

Senior Education Officers' Views on Strategies to Increase Learner Enrolment in the Commerce Field of Study in Namibia Secondary Schools

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Abstract

This study investigated the perspectives of Senior Education Officers (SEOs) on strategies to increase learner enrolment and retention in commerce subjects in Namibian schools, as well as the factors they perceived as hindering the successful implementation and teaching of these subjects. Despite the importance of commerce education in equipping learners with skills for trade, entrepreneurship, and economic management, enrolment has steadily declined. Using a qualitative approach design, the study collected qualitative data from SEOs interviews. Findings revealed that while SEOs recognise the potential of strategies such as commerce competitions and teacher training, their implementation remains limited, particularly at regional levels. Barriers found include learners' perceptions that science subjects offer better career opportunities, the perceived difficulty of commerce subjects such as accounting, and national performance concerns that discourage enrolment. The study recommends targeted regional partnerships, awareness campaigns to reframe career opportunities in commerce, and strengthened teacher support systems to sustain commerce education in Namibia.

Keywords: commerce education, curriculum implementation, continuous professional development, senior education officers, learner enrolment, learner retention

1. Introduction

Commerce is a vital field of study for any nation, as it produces professionals who manage national wealth, establish and sustain businesses that generate employment, and analyze economic trends to guide understanding of the economy's movement (Shinde & Dindori, 2025; Ras & Pretorius, 2007). It is therefore crucial that a significant number of students enrol in and successfully complete the commercial stream (Makhoba, & Qoyi, 2024). The national curriculum for Basic Education (NIED, 2018) outlines commerce subjects as Business Studies, Economics, Entrepreneurship, and Accounting. Namibia has 14 regions, and each region has 1 or 2 senior education officers for commerce. Senior Education Officers are responsible for ensuring the successful implementation of commerce subjects in Namibia by providing ongoing guidance to teachers through professional development activities and school visits to monitor content delivery. By virtue of their position, Senior Education Officers are responsible for the survival of the subjects they oversee and should take the initiative to ensure that their subjects not only perform academically but also market themselves to ensure high enrolment and learner engagement.

In global and African studies, there is a decline in enrolment in commerce subjects, and empirical research on the Namibian context remains limited. Existing studies, such as those by Gawde (2014) in India and Ibelegbu Ngozi and Ogechi (2025) in Africa, highlight declining learners' interest and participation in commerce subjects, but they do not examine the role of Senior Education Officers in addressing these challenges in Namibia. Furthermore, no known Namibian study has explored strategies for improving learner enrolment, engagement, and retention in commerce subjects at the secondary school level. The absence of localised research leaves a knowledge gap on how educational leadership and curriculum support structures can respond to declining participation in commerce education. As an SEO and doctoral candidate, we embarked on this study because no study in Namibia has examined ways to improve retention, engagement, and enrolment in commerce subjects.

Globally, concerns have been raised about the declining enrolment in commerce-related subjects at the secondary school level. A longitudinal study by Solinas-Saunders, Hobson, and Frink (2025), reported a concerning decline in black enrolments, driven by lower enrolment in high school commerce subjects. Moreover, the New Zealand study by Neilson and Fowler (2026), which investigated high school students' negative attitudes towards accounting and the profession and suggested that students must be exposed to career choices. In addition, studies have cautioned that continued declines could lead to a shortage of qualified personnel in commerce-related professions and adversely affect national economic development (Dawkins, 2023; Lee, Fernandez & Ro, 2022; Ona, 2025). Evidence from India indicates a drop in commerce enrollment. Chordia, Birla, and Bhanawat (2024) suggest that this decline results from shifts in the labor market, fewer job prospects in traditional commerce sectors, and increased student interest in science, technology, and digital careers. They argue that without updating commerce curricula to reflect current economic realities, student enrollment will likely continue to decline. Several African studies have confirmed similar trends of declining student enrollment in secondary school commerce subjects (Ibelegbu Ngozi & Ogechi, 2025; Ng'humbu, 2025). From a South African perspective, some schools have phased out

commercial subjects like Accounting, Business Studies, and Economics. A study by Thaba-Nkadimene and Mmakola (2020) identified factors such as poor learner performance, shortages of qualified teachers, limited pedagogical content knowledge, and scarce educational resources as reasons for the decline of these subjects in rural schools. Their study also showed that removing these subjects decreased opportunities for students interested in commerce-related careers. Recent research in South Africa shows a continued decline in enrolment in commerce subjects. Makhoba and Qoyi (2024) highlight that, although commerce education is essential for preparing students for careers in business, finance, and economics, data reveal fewer learners are selecting commerce streams in secondary schools. Multiple studies identify key factors affecting enrolment, such as limited career guidance, insufficient resources, and learners' perceptions of job opportunities (Ketwa & Tebekana, 2025; Ngwenya, 2025).

