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PoMiSA
Connecting Credentials Creating Futures

The State of Play of Microcredentials:

Namibia

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Acronyms and abbreviations

EACEA	European Education and Culture Executive Agency
EC	European Commission
HE	Higher Education
HEI	Higher Education Institution
IUM	International University of Management
MC	Microcredential
MHETI	Ministry of Higher Education, Technology and Innovation
MOOC	Massive open online course
NASFAF	Namibia Students Financial Assistance Fund
NCHE	National Council for Higher Education
NDP	National Development Plan
NIED	National Institute for Educational Development
NQA	Namibia Qualifications Authority
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
NUST	Namibia University of Science and Technology
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PoMiSA	Potential of Microcredentials in Southern Africa
RPL	Recognition of Prior Learning
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
UNAM	University of Namibia
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
VET	Vocational Education and Training

Front matter heading

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Namibia

OVERVIEW AND CONTEXT

NAMIBIA: OVERVIEW AND CONTEXT

Demographic Factors

Namibia is situated in southwestern Africa, bordered by the Atlantic Ocean, South Africa, Botswana, Angola, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. According to the preliminary findings of the Namibian 2023 Population and Housing Census, Namibia's population has grown to 3.02 million, an increase from 2.3 million in 2011 (Namibia Statistics Agency [NSA], 2024)[1]. With a land area of 824,269 km^2, Namibia remains one of the most sparsely populated countries globally. The population is predominantly young, with 71.1% under the age of 35 years, and the youth population (15-34 years) constituting 34.1%. Females make up 51.2% of the population. The census also revealed a 50:50 balance between urban and rural populations, in 2023 (NSA, 2024)[1].

Overview of the Economy

In 2004, Namibia adopted Vision 2030, a long-term perspective plan aiming to develop an integrated, unified, and high-quality education and training system. This vision has been supported by subsequent medium-term National Development Plans (NDPs), with the current NDP5 focusing on aligning the education system with industrial needs by 2022 (Shimpanda, 2015)[2].

Following a severe economic contraction of 8.0% in 2020, the Namibian economy recovered, achieving 2.7% growth in 2021 (National Planning Commission [NPC], 2021)[3]. In 2023, the economy registered a growth of 4.2% (Bank of Namibia, 2024)[4], primarily driven by the natural resources sector, including the residual impact of ongoing petroleum exploration and increased uranium production following price increases (Shiimi, 2024)[5]. However, the economy is expected to decelerate in 2024, primarily due to subdued global demand and the prevailing drought conditions (Bank of Namibia, 2024)[4].

The Labour Market

The 2018 Namibian Labour Force Survey reported 364,411 unemployed individuals, representing a broad unemployment rate of 33.4%. Skills mismatch and increasing graduate unemployment are significant challenges in Namibia's labour market (National Council for Higher Education [NCHE], unpublished)[6]. While training institutions appear to produce sufficient graduates numerically, qualitative mismatches in training programmes and a lack of soft skills may contribute to high unemployment rates.

A skills audit survey conducted by the NCHE in 2022 among 192 enterprises revealed difficulties in hiring skilled workers across various fields, including technical specialists and managers. The survey highlighted the importance of soft skills in employers' hiring decisions, with problem-solving initiatives, responsibility-taking, and teamwork being

[1] Namibia Statistics Agency. (2024) *Namibia 2023 population and housing census main report.* Namibia Statistics Agency, Windhoek..
[2] Shimpanda, F. (2015). *Labour dynamics: NPC policy brief.* https://www.npc.gov.na/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Labour-Dynamics-Policy-Brief-2015.pdf
[3] National Planning Commission. (2023). Economic development report 2021 –"Towards resilient inclusive growth". https://www.npc.gov.na/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/NPC-2021-Economic-Development-Report.pdf
[4] Bank of Namibia (2024). *Economic outlook.* https://www.bon.com.na/CMSTemplates/Bon/Files/bon.com.na/cb/cbe629ce-f08a-4b84-b521-dd4c54c2d131.pdf
[5] Shiimi, I. (2024). *Budget statement for the 2024/25 financial year: Continuing the legacy of his excellency, President Hage G. Geingob by caring for the Namibian child.* https://mfpe.gov.na/budget/
6 National Council for Higher Education (unpublished). *Final draft national human resurce development strategy for Namibia. NCHE.*

the most sought-after employability skills (NCHE, unpublished)[6].

Overview of the Education and Training System

Namibia's education and training system comprises Early Childhood Development (ECD), pre-primary schooling, general education, technical and vocational education and training (TVET), and higher education (HE). Both public and private entities provide educational services, with public institutions being established through statutory laws and private institutions permitted under Article 20(4) of the Constitution of the Republic of Namibia.

ECD and pre-primary education are recognised as crucial for children's performance in basic education programmes, thereby ensuring a smooth transition to primary education and reducing dropout and repetition rates. However, the challenge lies in making these programmes accessible and affordable to all Namibians, including disadvantaged communities.

General education forms the foundation for lifelong learning and it is essential for developing the youth's adaptability to labour market requirements and progression to tertiary education.

TVET is delivered through various subsystems, including formal and non-formal educational institutions, training centres, Community Skills Development Centres (COSDEC), non-governmental organisations (NGOs), workplace training, and self-learning. TVET enrolment stood at 23,870 in the 2023 academic year.

