed to be in the hands of the school's authority. Thus, calling for the establishment of learner pregnancy task forces by the traditional authority and the community members. Also, a significant leadership gap was further revealed within the ESPPMLP document, as it needs to explicitly explain the person or entity responsible for initiating its activities at the community level. Instead, ESPPMLP vaguely refers to the Ministry of Education (MoE, 2012) without providing specific details regarding the individual or body who holds this responsibility at the community level. This task force could initiate and drive the activities of the ESPPMLP and foster stakeholder collaborations.

Our findings are consistent with Michel's (2021) recommendations that leadership is crucial to policy implementation. It may provide actors with support, role clarifications, motivation, and a shared vision for the program. It may also lessen blame-shifting. In the study, external and internal actors lacked a central point of coordination and decision-making, thus engaging in blame-shifting and a shift of responsibility onto others. Previous literature stressed the establishment of sectoral response bodies and task forces to coordinate and monitor policy activities and successfully enhance policy performance (Calvès, 2002; Hadley et al., 2016; Gcelu, 2019; Ahinkorah et al., 2020; Bash-Taqi et al., 2020).

## Unclear roles and responsibilities assigned to the actors within ESPPMLP

Furthermore, the study established that although the ESPPMLP emphasizes stakeholder collaborations, their roles and responsibilities must be delineated. This study revealed that the ESPPMLP merely has a clause that states that "parents must be requested to partake if they are willing to engage in activities on learner pregnancy and school drop-out" (MoE, 2012, p. 24). The sole required parental involvement outlined in the ESPPMLP is to submit and endorse a guardian letter to the school administration when the learner's parent has returned to school; this seems to convey that their involvement is discretionary, not mandatory, in its implementation. In our study, the parents exhibited frustration and reduced motivation as they perceived disconnection from their responsibilities. They also regarded their contributions inconsequential, even if they wanted to contribute, attributing power dynamics to the government and school authority. When external actors, particularly parents, perceive their contributions as inconsequential, it may lead to frustration and diminished motivation. This frustration may not only impact their engagement with the educational process but could also have broader implications on their engagement in the activities of the ESPPMLP. Our findings align with the CIT, which posits that

actors become demotivated when their roles in policy execution are not clearly outlined (Owens, 2008; Owens and Bressers, 2013).

## The shortage of resources

This study revealed that a scarcity of resources poses a significant challenge to stakeholder collaboration within the activities of the ESPPMLP. The ESPPMLP states that the "Ministry of Education is committed to ensuring adequate budgetary allocation and resources to implement all policy aspects" (MoE, 2012, p. 15). However, in our study, the internal actors reported an absence of budgetary allocations for the activities and programs of the ESPPMLP. This limitation may affect the breadth and depth of interventions. Without adequate funding, carrying out essential activities designed to collaborate and address learner pregnancy within school settings may be challenging. Also, our study findings underscored inadequate resources, which stemmed from the lack of practical, comprehensive sexual programs within school settings. Evidence suggests sexuality education without demonstration does not equip learners with the critical skills needed and carry out the desired sexuality behavioral changes (Adekola and Mavhandu-Mudzusi, 2023). The shortage of resources may limit actors to access training, teaching materials, and tools necessary for effective instruction. This may hinder both actors' capacity to address the complex issues related to learner pregnancy.

Besides, the lack of resources was also evident as the internal actors claimed a lack of time to mobilize other stakeholders, as they claimed to be equally occupied with heavy academic workloads. The study noted a persistent shortage of life skills teachers in schools under investigation. Our findings correlate with the Namibian study of Mushaandja et al. (2013), who revealed the allocation of ordinary and unqualified school counselors with extra teaching loads on life-skill subjects. The shortage of life skills teachers in schools may limit learners' access to sexuality education lessons and enhance positive sexuality education outcomes (Adekola and Mavhandu-Mudzusi, 2023).