The research problem emerging from the introduction is the persistent decline and low enrollment in commerce subjects in Namibia's secondary schools, which threatens the sustainability of the commerce field and future availability of commerce-related professionals in the country. Several schools in the Otjozondjupa region have stopped offering commerce subjects altogether, while others experience very low learner intake. National examination statistics further confirm the seriousness of the issue, with only 4,494 learners sitting for commerce subjects out of 40, 630 learners nationally in 2023 (Directorate of National Examination Assessment, 2024). This decline had implications for economic development, employment creation, and the supply of qualified professionals in commerce-related careers. Despite the important role of Senior Education Officers in curriculum implementation and subject promotion, there is insufficient understanding of the strategies they perceive as necessary to increase learner enrolment and retention in commerce subjects. This persistent low enrolment in commerce subjects has threatened the survival of the field, thereby jeopardising career opportunities for learners and causing a shortage of qualified professionals in commerce across the country. This has increased the need for Senior Education Officers to take charge of their own initiatives within their respective regions and to boost enrolment in the field.

This study aims to explore the views of Senior Education Officers on strategies to increase learner enrolment in the commerce field of study and to prevent it from becoming extinct or economically unsustainable. Based on this inquiry, the following questions were generated:

- RQ1: How do Senior Education Officers perceive strategies for increasing learner enrolment and retention in commerce subjects in Namibian schools?
- RQ2: How do Senior Education Officers explain the factors hindering the successful implementation and teaching of commerce subjects in Namibian secondary schools?

This study will assist Senior Education Officers in implementing strategies to boost commerce enrolment in schools and make the field of study more appealing and a choice, while identifying barriers hindering the successful implementation of commerce. Furthermore, this will provide curriculum developers with insights into integrating strategies into the curriculum that can make the commerce field of study more appealing, ultimately increasing

enrolment whilst boosting academic performance.

The paper proceeds in four parts: Section 2, literature reviews on skills needed to excel in commerce subjects; followed by the research methodology, findings on the skills needed and how the current commerce teaching and learning support the acquisition of these skills and concludes with recommendations for future research

2. Literature Reviews

The literature review will precede with the theory to be applied in this study. Moreover, it will present findings on the views of Senior Education Officers and their suggestions on what can be done to uplift the commerce field of study, at the same time barriers affecting the implementation of commerce subjects will also be highlighted.

2.1 Theoretical Framework

Anderson's Organisational Development Theory (ODT) is appropriate for this study because it provides a structured framework for understanding how organisational improvement processes can enhance teacher performance, learning outcomes, and ultimately learner enrolment in commerce subjects. Theory is grounded in key tenets that serve as guiding principles for operational and organisational development, namely: the provision of adequate training; improved learning processes; improved teachers' performance. These principles align closely with the responsibilities and job descriptions of Senior Education Officers (SEOs), who are mandated to support curriculum implementation and to provide continuous professional development for teachers across regions. Additionally, SEOs are responsible for providing training to commerce subject teachers in the regions. SEOs are also accountable for the overall outcomes of these subjects. As alluded to earlier, poor academic performance and low learner intake in these subjects compel SEOs to be uniquely positioned to intervene more effectively than other stakeholders in the regions, as they directly oversee curriculum implementation, teacher support, and learner engagement. Finally, SEOs' responsibilities and accountability therefore extend not only to teacher performance but also to ensuring that commerce subjects remain attractive and sustainable within the Namibian education system.

The theory is justified in this study because the problem of low enrolment in commerce subjects is not solely a learner issue, but also a systemic challenge linked to teacher capacity and instructional effectiveness. By providing targeted training, SEOs can address gaps in teachers' subject knowledge and pedagogical skills, leading to improved classroom practice. Improved teaching quality is expected to strengthen learner engagement, performance, and interest in commerce subjects, thereby contributing to increased enrolment and retention. Therefore, the theory offers a relevant lens for analysing how SEOs can strategically intervene to strengthen commerce education and ensure its sustainability within the Namibian education system.

2.2 Strategies Employed by Senior Education Officers to Increase Retention and Enrolment for Commerce Subjects

Stanton (2006) offers strategies that Senior Education Officers can implement to increase retention in the field of commerce, starting with fostering a relationship between the SEO and the teacher they are responsible for. This requires the SEO to be positive and constructive in all feedback they give. Another strategy highlighted is for Senior Education Officers to become partners in the classroom by working with teachers to identify teachers in need and to plan together as a means of capacitating them. The strategies shared by Stanton are proof that a positive work environment among stakeholders in commerce can increase learner enrolment in these subjects.

Hagen (2024) studied what can be done to increase enrollment in the accounting profession, which found that major marketing initiatives to promote the profession as an exciting, rewarding career that is diverse both personally and professionally are rare to nonexistent in the United States. The studies further highlight a gap that exist with the accounting subject introduced late in the learners school life as it is not in elementary schools and only starts in high school. This is not new phenomena as it is the situation of the commerce education system in Namibia, the commerce field of study only starts in secondary school up to Advanced Subsidiary level, The national curriculum for Basic Education, NIED (2018). This studies opens up a need for commerce subjects to be offered from primary school to increase exposure.

During a study conducted in Nigeria a model was created by Igberaharha & Onyesom (2021), which sought strategies on how to increase enrolment in business education classes. It was found that to strengthen the appeal and sustainability of business education programmes, coordinated and focused awareness campaigns should be implemented to highlight their relevance and career prospects. Furthermore, the research highlights that regular public enlightenment initiatives are necessary to sensitise communities about the opportunities that business education provides. The above findings concur with strategies brought forth by Dwyer (2017) from the Reserve Bank of Australia to increase content on the Bank's website that is directly relevant to the needs of educators and learners and can be used in class. In addition, an Ambassador program has also been established, with a group of Bank economists being equipped to deliver talks to teachers and students on aspects of Bank and Economists work that are relevant to their syllabus. These Ambassadors not only explain economic content. They are advocates for economics and exemplify in the classroom what economics is and what an economist can be.