Higher education, as defined by the Higher Education Act 26 of 2003, encompasses programmes leading to qualifications higher than grade 12 or its equivalent. In 2023, a total enrolment of 80,196 students enrolled in public and private higher education institutions (HEIs) registered with the Ministry of Higher Education, Technology and Innovation (MHETI). Of these, 54% (42,083 students) were enrolled at the two public universities: The University of Namibia (UNAM) and the Namibia University of Science and Technology (NUST). The International University of Management (IUM) is the largest private HEI, accounting for 50% (16,416 students) of private HEI enrolments.

In 2011, the government established the Namibia Institute of Public Administration and Management (NIPAM) under Act 10 of 2010 to provide training, operational research, capacity evaluation, and consultancy services for the public sector. In line with the provisions under its enabling law, NIPAM has developed qualifications registered on the National Qualifications Framework (NQF), credit-bearing courses in collaboration with HEIs, and short courses for the public sector.

Quality Assurance in Tertiary Education

Namibia's tertiary education quality assurance framework is underpinned by comprehensive legal instruments and policies encompassing institutional registration and accreditation, qualification registration, programme accreditation, and institutional quality audits. Several statutory agencies have been established to coordinate, regulate, and support the development of the education system:

1. The Namibia Qualifications Authority (NQA), established by the NQA Act, Act 29 of 1996, is responsible for

promoting quality education and training through the development and management of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF). It is also tasked with accrediting education and training institutions and courses, setting standards, and recognising prior learning (RPL) (Republic of Namibia, 1996).[7]

2. The National Council for Higher Education (NCHE), established by the Higher Education Act, Act 26 of 2003, is charged with promoting a coordinated HE system, ensuring quality assurance through programme accreditation, monitoring institutional quality assurance mechanisms, and advising the government on state fund allocation to public institutions (Republic of Namibia, 2003).[8]
3. The Namibia Training Authority (NTA), established by the Vocational Education and Training Act, Act 1 of 2008, oversees the quality assurance and delivery of vocational training programmes with potential articulation into HE programmes (Republic of Namibia, 2008).[9]
4. Professional Bodies, established by respective statutes, prescribe education and professional examination requirements, as well as qualifications to be obtained. They participate in curriculum development and their endorsement is a prerequisite for qualifications to be registered on the NQF. These bodies also contribute as members of review panels for NQA and NCHE accreditations.
5. HEIs have developed internal quality assurance mechanisms in response to national quality assurance agency requirements. These mechanisms aim to strengthen internal management and assist academic staff in developing new qualifications and aligning existing ones with the NQF and quality assurance requirements set by the NQA, NCHE, and Professional Bodies.

Recognising the importance of a robust quality assurance system in maintaining academic standards and ensuring qualification integrity, the NCHE introduced minimum standards for HEIs in Namibia. These standards aim to:

- Safeguard students, and academic and administrative staff by ensuring sustainable HE operations in Namibia.
- Ensure consistency, quality compliance, and transparency while promoting articulation among HEIs.
- Supplement the current quality assurance system with a robust set of metrics to ensure the sustainable operations of HEIs.

Given the comprehensive nature of Open Educational Resources (ODL), minimum standards for ODL are not included within the general document. Consequently, specific criteria and standards for quality assuring ODL institutions and programmes remain a gap in the national system.

The quality assurance of microcredentials is critical to the development and acceptance of microcredentials by both the higher

[7] Republic of Namibia. (1996). Namibia qualifications authority act, Act 29 of 1996.
[8] Republic of Namibia. (2003). Higher education act, Act 26 of 2003.
[9] Republic of Namibia. (2008). Vocational education and training act, Act 1 of 2008.

education sector and the industry. According to Cedefop (2023a)[10], quality assurance should be central to all discussions on microcredentials, including which type of quality mechanism will be fit for microcredentials.

Challenges in Namibia's Education, Training and Development System

Despite the well-established education institutional framework and quality assurance system, Namibia experiences several challenges.

TVET

The challenges in the TVET sub-sector include:

1. Misalignment with labour market demands
2. Lack of adaptability to changing labour market needs
3. Insufficient number of qualified instructors for higher-level training
4. Outdated equipment and instructional materials
5. Inadequate funding
6. Inadequate registered examiners and assessors for competency-based instruction and RPL
7. Insufficient outreach, intake, and placement services
8. Inadequate trainee services
9. Low research capacity

Higher Education

In HE, there is a general shortage of skills in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) fields, contrasted with an oversupply of non-STEM skills, particularly in education training and development, and business sectors.

Employed Labour Force

A significant concern within the civil service and professional organisations such as primary and secondary education, is the lack of motivation among employees. This leads to reduced job performance, high turnover rates, increased absenteeism, and other negative outcomes. Support services such as teacher resource centres or teaching clusters are often ineffective or non-functional, thus contributing little to classroom improvement. In the past, teachers also complained about low wages, but this has since been addressed.

Unemployed Youth

The most recent labour force statistics (2018) indicate that a significant portion of unemployed young people (37%) have a secondary school education or less (NSA, 2019)[11]. The proportion of unemployed youth with post-secondary school education is 20%. Some university graduates also struggle to enter the labour market (18%). Furthermore, an increase in graduate unemployment rates from 17% in 2017, 30% in 2019 to 32% in 2021 was reported in the national graduate surveys (NCHE, 2022)[12]. The lack of

[10] Cedefop (2023a). *Microcredentials for labour market education and training: Microcredentials and evolving qualifications systems*. Luxembourg: Publications Office (Cedefop research paper, No 89).