In summary, as per the CIT framework, our study aligns with the findings of previous research conducted by Hophmayer-Tokich (2012) and Owens and Bressers (2013), emphasizing the influence of information, power, and motivation on policy performance. Our study identified information about the ESPPMLP on actors as a barrier to mobilizing and collaborating within the ESPPMLP. Findings indicate that power dynamics and motivation shaped the behavior of internal actors as they prioritized academics over preventing learner pregnancy and school drop-out. Conversely, external actors expressed reluctance and a sense of disempowerment in collaborating with others, perceiving that authority and decision-making power belong to the school administration and government. The scarcity of resources also served as a demotivating factor for internal actors, as limited opportunities for involvement diminished their enthusiasm. Consistent with the three central CIT variables, our study supports the assertion made by Michel (2021), suggesting that leadership should be integrated into the CIT framework to provide actors with clear guidance, direction, and a shared vision for the

program. Without leadership, actors may work in isolation, lacking coordinated efforts and a sense of no purpose.

## Policy implications

Policy efforts should address the factors that impede collaboration and the involvement of actors in the ESPPMLP. In addition to policy efforts, mobilizing resources and engaging in ongoing advocacy campaigns, training, and education for all actors involved are crucial. It is necessary to prioritize the establishment of implementation guidelines and a policy plan to guide, monitor, and evaluate the performance of the policy. Also, the content of the policies should be explicit on the roles and responsibilities aligned to actors to address misconceptions, dispel disrespect and intimidation, and clarify roles, responsibilities, expectations, and conflicts related to the policy activities. Addressing these issues may consequently lead to improving the performance of the policies, which may reduce the number of learners' pregnancies and school drop-outs.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, factors stemming from internal and external actors who need more knowledge and understanding of the policy deter the lack of stakeholder collaboration within the execution of the ESPPMLP. Internal actors, particularly need more training and skills to effectively fulfill their roles and responsibilities. Moreover, the absence of clear implementation guidelines that may simplify the actor the task and guidelines further complicate stakeholders' comprehension of the ESPPMLP. Additionally, the absence of leadership and dedicated task forces at the community level exacerbates these challenges, hindering the mobilization and inclusion of parents, and NGOs to coordinating efforts. The shortcomings in monitoring processes and ambiguous roles assigned to actors may create to frustration and inconsistency among stakeholders, further undermining collaboration. The study noted that reliance on donor-driven initiatives and inadequate resource allocation highlights the urgent need for sustainable funding and planning mechanisms. Establishing leadership structures and task forces at the community level can facilitate partnerships, monitor activities, and coordinate efforts effectively.

## Limitation of the study

This article reports one of the objectives of a more extensive study (unpublished thesis) conducted in August 2022. The insights of this study are from the perspectives of teachers, parents, school board members, and NGOs in a specific northern region of Namibia. The research has limited input from other key stakeholders, including the Ministries of Gender, Health and Social Services, Safety and Security, Youth and National Service, and Culture, who could offer additional understanding of the dynamics

surrounding the ESPPMLP nationally. The studied region has unique geographical and socio-economic conditions that may have influenced the participants' viewpoints. The findings of this study may only be generalized to some regions in Namibia.

The author is a PhD student specializing in research and sustainability at the Tokyo University of Foreign Studies in Japan. As a JICA scholar, her doctoral study investigates factors hindering the implementation of the ESPPMLP. Her areas of interest are school pregnancy policies, the research and sustainability in educational policies, and their practical implications on learner pregnancies, school drop-out, girls' education, and sexuality education.

## Data availability statement

The raw data supporting the conclusions of this article will be made available by the authors, without undue reservation.

## Ethics statement

The studies involving humans were approved by the Ministry of Education/Namibia. The studies were conducted in accordance with the local legislation and institutional requirements. The participants provided their written informed consent to participate in this study.

## Author contributions

DS: Writing – original draft. ST: Supervision, Writing – review & editing.

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## Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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