2.3 Barriers to the Implementation of Commerce Subjects

In a study conducted in Australia by Hagen (2024), it focused on the barriers Economics as a subject faces and found that the subject suffers from an image problem, as many students do not understand its relevance to their lives or future careers. This lack of connection makes economics less attractive compared to subjects perceived as more practical. Careers advisors and educators also struggle to explain how economics is applied in the workplace, which weakens its appeal as a career pathway. Another barrier is the limited availability of relevant teaching resources and contextual content, making it harder for teachers to engage learners effectively. Interestingly, the study also found that Economics has also been displaced by

Business Studies, which is widely seen as easier, more employable, and more accessible, further reducing demand. These two subjects

In Lusaka, Zambia, barriers were identified in the implementation of commerce subjects Mwansa (2022) a number of factors account for poor performance in commerce in the fifteen selected public Secondary Schools were: absenteeism of learners, poor reading culture among learners, unfavorable examination structure for commerce, bulkiness of the Commerce Syllabus, poor learning environment and lack of teaching-learning resources in schools, among others. These issues are critical and can hinder the successful implementation of the commerce curriculum.

In addition to the factors identified above, Makhoba and Qoyi (2024) found that learners' abilities, together with the influence of teachers and parents, play the most significant role in shaping their decision to enrol in commerce subjects. Teachers, in particular, exert a strong influence, as many routinely encourage high-achieving learners to pursue science rather than commerce, thereby steering subject selection. This authority, whether exercised directly or indirectly, has a substantial impact on learners' choices as they transition into senior grades of school.

Though their task is to support teachers, Senior Education Officers are also constrained by their own challenges. Tjozongoro (2019) found that subject advisers face challenges that reduce their effectiveness in providing teaching support. It was further evident that subject advisers receive limited support and need support through training, the provision of resources, and a reduction in workload.

3. Methodology

The study employed an interpretivist paradigm and a qualitative approach to investigate the strategies used by SEOs to increase retention and enrolment in commerce subjects. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews to address the research questions (Creswell, 2014). The data were analysed thematically using a six-step approach (Braun & Clark, 2006; Tables 1 and 2). The thematic analysis process comprised the following steps: familiarisation with the data sets, coding for tracking purposes, generating and identifying themes and subthemes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and writing up (Braun & Clark, 2006). The SEOs consisted of two males and one female, with many years of experience and well-qualified in commerce fields of study. Although the study initially aimed to engage five participants, only three were successfully interviewed despite considerable efforts by the researchers. This limitation reflects the practical challenges encountered during data collection.. The study used purposive sampling to select Senior Education Officers (SEOs) who were directly responsible for overseeing commerce education in their respective regions and who had extensive experience and expertise in commerce-related subjects. The inclusion criteria required participants to (i) hold an SEO position responsible for commerce subjects, (ii) have substantial experience in curriculum implementation and monitoring, and (iii) possess relevant qualifications in commerce education or related fields. Although the study

initially targeted five participants to ensure broader regional representation, only three SEOs were available and willing to participate despite repeated attempts to secure additional interviews. The final sample comprised two males and one female, all of whom had many years of professional experience and were highly qualified in commerce education. In qualitative research, sample adequacy is determined by the richness, relevance, and depth of the data rather than by numerical representativeness. The three participants were regarded as information-rich cases capable of providing detailed insights into the implementation, challenges, and future prospects of commerce education in Namibia. Their extensive professional knowledge and strategic roles within the education system enabled them to generate sufficient data to address the study's research questions effectively.

3.1 Measure of Trustworthiness

Credibility: According to Cope (2014:89-91), credibility refers to data that is unbiased and supported by reliable evidence. To ensure credibility, the researcher conducted member checking (participant validation) by sharing findings with participants for validation (extracts from interviews). To further maximise credibility, the researcher spent time with each study participant to gain a thorough understanding of the individuals, their experiences, and the phenomenon under investigation, thereby building a trusting relationship.

Transferability: the extent to which the findings of one study can be applied to other situations (Cope, 2014, pp. 89-91). The researcher ensured transferability by providing all relevant, detailed, and sufficient information for readers to make an informed decision about the applicability of the research results in other contexts.

Dependability: Dependability is the consistent production of the same data in similar situations (Cope, 2014:89-91). The researcher ensured dependability by maintaining a focused research question that linked data collection to how the data were collected. To ensure the dependability of this study, a comprehensive audit trail was maintained throughout the research process. This included the raw interview transcripts and field notes.

Confirmability: The degree to which the results of the research could be confirmed by other researchers (Korstjens & Moser, 2017:121). The researcher outlined all the steps taken from the start of the research until its completion to ensure confirmability.

Participant validation: Lindheim (2022) defines participant validation as a strategy to strengthen data credibility and further address ethical concerns about transparency and power imbalances in the research process. The researcher used the Synthesised Member Checking Model of Birt et al. (2016:1802–1811), which outlines a five-step validation process; Prepare a synthesised summary of emerging themes from the total sample of interviews using illustrative quotes from the different interviews; the informants' eligibility for participating in the member checking process is considered to ensure that the research process will not inflict unnecessary harm on the informants; the synthesised report was sent to the selected informants with an invitation to make corrections and add comments; the responses were collected and added to the data material, and the new data were integrated and coded.