[11] Namibia Statistics Agency. (2019). *Namibia labour force survey 2018 report*. Namibia Statistics Agency, Windhoek.
[12] National Council for Higher Education. (2022). *2021 National Graduate Survey*. http://www.nche.org.na

employability skills and experience makes it difficult for many young people to secure employment. Despite projected economic recovery, the prevailing economic structure, primarily anchored in capital-intensive sectors such as mining, cannot adequately address entrenched national challenges like high unemployment.

Quality Assurance

The shortcomings in the national quality assurance system for HE necessitate a more proactive role from quality assurance providers in promoting inclusion, equity, relevance, and equal access to quality education. Supplementary measures are required to enhance quality assurance approaches to ensure that the increasingly diverse and expanding Namibian HE system remains relevant to meet expectations. A notable gap is a need for quality assurance policy guidelines and minimum standards for open and distance HEIs and programmes. This state of play does not set a solid foundation for the quality assurance of microcredentials. Furthermore, the NQF does not recognise nonformal learning such as short courses, industry credentials and any training below 400 national hours unless this is in the form of unit standards.

To further address these challenges, a pre-stakeholder engagement survey, guided by the PoMiSA country report template, was administered among key stakeholders in Namibia. This survey aimed to gather views on various aspects of microcredentials and preceded a stakeholder meeting held on 23 June 2024 at the Windhoek Country Club in Windhoek, Namibia. The survey resulted in a comprehensive country report on microcredentials that was validated by participants in the final workshop held at the NUST Hotel School on 21 October 2024. The outcomes of the survey and consultative workshops are expected to inform future strategies for improving Namibia's human resources development system.

Summary

The Namibian economy is gradually recovering from the adverse effects of the COVID-19 global pandemic, mainly driven by the exports of natural resources. The education, training, and development system is well established, starting from early childhood development through secondary education to tertiary education. There is also an institute for public servant training, the Namibia Institute of Public Administration and Management. Similarly, the national quality assurance system covers all levels of education, namely: general education, TVET, and higher education. Generally, lack of employment, increasing graduate unemployment rates, skills mismatch, and insufficient quality assurance standards for emerging modes of learning prevail in the country.

MICROCREDENTIALS IN

Namibia

1. MICRO-CREDENTIAL CONCEPTUALISATION

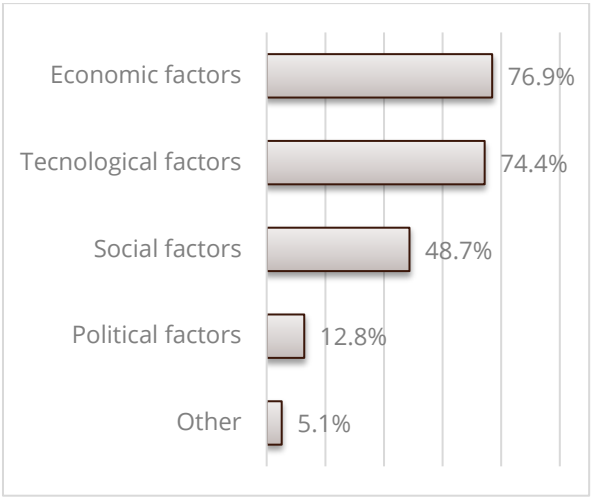
The rapid evolution of the global economy, driven by technological advancements and changing labour market needs, has necessitated a rethinking of traditional educational models. In response, microcredentials have emerged as a flexible and innovative approach to education, offering learners the ability to acquire specific skills and knowledge through shorter, more focused courses. These credentials are often recognised by accrediting agencies, quality assurance bodies, employers, and educational institutions, as they provide a bridge between formal education and the constantly changing demands of the job market.

Namibia, like many other countries, faces challenges in aligning its education system with the needs of the modern workforce as skills mismatch is a growing concern. With high unemployment rates, especially among the youth, and a growing demand for skills in sectors such as technology, health, renewable energy, green hydrogen, and the newly discovered oil and gas industries, microcredentials offer a promising solution.

1.1. Key Drivers and Attractors for Adopting Microcredentials in Namibia

Several drivers influence the implementation of microcredentials. Stakeholders who participated in the survey of this study were asked to share views on what they considered key drivers for adopting microcredentials in Namibia. Economic and technological factors appeared to be the most important drivers, scoring 76.9% and 74.4%, respectively (Figure 1). Social factors were ranked third at 48.7% and the political factors the lowest at 12.8%.