Ethical clearance was obtained from the college ethics committee (reference

2024/11/15/000000389/07/RB) to conduct research at selected secondary schools and regional offices in Namibia.

Table 1. Example of Theme Development Using Braun and Clarke's Thematic Analysis

Data Extract (Verbatim Quote)	Initial Code	Sub-theme	Final Theme
<i>"We need to do some aggressive advocacy on creating awareness on how content is designed at Grade 8."</i> (SEO1)	Need for awareness campaigns	Promotion of commerce subjects	Advocacy and Promotion for Commerce in the Regions
<i>"I've never come across a school where we could at least have time with parents to discuss fields of study."</i> (SEO3)	Limited parental engagement	Stakeholder involvement	Advocacy and Promotion for Commerce in the Regions
<i>"We need to venture into things such as career fairs because they expose learners to opportunities."</i> (SEO1)	Importance of career fairs	Career awareness initiatives	Establishing Yearly Career Fairs and Career Days
<i>"We would like to invite companies to stay here for a week and engage learners."</i> (SEO3)	Industry participation in schools	School-industry partnerships	Establishing Yearly Career Fairs and Career Days
<i>"The commerce teachers are trying their level best and ran a campaign marketing the commerce field."</i> (SEO3)	Marketing commerce subjects	Teacher-led recruitment	Marketing Strategies to Improve Enrolment
<i>"Go to Grade 9 classes and sell your subjects to learners."</i> (SEO3)	Subject promotion activities	Recruitment campaigns	Marketing Strategies to Improve Enrolment
<i>"We let learners have the free will of choice, but they don't know what they are choosing."</i> (SEO1)	Poor subject choice decisions	Learner decision-making	Career Choice for Learners and Parents
<i>"Admission is handled by the regional office and learners are placed where space is available."</i> (SEO2)	Subject allocation process	Institutional placement	Career Choice for Learners and Parents
<i>"Commerce field, there's nothing."</i> (SEO3)	Lack of commerce activities	Absence of extracurricular programmes	Extracurricular Activities for Commerce Subjects
<i>"We used to have a commerce club, but it died a death."</i> (SEO1)	Discontinued commerce club	Weak learner engagement	Extracurricular Activities for Commerce Subjects

<i>"Most learners feel that science offers more studying opportunities and employability." (SEO2)</i>	Preference for science careers	Perceived career prospects	Lack of Career Opportunities in Commerce
<i>"Some schools prioritise certain fields that are not commerce." (SEO1)</i>	Preference for non-commerce fields	Institutional bias towards science	Lack of Career Opportunities in Commerce
<i>"Some learners feel accounting is too difficult." (SEO2)</i>	Accounting perceived as difficult	Negative perceptions of commerce	Misconceptions and Fear of Accounting
<i>"Learners are not interested because these subjects don't perform well." (SEO3)</i>	Fear of poor results	Negative performance reputation	Poor Performance of Commerce Subjects
<i>"Most of our subjects are subjects of concern nationally." (SEO3)</i>	National underperformance	Low achievement trends	Poor Performance of Commerce Subjects

4. Findings

- RQ1: How do Senior Education Officers perceive strategies for increasing learner enrolment and retention in commerce subjects in Namibian schools?

Table 2. Condensed Thematic Development Matrix

Research Question	Codes	Theme
RQ1: Strategies to increase enrolment and retention	Awareness campaigns, parental involvement, subject promotion	Advocacy and Promotion for Commerce in the regions
RQ1: Strategies to increase enrolment and retention	Career fairs, industry partnerships, career guidance	Career Fairs and Career Days
RQ1: Strategies to increase enrolment and retention	Marketing campaigns, teacher recruitment efforts	Marketing Strategies for Commerce
RQ1: Strategies to increase enrolment and retention	Learner choice, parental influence, placement decisions	Career Choice for Learners and Parents
RQ1: Strategies to increase enrolment and retention	Commerce clubs, extracurricular participation	Extracurricular Activities
RQ2: Factors hindering implementation	Science preference, employability perceptions	Lack of Career Opportunities in Commerce
RQ2: Factors hindering implementation	Fear of Accounting, subject difficulty	Misconceptions and Fear of Accounting
RQ2: Factors hindering implementation	Poor examination results, low achievement	Poor Performance of Commerce Subjects

As alluded to earlier, to address these challenges, participants suggest strategies such as enhancing teacher training, introducing engaging teaching methods, such as case studies and role-playing, and increasing awareness of career opportunities in commerce. Strengthening partnerships with local businesses and organisations is also recommended to provide real-world relevance and motivation for learners.

The study identified five primary interconnected themes regarding strategies to optimize commerce stream enrollment and student retention. These strategies range from formal regional advocacy campaigns to grassroots school-level marketing and structural revisions to how curriculum selections are guided.

Theme 1: Systemic Advocacy and Regional Promotion at the Entry Threshold

This theme highlights a critical consensus among participants regarding the timing and target of advocacy frameworks. Rather than treating subject selection as an isolated decision in senior secondary phases, Senior Education Officers (SEOs) identified Grade 8 as the foundational bottleneck influencing the downstream academic pipeline.

Participant SEO1 highlighted the geometric impact of early structural intervention:

“We need to do some aggressive advocacy on creating awareness on how content is designed at the entry grade, particularly grade 8. Maybe only then can we increase, because if we can increase the intake at grade 8, obviously, when we go to the secondary grade 10, we will have a large volume of learners that we must take up.”

SEO1’s insight exposes a structural pipeline dependency: enrollment issues at the secondary level are often symptomologies of neglected structural advocacy at the junior secondary transition point. By framing advocacy as “aggressive,” there is an implicit acknowledgment that the current passive dissemination of subject options fails to compete with established academic streams.

However, this proactive ideological stance faces severe operational friction at the institutional level. SEO3 revealed a systemic disconnect regarding parental inclusion—a critical external stakeholder group:

“We don't call up the meeting specifically just to come and talk about the field of studies. That's one thing I've never come across at any school that I've been to, where we could at least have time with parents.”

This counter-perspective exposes a critical operational void. While regional leadership conceptualizes systemic pipelines, individual schools lack the structured institutional spaces required to execute parent-facing advocacy. This missing link perpetuates information asymmetry, where parents and junior learners make critical academic decisions in a structural vacuum, unaligned with macro-economic opportunities or curriculum design.

Theme 2: Institutionalizing Immersive and Differentiated Career Exhibitions

Participants overwhelmingly advocated for transforming career orientation from static, single-day informational sessions into structurally immersive, stakeholder-inclusive ecosystem

events. The consensus suggests that to decouple commerce from low prestige, learners must visualize structural pathways from curriculum competencies to corporate leadership roles.

SEO1 emphasized the value of using corporate partnerships to cultivate instrumental motivation:

“We need to venture into things such as career fair, because if you expose them to career fair, the career fair kind of opens them up to say, if I want to be an MD (Managing Director) of a certain bank... I need to be having some sound knowledge either of business management or economics or accounting... And we also maybe look for a corporate entity... where these corporate or commercial entities come and market what it takes for one to land a job with them...”

This perspective underscores a crucial shift from abstract classroom learning to applied economic utility. By proposing that corporate entities explicitly "market what it takes," SEO1 advocates for an external validation mechanism to counteract internal school biases that favor natural sciences.

Expanding on this operational framework, SEO3 criticized the superficiality of typical school career orientations, suggesting an extended, station-based immersive format instead:

“What we decided was to have a career fair early next semester... We don't want them to come just for a day, because in most cases, if they come only to the assembly point for a day and talk, learners don't get anything. So, it's best if we allocate the hall to them... and then learners can make time for at least all our free periods...”

SEO3's model identifies a pedagogical flaw in traditional school career days: assembly-style lecturing fails to provide personalized, meaningful engagement. By decoupling guidance from rigid class times and implementing a localized, week-long exhibition, the school shifts the agency to the learner.

Conversely, SEO4 pointed out that in the absence of regional funding for large exhibitions, localized, informal classroom interventions can serve as a stop-gap measure:

“But what we do is when it comes to the end of the year, my assistant, deputy principal, the two of us, we will go into grade 9 classes, and we will tell learners what it is that we have to offer... We listed all the subjects and fields of study and briefly reviewed the commercial field. But then the learner is the one who makes the decision.”

While SEO4 highlights localized agency, their broader testimony exposes an institutional hierarchy where junior learners are marginalized from formal orientation infrastructure:

“We rely mainly on the life skills teachers... They also provide career guidance, especially to grade nines... We hold career fairs, but they're not typically open to juniors. Our career fairs are primarily for seniors, grades 10, 11 and 12. So for the juniors, we don't do a career fair.”

This structural exclusion represents an institutional paradox. The very learners who require comprehensive career mapping to make informed stream selections at the end of Grade 9 are

denied access to formal career exhibitions, which are reserved exclusively for seniors who have already committed to an academic track. This creates a reliance on overextended Life Skills teachers, limiting early intervention strategies.

Theme 3: Grassroots Internal Marketing and Curricular Competitive Positioning

Faced with declining systemic numbers, participants highlighted the necessity of micro-level marketing strategies led directly by school management teams (SMTs) and commerce educators. This approach positions educators as proactive internal salespeople of their discipline to redress artificial imbalance in stream distribution.

SEO3 illustrated how targeted counseling can be deployed to balance skewed stream allocations when traditional enrollment drops significantly:

“So, we can at least talk to the learners... We explained to them. And before that, we encouraged most of those learners, especially those we took in this year, to pursue commerce. However, first, we had a talk. Because commerce was empty and the other teachers were packed, especially the science teachers.”

SEO3's account exposes a profound operational vulnerability: stream allocation is frequently driven by emergency resource optimization rather than proactive student choice. The description of commerce as "empty" while science tracks are "packed" reveals a systemic hierarchy of disciplines. Here, marketing becomes a reactive strategy to balance teacher workloads rather than an intentional academic path.

In contrast, SEO4 presented a model where internal grassroots marketing yielded quantifiable, positive outcomes on enrollment:

“The commerce teachers are trying their level best. As last year, they ran a campaign that marketed the commerce field of study to grade 9 learners. And that's why this year we have... 26 in grade 11, 35 that are doing it for the first time in many years... I tell them, colleagues, have a week for marketing... Go and sell your subjects to the learners... Make your subject as interesting as possible...”