Figure 1: Key drivers for adopting microcredentials in Namibia



Question 9. What do you consider to be the key drivers for adopting microcredentials in Namibia? (Select all that apply)

In the national consultative workshop, the participants were probed to provide a possible meaning behind the survey results. Elaboration of the roles of each driver are detailed as follows:

Political and Economic Drivers: Though ranked the lowest (12.8%), the political drivers appear to be closely linked to the economic drivers which were ranked the highest at 76.9%. The government has developed policies and guidelines on how Namibia will achieve its national developmental goals, and these initiatives have the political and economic support of various

government sectors. The provisions made in the various developmental policies, such as Vision 2030, the Harambee Prosperity Plan, and the Fifth National Development Plan, all indicate that Namibia needs to align its educational goals with the country's economic goals. However, at the moment, the investment in existing infrastructure for delivering micro-credential education, particularly in rural areas, is limited. While available online platforms offer a solution, the digital divide between rural and urban networks remains a significant barrier to access. This was emphasised by participants in the workshop who indicated that higher education institutions and the TVET sector in Namibia need trainers who are better equipped to deliver microcredentials online and they need better infrastructures that will enable the teaching, learning and assessment of microcredentials to be done remotely.

There is currently no comprehensive policy framework governing microcredentials in Namibia. The development of such a framework by educational plannerspolicy makers and the acceptance of such framework by policy makers is essential to ensure that microcredentials are recognised by both employers and educational institutions. The national standardisation of microcredentials will lead to the national-wide acceptance of microcredentials. During the workshop, participants highlighted the lower level of acceptance and no standardisation of microcredentials as a stumbling block to their acceptance by the industry and the higher education sector. Participants proposed that the NCHE and the NQA should set up a working committee that will develop the Micro-credential Framework (to be approved by Cabinet as a national policy) and also to conduct awareness campaigns to sensitise the industry, higher education institutions and other stakeholders. Microcredentials can be offered both on and off-line and the framework should make provisions for the quality assurance of both types of microcredentials for recognition purposes. The framework should further provide mechanisms for how credit-bearing microcredentials can be interlinked (transition arrangement) into traditional qualifications. The participants indicated that the policy and framework for microcredentials should also cater for non-credit-bearing microcredentials to be recognised, for example, in the form of badges or unit standards. They further indicated that the funding of micro-credential courses is important for their sustainability. Therefore, funding bodies such as the Namibia Students Financial Assistance Fund (NSFAF) and others should start recognising and funding micro-credential courses.

Social Drivers: The social driver was 48.7% according to the survey. As indicated in the introduction, Namibia's unemployment rate among the youth with secondary education stands at 37%. Microcredentials provide focused, credible, and targeted, short-term learning opportunities to fill the skills gaps

that formal education has been unable to address. Workshop participants agreed that most higher education institutions in Namibia have a component of lifelong learning in their structure. However, these structures need to be strengthened by equipping them with the correct infrastructure tools for microcredentials as well as the training of tutors who can teach micro-credential components at various levels of the national qualifications framework. Micro-credetials can also be recognised as a lifelong learning initiative that will keep the Namibian workforce up to date with current trends in technology. Therefore, microcredentials offer pathways for continuous learning, particularly for those in non-formal education or mid-career professionals looking to adapt to industry changes.

Technological Drivers: The technological driver was ranked high by participants at 74.4%, which means that it is regarded as a good driver for the adoption of microcredentials in Namibia. The Namibian Government Digital Transformation Strategy 2021 encompasses various aspects of development in the IT sector, and microcredentials can play a significant role in equipping trainees with the correct technical skills. The development of proper digital platforms and the advancement of Open Educational Resource materials and various online platforms in Namibia have driven the push for microcredentials, particularly in rural areas where traditional education may be less accessible. The technological drivers for microcredentials are faced with various challenges inclusive of lack of funding to lack of equipment and infrastructure.

The success of microcredentials depends largely on their relevance to industry needs. With many industries now digitalising their operations, it is important to forge collaboration between educational institutions and industry stakeholders to identify the technological skills in demand and to design courses that address these needs. Like in other parts of the world, microcredentials can enhance employability among graduates (Orman et al., 2023)[13] through the filling of skills gaps needed by industry (Maina et al., 2022)[14]. Participants in the workshop confirmed that microcredentials can be useful to address the current skills shortages in some areas of the industry. Workshop participants further indicated that micro-credential programmes should provide students with hands-on experience and exposure to real-world challenges that engage students in internships, project-based learning, and workshops through collaboration with relevant industries.

[13] Orman, R., Şimşek, E. & Kozak Çakır, M.A. (2023). Microcredentials and reflections on higher education. *Higher Education Evaluation and Development, 17*(2), 96-112. https://doi: 10.1108/heed-08-2022-0028

[14] Maina, M.F., Guàrdia Ortiz, L., Mancini, F., & Martinez Melo, M. (2022). A micro-credentialing 7methodology for improved recognition of HE employability skills. *International Journal of Educational Technology in Higher Education, 19*(1), 1-22, https://doi: 10.1186/s41239-021-00315-5

Furthermore, there is a need to raise awareness about the value of microcredentials among both learners and employers in the use of technology. This involves changing perceptions about the validity and recognition of these credentials compared to traditional qualifications. Scholars like Cortez (2020[15]) and Hasanah and Malik (2020)[16], have linked the importance of microcredentials to an effective learning environment coupled with a blended teaching approach to ensure that graduates can demonstrate the application of newly developed skills to a practical work environment. Participants indicated that when the industry witnesses graduates who are performing better with newly gained technological skills from micro-credential learning, this creates awareness and changes the perception of the industry towards these graduates.