This success story proves that internal advocacy campaigns can actively reshape student intake trends. However, SEO4 also identified an ongoing blind spot within this marketing framework:

“And then perhaps the one thing we have not yet done is reach out to parents. Maybe to talk to parents, actually, of these grade nines that are now doing accounting.”

The failure to incorporate parents into internal marketing strategies undermines long-term retention. Because parental ambitions deeply influence Namibian learners, neglecting home-level alignment means internal school gains remain vulnerable to parental pushback or skepticism regarding the viability of commerce careers.

Theme 4: The Tension Between Learner Autonomy and Centralized Placement

This theme uncovers a sharp ideological and systemic conflict within the Namibian educational framework: the balance between student choice, parental aspirations, and bureaucratic resource constraints.

SEO1 flagged unregulated learner autonomy as a primary catalyst for systemic academic failure:

"We are making a lot of mistakes, and it's showing in the results that we let the learners have the free will of choice, but they don't know what they are choosing. I have the U symbol in mathematics and the U symbol in life sciences; the learners and their parents are both convinced that their child will be a medical student."

SEO1 exposes a critical misalignment between cognitive capability and career ambition, driven by the social prestige of medical fields. The "free will of choice" results in an inflation of unviable career choices, leading to poor academic outcomes (symbolized by the 'U' grading). This indicates that without diagnostic entry prerequisites, absolute autonomy can lead to academic self-destruction.

Conversely, SEO2 outlined an entirely different reality: a rigid, centralized placement system controlled by the regional office that strips away learner autonomy to manage oversubscription to science streams:

"Admission is handled by the regional office for learners who are entering grade 10... Once that field of study is full, such as the one for commerce and social sciences, some fields are not offered. Because almost all of them apply for science. Now, when seats in a specific school, such as science classes, are full, they look at those who have applied for commerce and place them in the commerce classes."

This reveals an operational irony. The commerce stream, rather than attracting passionate candidates, often functions as a structural catchment area for students rejected by oversubscribed science streams. This institutional reality undermines retention and motivation; many learners in commerce classrooms are there due to bureaucratic redirection rather than genuine intent, directly affecting overall stream morale and academic outcomes.

Meanwhile, SEO4 indicated a completely decentralized approach:

"We give them that option. Yeah, we don't compel them to do any field of study."

This stark contrast between SEO2's centralized placement and SEO4's total decentralization highlights a fragmented policy landscape across schools and regions, pointing to a lack of uniform guidelines governing stream entry across Namibian secondary schools.

Theme 5: The Collapse and Institutional Neglect of Commerce Extracurricular Infrastructures

This theme illuminates a disappointing, systemic reality: the absolute absence or operational death of informal, co-curricular learning spaces designed to foster organic interest in commercial fields.

SEO3 succinctly summarized the total void of co-curricular engagement:

“Commerce field, there's nothing.”

SEO4 expanded on this, noting that previous efforts have collapsed due to lack of teacher initiative:

“We used to have a commerce club. But it has also died a death. And it does not look like our teachers are planning to revive it.”

The collapse of organizational tools like "commerce clubs" represents a significant loss for holistic learner development. Co-curricular activities are crucial for bridging theoretical concepts (like accounting ledgers or economic models) with entrepreneurial applications. The fact that these clubs have "died a death" and that teachers show no intention of reviving them points to widespread educator burnout or a lack of institutional incentives.

Without informal, low-stakes spaces to engage with the field, commerce learning remains confined to rigid, high-stakes examination preparation. This lack of engagement external to formal assessments drives down enrollment and dampens learner enthusiasm.

RQ2: How do Senior Education Officers explain the factors hindering the successful implementation and teaching of commerce subjects in Namibian secondary schools?

To design effective solutions, we must first understand the underlying impediments. This section explores the structural, psychological, and systemic barriers that hamper commerce education across the regions.

Theme 1: Hegemonic Societal Prioritization of Science and Educator Self-Efficacy Deficits

The primary structural barrier identified by SEOs is a deeply entrenched social hierarchy that privileges STEM fields over commerce, compounded by a lack of instructional confidence among commerce educators themselves.

SEO2 analyzed how student choices are driven by structural perceptions of economic return:

"Most of the learners feel that science offers more studying opportunities and employability when they finish school. So that's why they opt for science."

SEO2's observation highlights a systemic challenge: commerce is facing a branding crisis. This preference for science streams reflects a rational response by learners to perceived market signals regarding employment stability.

However, this external challenge is worsened by internal issues with teacher confidence and school resource allocation, as articulated by SEO1:

“I would conclude that I think some schools prioritise certain fields that are not commerce. Furthermore, commerce teachers or teachers are not confident enough to take in a lot of learners”

SEO1 connects institutional bias with a lack of teacher self-efficacy. When school managements under-resource the commerce department, it can lead to decreased teacher confidence. This lack of instructional self-efficacy creates a defensive gatekeeping mechanism; underconfident teachers may limit student intake to keep class sizes manageable, inadvertently driving down enrollment numbers.

Theme 2: The Cognitive Blockade: Misconception, Anxiety, and Fear of Accounting

Participants noted that widespread anxiety surrounding Accounting acts as a psychological barrier, discouraging learners from choosing the stream before they even engage with the content.

SEO2 pointed out how this perceived difficulty deters students:

"Some learners may feel that accounting is too difficult, so they would rather opt for a different field," pointing to the perceived difficulty of specific commerce subjects, particularly accounting, as a deterrent.

This finding reveals that Accounting functions as a gatekeeper within the commerce stream. The fear of its mathematical and structural complexity creates a cognitive barrier. Because learners view Accounting with anxiety, they often opt out of the entire commerce track entirely, even if they have an interest or aptitude for Business Studies or Economics. This anxiety is rarely addressed with diagnostic or preparatory support in earlier grades, allowing a manageable learning curve to morph into an intimidating academic hurdle.

Theme 3: The Stigma of Deficit: National Performance Trends and the Self-Fulfilling Prophecy of Failure

The final theme identifies a damaging, cyclical feedback loop in which poor national examination performance actively discourages subsequent student cohorts from enrolling in the stream.

SEO3 outlined how national performance markers negatively impact student interest:

"Most of our subjects are the subjects of concern, nationally. This will obviously also lead to learners' interest in the subject. So, that will then, obviously, make the learners not be interested in taking the subject, because they have the fear that these subjects don't perform."

SEO3's assessment exposes a systemic vulnerability in which regional and national performance reporting can have unintended negative consequences. Labelling commerce disciplines as official "subjects of concern" creates an institutional stigma.

Instead of prompting constructive interventions, this label often generates a self-fulfilling prophecy of avoidance. Learners fear that these subjects are structurally designed for failure, so they choose other fields to protect their final point aggregates. This structural anxiety turns commerce streams into high-risk choices, undermining enrollment and retention efforts across Namibian secondary schools.

5. Discussion of Findings

Research question 1 explores Senior Education Officers' views of strategies implemented to improve enrolment, retention and learner engagement in commerce subjects in Namibian secondary schools. First, SEOs echoed sentiments of advocacy for the commerce schools. Findings indicate that advocacy plays a significant role in creating awareness about the field of commerce. SEO1 narrates that *“we need to do some aggressive advocacy on creating awareness on how content is designed at the entry grade, particularly Grade 8. Maybe only then can we increase, because if we can increase the intake at Grade 8, obviously, when we go to the secondary grade 10, we will have a large volume of learners that we must take up.”* Another form of creating awareness is also identified. On the other hand, door-to-door advocacy was proposed by SEO3, who stated that *“We come up with plans to say mostly when the school reopens, we try to go introduce the commercial teachers to learners and explain what the commerce field is all about”*. Reddy (2007) suggested advocacy strategies to raise awareness of the commerce department by building rapport with industry and ensuring its representation on the syllabus board for commerce subjects. Second, promoting career awareness in commerce in the regions. Participants viewed this strategy to revive the commerce field, identified in the results, as career awareness. SEO1 states that *“we need to venture into things such as career fair, because if you expose them to career fair, the career fair kind of opens them up to say, And we also maybe look for a corporate entity, a career fair, where these corporate or commercial entities come and market what it takes for one to land a job with them, so that when that comes, it kind of prompts interest from them.”* . Another participant (SEO2) suggested that *“Make learners understand about commerce on career choice, make use of parents' meetings to make parents understand about commerce and relatives.”* Singh et al. (2023) noted that guiding learners' career paths can boost subject engagement when done well, as they gain a better understanding of career possibilities within each subject. On the contrary, Ibrahim et al. (2014) conducted research among secondary school learners and found that learners who were aware of careers were able to make informed career decisions, whereas those who were not had difficulty doing so. This calls for effective career guidance to help learners become aware of different career options, enabling them to make informed choices. Third, the establishment of school commerce clubs and conferences/competitions. Findings show that commerce clubs are not present in schools, despite their proven effectiveness in retaining learners when implemented. SEO4 said: *“We used to have a commerce club, but it has died, and it does not look like our teachers are planning to revive it”*. Furthermore, SEO4 submitted that *“Commerce club provided that if it's well-planned, teachers are well aware and equipped with what they need to be doing in this commerce club with the learners. I think that if the others are able to see what the commerce club is doing, then it will really motivate, especially the juniors, to be interested and consider it a field we can join.”* Finally, increase parental advocacy and awareness of commerce at the school level. The role parents play in choosing the field of study cannot be overlooked. SEO1 recommends that *“intrinsic motivation from commerce learners should come from home”*. Additionally, SEO3 opined that *“I have to go to feeding schools to create awareness to abolish the myth that they have that accounting is a very tough subject.”* This is supported by SECO5, who highlighted as follows: *“My focus point was the involvement of parents in their learners’*

teaching system. For me, in the future, I plan to have a committee for the people where we are going to discuss these commerce subjects, so that we share ideas, and how we are going to introduce this subject to learners.” Singh et al. (2023) outlined improved parental involvement as a means to enhance students' literacy and numeracy skills in commerce subjects, which, when implemented correctly, will help boost these subjects.

Research question 2 explores how Senior Education Officers explain the factors hindering the successful implementation and teaching of commerce subjects in Namibian secondary schools. First, a lack of career opportunities in commerce. Findings indicate that perceptions of limited career prospects in commerce strongly influence learners' subject choices. SEO 2 emphasised that “most of the learners feel that science has more studying opportunities and employability when they finish school. So that's why they opt for science.” This sentiment was echoed by SEO 1, who noted that schools often prioritise other fields over commerce, and commerce teachers themselves may lack the confidence to attract learners. These qualitative insights highlight a pervasive societal bias that positions science as superior to commerce in terms of career outcomes.