1.2. Alignment of Microcredentials with Educational Trends and the Current Workforce Trends

Alignment with Educational Trends

To determine the degree of alignment between the microcredentials and educational trends, survey respondents were asked to rate the extent of such alignment using a scale between 1 and 5, where 1 denotes 'Not aligned at all' and 5 denotes 'Perfectly aligned'. Only 5.3% of the respondents held the view that there was perfect alignment (Table 1). A substantive proportion of 36.8% asserted that there was no alignment at all. However, stakeholders described microcredentials as having the potential to bridge the gap between formal education and industry needs.

Table 1: Alignment of microcredentials with educational trends

Rate	Count	%
Not aligned at all	14	36.8%
2	7	18.4%
3	11	28.9%
4	4	10.5%
Perfectly aligned	2	5.3%
Total	**38**	**100.0%**

Question 10. How would you rate the alignment of microcredentials with current educational trends in Namibia?

Alignment with the Workforce Trends

Using the same scale of 1 to 5, the respondents were also asked to rate the degree of micro-credential alignment with the current workforce. Again, the results show that the alignment of miro-credentials to the current workforce trends in Namibia is low, with only 5.3% indicating that it is perfectly aligned while 26.3% indicating not aligned at all (Table 2).

[15] Cortez, C. P. (2020). Blended, distance, electronic and virtual-learning for the new normal of Mathematics education: A Senior High School Student's Perception. *European Journal of Interactive Multimedia and Education, 1*(1), e02001. https://doi.org/10.30935/ejimed/8276

[16] Hasanah, H. & Malik, M. N. (2020). Blended learning in improving students' critical thinking and communication skills at University. *Cypriot Journal of Educational Science. 15(5), 1295 - 1306.* ,https://doi.org/10.18844/cjes.v15i5.5168

Table 2: Alignment of microcredentials with the current workforce

Rate	Count	%
Not aligned at all	10	26.3%
2	12	31.6%
3	9	23.7%
4	5	13.2%
Perfectly aligned	2	5.3%
Total	**38**	**100.0%**

Question 11. How would you rate the alignment of microcredentials with current workforce trends in Namibia?

In the workshop discussions, participants expressed the view that employers in the emerging sectors of renewable energy, green hydrogen, TVET, and tourism recognise the value that microcredentials can add to their sectors. These industries are relatively new, and not so many Namibians have qualifications in these areas. This is where microcredentials can play a crucial role by adding value to the current qualifications in the form of upscaling. Therefore, much needs to be done in terms of creating trust in microcredentials, both from the provider and employer side.

1.3. Definition of Microcredentials from the Stakeholders' Perceptions

The lack of a comprehensive definition of microcredentials across academic institutions has contributed to scepticism about microcredentials (Kato et al., 2020).[17] This has further created fears in the higher education sector, that microcredentials will cannibalise the existing traditional degrees and potentially impact revenues (Kato et al., 2020).[17] Although there is an absence of a unified definition of microcredentials, Oliver (2019)[18] coupled with fragmented existing literature (Sankey & Salvaratnam, 2021)[19], explain that microcredentials are typically defined as short, focused learning experiences that result in a certification of specific competencies or skills.

TVET institutions have embraced microcredentials at practical level courses as part of their competency-based education model, where students are assessed on what they can do rather than theory. They focus on practical skills that are immediately applicable to the workforce and that students can prove by doing. However, there is still some resistance from higher education institutions (HEIs) that have no clear understanding of them. Microcredentials are more concerned with ensuring quality assurance and maintaining the value of traditional degree programmes by doing theoretical assessments to measure students' competencies.

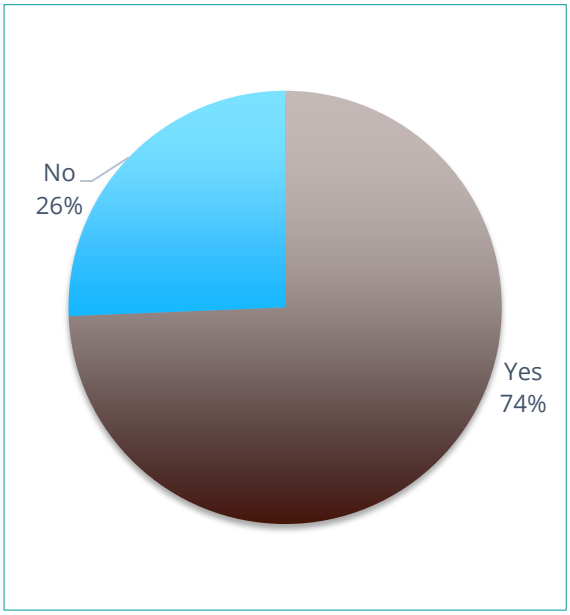
The adoption of microcredentials in Namibia is currently in its infancy stages and is still to gain political support. The NQA has begun exploring the possibilities of accrediting microcredentials, but there are still challenges in terms of standardisation, recognition, and quality assurance. Awareness and discussions at the national level have started with the aim of promoting microcredentials as part of the government's strategy for skilled workforce development and lifelong learning, with an emphasis on ensuring that microcredentials are aligned

[17] Kato, S., Galan-Muros, V., & Weko, T. (2020). *The emergence of alternative credentials*. OECD Publishing, Paris. https://doi.org/10.1787/b741f39e-en
[18] Oliver, B. (2019). *Making micro-credentials work for learners, employers and providers*. Melbourne, Deakin University.
[19] Sankey, M.D. & Selvaratnam, R.M. (2021). An integrative literature review of the implementation of microcredentials in higher education: Implications for practice in Australasia. *The Journal of Teaching and Learning for Graduate Employability, 12(1), 1-17.* https://doi: 10.21153/jtlge2021vol12no1art942

with national qualifications frameworks. However, the lack of a unified national policy around microcredentials means that implementation varies across sectors and institutions and various interpretations are hindering a clear understanding of microcredentials. Policymakers through institutions such as the NQA and NCHE are working on incorporating microcredentials into the National Qualifications Framework (NQF), thereby creating standards for microcredentials to increase the portability and recognition across the country's education system. This integration is still in its early stages but this is seen as a critical step in policy development.

To gauge the views on the definition of microcredentials, it was necessary to first establish the level of stakeholders' familiarity with microcredentials. The results show that 74% of the respondents were familiar with the concept of microcredentials (Figure 2).

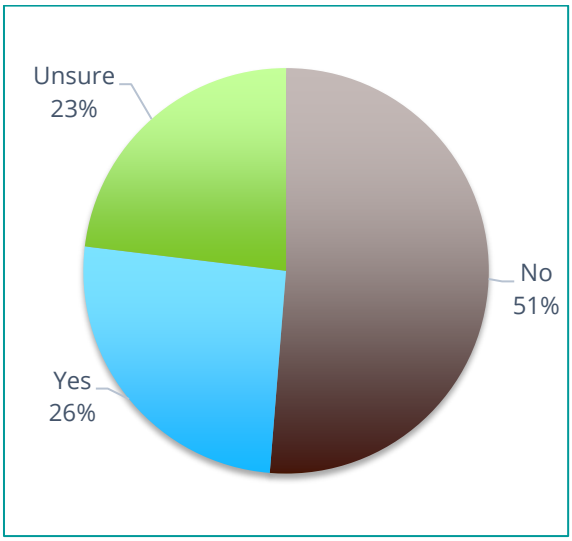
Figure 2: Familiarity and awareness of microcredentials in Namibia



Question 5. Are you familiar with microcredentials?

Participants were further asked to indicate if they ever participated in any local or regional discussions of microcredentials. Only a quarter (26%) of the participants confirmed that they participated in national or regional discussions of microcredentials (Figure 3), while 51% said that they never took part in any local or regional discussions on microcredentials, and 23% were unsure.

Figure 3: Participation in the national and regional discussions on microcredentials



Question 8. Has your institution participated in any national or regional discussions about microcredentials?

Survey respondents were then asked to share some definitions of microcredentials from their own perspective. The top 5 elements considered in the definition of microcredentials in Namibia are as follow:

1. **Addressing skills gaps and enhancing employability**: Micro-credentials focus on providing specific, demand-driven skills aligned with the prevailing labour market needs. These short, skill-oriented courses are essential for bridging the gap between human resources supply and demand, helping individuals, particularly youth, improve their employability and career advancement.

2. **Flexibility and accessibility**: Micro-credentials are often offered online or part-time, allowing individuals to

engage in learning while balancing work or other commitments. This flexibility makes them ideal for those seeking to upskill or reskill without the need for long-term, full-time education.

3. **Recognition of competence**: Microcredentials serve as a formal recognition of competence in a specific skill or competency. This adds value to a learner's qualifications, providing industry-relevant certifications that are useful for career growth and job opportunities, even if they do not form a full qualification.

4. **Promoting lifelong learning and continuous professional development**: Microcredentials support continuous professional development and lifelong learning by offering short, focused learning experiences. These credentials are often used to keep skills up-to-date, making them relevant to the evolving needs of industries and professions.

5. **Integration with National Qualification Frameworks**: Microcredentials are integrated into national qualifications frameworks to ensures that they meet quality standards and are formally recognized as part of a broader qualifications system. This integration contributes to their credibility and helps standardise the recognition of microcredentials across sectors.

During the discussion of the definitions that emanated from the survey, participants in the consultative workshop confirmed that in the Namibian context, microcredentials could play a critical role in bridging the skills gap, particularly in sectors where the demand for specialised skills outpaces the supply of qualified workers. The phenomenon of microcredentials has gained increased attention due to the growing demand for competency-based skills in today's job market. Namibia has two newly discovered lucrative areas of green hydrogen and oil and gas. The flexibility of microcredentials will allow learners to upskill or re-skill while continuing to work, thus making them an attractive option for both employers and employees in these sectors. Other sectors like tourism and renewable energy are recognising the value of microcredentials as a way to address specific skills gaps. With an increasing rate of unemployment among graduates, microcredentials could play a critical role in upscaling these graduates, especially engineering graduates, to function and seize employment opportunities in the new developmental areas where employers are now seeking stackable short-term credentials that can fill immediate skills gaps. However, there is still a need for clearer standards and consistency to ensure that microcredentials are recognised and trusted across industries and the education sector.

The discussions in the workshop support the literature such as from Cedefop (2023a)[10] and Kato et al. (2020)[17] by characterising microcredentials as:

- **Modularity:** referring to specific skill or knowledge areas that are directly relevant to the career goals or job requirement.
- **Flexibility:** offering learners to pursue education and training at their own pace and on their terms.