Second, the misconceptions and fears about accounting as a difficult school subject. The perception that accounting is too difficult is another barrier. SEO 2 explained that “some learners may feel that accounting is too difficult, so they would rather opt for a different field.” This reflects a subject-specific deterrent that discourages learners from pursuing commerce. The lack of consensus suggests that the fear of accounting is more perception-driven than purely structural.

Third, poor performance of commerce subjects. Findings also reveal that commerce subjects are nationally perceived as “subjects of concern”. SEO 3 stated that poor national performance trends discourage learners, creating a cycle of disinterest and avoidance. This perception of underperformance contributes to commerce's negative image. Quantitative results reinforce this theme through unanimous agreement on the importance of continuous professional development (CPD). All SEOs strongly agreed or agreed that teacher training is crucial to keeping the commerce curriculum up to date. This consensus highlights CPD as a key solution for addressing poor performance, improving teaching confidence, and ultimately shifting learner perceptions. Finally, Continuous Professional Development (CPD) emerged as a unifying theme across both qualitative and quantitative findings. SEOs noted teacher confidence issues and prioritization of other fields, while quantitative data showed unanimous agreement on CPD's importance. This highlights CPD as a critical enabler for effective commerce teaching, capable of addressing performance concerns and reshaping learner attitudes toward commerce.

In sum, improving enrolment, retention and learner engagement in commerce subjects in Namibian secondary schools requires a multifaceted approach. One key strategy is enhancing the relevance and visibility of commerce subjects by linking them to real-world applications and career opportunities. This can be achieved through entrepreneurship projects, business simulations and guest lectures from local professionals and entrepreneurs, which help learners see the practical value of these subjects. Ongoing teacher training and support are also critical.

Many teachers feel underprepared to deliver learner-centred and interactive lessons. Providing ongoing professional development, mentorship, and access to teaching resources can empower teachers to use engaging methods such as gamification, collaborative learning and ICT integration. To boost enrolment, schools can run awareness campaigns targeting both learners and parents, emphasising the economic and entrepreneurial benefits of commerce education. Furthermore, early exposure to commerce concepts, possibly in open days at school, can also spark interest. For subject retention, fostering a sense of belonging and achievement is vital. Recognising learner progress through clubs, competitions and public acknowledgement can motivate continued participation.

6. Recommendations

Based on the synthesis of the qualitative findings, the following recommendations are proposed to address the identified challenges in increasing the retention and enrolment of learners in commerce subjects in Namibian schools:

6.1 To Develop and Implement Targeted Regional Commerce Competitions and Partnerships

Whilst the quantitative data strongly support the effectiveness of commerce competitions, qualitative findings reveal their scarce implementation at the regional level and a lack of regional partnerships. Senior Education Officers, in collaboration with regional educational authorities, should actively seek and establish partnerships with local businesses, financial institutions, and professional bodies to design and host regular, well-publicised regional commerce competitions.

6.2 Host Campaigns to Reframe the Career Opportunities in Commerce

Qualitative findings strongly indicate that learners opt for science subjects due to perceived better study opportunities, greater employability, and a general fear that commerce subjects do not perform well. The Ministry of Education, in conjunction with relevant stakeholders, should initiate a comprehensive national awareness campaign. This campaign should actively challenge misconceptions about commerce, showcase diverse and lucrative career paths, highlight success stories of commerce graduates, and demonstrate the practical applicability and intellectual rigour of commerce subjects.

6.3 Promote Positive Attitudes and Ambassadorial Roles for Commerce Education

In addition to competitions and awareness campaigns, it is essential to foster a cultural shift in how commerce subjects are perceived. Senior Education Officers, teachers, parents, and even learners themselves should be encouraged to act as ambassadors of commerce education, actively promoting its value and relevance within schools and communities. By cultivating positive attitudes and positioning commerce as a respected and rewarding field of study, stakeholders can collectively influence learner perceptions, counter misconceptions, and strengthen enrolment. This ambassadorial approach ensures that commerce subjects are not only taught but also championed, thereby enhancing their visibility, appeal, and sustainability.

7. Conclusion

The study concludes that the sustainability of commerce education in Namibia is increasingly under threat due to declining learner enrolment, persistent negative perceptions of the subjects among learners, and limited implementation of effective intervention strategies. Although Senior Education Officers recognise the value of initiatives such as academic competitions, school-industry partnerships, and teacher professional training, the impact of these efforts remains constrained by systemic challenges, including limitations and societal attitudes that favour science subjects. To address these challenges, a coordinated, multi-stakeholder approach is required, involving SEOs, school leadership, curriculum developers, and other stakeholders. Such collaboration should focus on rebranding commerce education as a relevant, accessible, and rewarding career pathway, while strengthening regional support initiatives and ensuring sustained, high-quality continuous professional development for commerce teachers. Without these targeted interventions, commerce subjects risk further marginalisation within the education system, thereby limiting learners' career opportunities and undermining the country's capacity to produce skilled professionals in commerce-related fields. Future research should explore learner perspectives on subject choice in greater depth, particularly the socio-cultural and motivational factors influencing the selection of commerce subjects. In addition, comparative studies across regions or countries could provide insight into successful intervention models that improve enrolment and retention in commerce education.

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