- **Stackability:** allowing learners to accumulate multiple cross-credentials over time which can be combined or stacked to form a larger and more comprehensive qualification.
- **Industry relevance:** designed in collaboration with industry experts to address a specific skills gap and the immediate needs of employers.
- **Career relevance:** used to entice students into university. For example, school learners can complete microcredentials while at school and gain partial credit at university. Microcredentials can be offered to bridge academic knowledge gaps.

1.4. Understanding of Microcredentials

The lack of knowledge and common understanding of microcredentials has been recognised all over the world as a central challenge to the coherent implementation of microcredentials across the educational system (OECD, 2021)[20], and Namibia is no exception.

To measure the degree of understanding among the different categories of higher education stakeholders, the survey respondents were asked to express their opinions on the understanding of microcredentials among the educational institutions, students, employers, and policymakers, using a scale of 1 to 5, with one denoting 'Poor understanding' and 5 representing 'Excellent understanding'. Figure 3 shows that in general, the understanding of microcredentials among various sectors in Namibia was below average, recorded at 2.1.

Educational Institutions: Though relatively higher than the other categories, the educational institutions category, which one might expect to be at the forefront of such educational innovations, was only rated at the mid-point average of 2.5. This gap in knowledge within the educational sector itself poses significant challenges to the development, implementation, and promotion of micro-credential programmes.

Table 3: Understanding of microcredentials by various sectors in Namibia

Understanding	Average
Educational institutions	2.5
Students	1.7
Employers	2.3
Policymakers	2.1
Total average	**2.1**

Questions 13-16. In your opinion, how well do the following stakeholders understand microcredentials? (1=Poor Understanding, 5=Excellent Understanding)

Employers: Employers, too, are perceived to have a limited understanding of microcredentials. Their understanding was predicted at an average of 2.3. This gap could have serious implications for the recognition and valuation of microcredentials in the job market, thus potentially hindering their adoption and effectiveness as tools for professional development and hiring.

[20] OECD. (2021). *Microcredential innovations in higher education: Who, What and Why?* OECD Education Policy Perspectives No 39.

Policy Makers: Perhaps most concerning is the perceived lack of understanding among policymakers with an average of 2.1. This perceived knowledge gap at the policy level could significantly impede the development of supportive frameworks and regulations necessary for the growth and recognition of micro-credential programmes. Policymakers are crucial in the development of policies and regulations that will govern the development and implementation of microcredentials in Namibia. Moreover, the incorporation of microcredentials in the qualifications framework will add value and increase trust from stakeholders in the use of microcredentials in the industries.

Students: The understanding among students is perceived to be the lowest, with an average of 1.7. This perceived lack of awareness among the very individuals who stand to benefit most from these credentials is particularly troubling and suggests a critical need for targeted education and outreach. The discussions from the workshop revealed that students have a limited understanding of microcredentials. Some respondents indicated that students see microcredentials as a way to gain specific job-relevant skills in a shorter timeframe, that do not need certification but rather the gaining of skills. Students who are in practical sectors such as ICT, agriculture and the new energy sector, are also believed to regard microcredentials as a flexible, short-term and cost-effective way of upskilling themselves to meet a particular skills gap in the sector.

These statistics collectively highlight that the concept of microcredentials is only slowly emerging and there is a pressing need for comprehensive awareness campaigns and educational initiatives about microcredentials across all sectors in Namibia. The widespread lack of understanding presents a substantial barrier to the adoption, implementation, and recognition of microcredentials in the country. Therefore, addressing this knowledge gap will be crucial for Namibia to harness the potential benefits of microcredentials in education and workforce development.

1.5. Impact of Microcredentials Conceptualisation on Implementation

The participants who completed the microcredentials survey believe that the implementation of microcredentials in education and industry will highly depend on the level of recognition by education providers, policymakers and the industry. The implementation of microcredentials will become effective if the skills gained through microcredentials can make a positive impact, thereby driving change in the industry and bettering the delivery of service. Proper engagement and collaboration among government bodies, educational institutions, employers, learners, accreditation agencies, and NGOs are essential for creating a supportive ecosystem that fosters the development, recognition, and adoption of microcredentials.

Stakeholders were asked to identify opportunities for offering microcredentials in Namibia. The lack of quality standards, limited awareness, and absence of a unified definition of microcredentials provide opportunities to develop and align a national microcrdentials framework with a unified definition and create awareness in the

country. In particular, opportunities for increasing awareness and the adoption of microcredentials in Namibia lie in:

- Engaging policymakers and securing funding for awareness campaigns
- Involving the industry and sharing best practices
- Creating supportive policies and collaborating with TVET institutions
- Marketing microcredentials as value additions to formal qualifications

However, realising these opportunities will require addressing the systemic challenges identified. It will also necessitate a more balanced approach to provision, with greater public sector involvement to ensure alignment with national priorities and equitable access. As one respondent noted, *"Industry recognition of microcredentials can bridge the skills gap by providing targeted training that meets employer needs."*

1.6. Summary and Recommendations

Summary

The study emphasised the early stage of micro-credential adoption in Namibia. It highlighted the disparity between public and private sector involvement, and revealed low overall adoption rates with minimal integration with current work force and educational trends. There is therefore a need for greater awareness, policy development, and stakeholder engagement to assist in the following challenges:

- Bridging skills gaps in the workforce
- Providing flexible and cost-effective learning options
- Industry recognition of microcredentials can bridge the skills gap by providing targeted training that meets employer needs
- Enhancing collaboration between education providers and the industry
- Creating supportive policies and collaborating with TVET institutions
- Marketing microcredentials to add value to formal qualifications

Addressing these challenges while capitalising on the opportunities for flexible and industry-aligned learning could pave the way for more widespread adoption of microcredentials across all education sectors in Namibia. The disparity between public and private sector involvement needs to be addressed to ensure a more balanced and equitable approach to micro-credential provision in Namibia. The challenges and opportunities identified in this study reflect global trends in micro-credential adoption. As highlighted by the ETF (2022a), the quality assurance of microcredentials is crucial for employer recognition. In Namibia, the role of the NQA in establishing standards for microcredentials aligns with this global emphasis on quality assurance. Moving forward, Namibia's approach to microcredentials should consider the European model of stakeholder engagement and alignment with qualifications frameworks to ensure that microcredentials meet the needs of the local labour market while maintaining international standards.

These challenges are not unique to Namibia and they reflect global debates about microcredentials. However, they are particularly acute in a context where there is a significant disparity between public and private sector involvement. Without a coherent national framework for

microcredentials, there is a risk of a fragmented system that fails to meet national development needs and exacerbates existing inequalities in education and employment.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were advanced to contribute to the conceptualisation of microcredentials in Namibia:

- *Digital literacy and access:* With a significant portion of the population lacking access to the internet and digital devices, delivering microcredentials online may not be feasible for everyone. Efforts to improve digital literacy and infrastructure are essential to ensure equitable access.
- *Quality assurance and standardisation:* Quality assurance and standardisation are major concerns, with suggestions that national bodies like the NCHE should provide oversight. Ensuring that microcredentials meet consistent standards across different providers is critical for their recognition and acceptance. This requires the development of clear guidelines and accreditation processes.
- *Employer engagement:* For microcredentials to be successful, employers must recognise and value these qualifications. Building partnerships with industry stakeholders to co-create relevant microcredentials is equally vital.
- *Alignment and contextualisation:* The conceptualisation and implementation of microcredentials in Namibia require careful consideration of the local context, including the country's socio-economic conditions, existing educational infrastructure, policies, frameworks, and the current educational landscape.

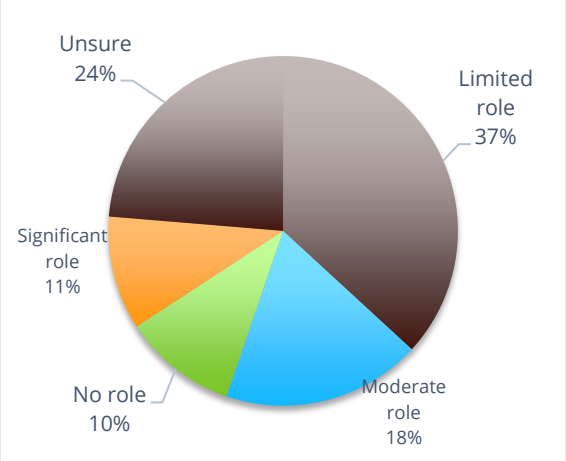
2. PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SECTOR MICRO-CREDENTIAL PROVIDERS

This section integrates findings from a national survey on microcredentials with insights from the PoMiSA National Consultative Workshop. The focus is on public and private sector providers for microcredentials in Namibia.

2.1. Provider Landscape and Role Disparities

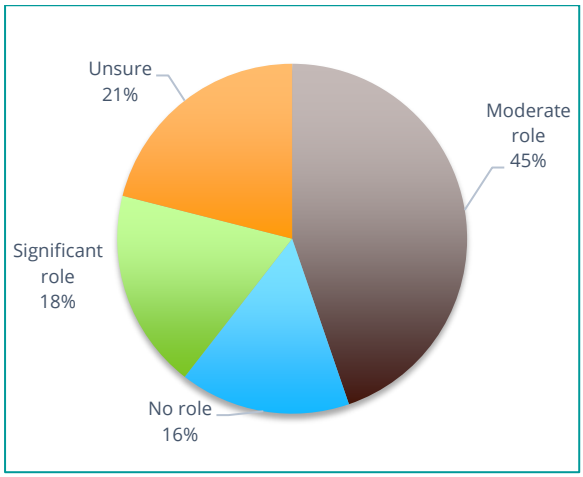
Participants in the survey were asked to indicate the current role of public and private sector providers in offering microcredentials in Namibia. Figures 5 and 6 provide a summary of their responses.

Figure 4: Current role of public sector providers in offering microcredentials in Namibia



Question 18. What is the current role of public sector providers in offering microcredentials in Namibia?

Figure 5: The current role of private sector providers in offering microcredentials in Namibia



Question 19. What is the current role of private sector providers in offering microcredentials in Namibia?

As can be observed in Figures 5 and 6, the survey revealed a stark contrast between the perceived roles of public and private sector providers in offering microcredentials in Namibia. For the public sector, 36.8% indicated a limited role, 18.4% suggested a moderate role and only 10.5% perceived a significant role. For the private sector, 44.7% indicated a moderate role, and 18.4% suggested a significant role.

This disparity suggests that private sector providers are currently more active in the micro-credential space. The predominance of private sector involvement indicates a market-driven approach which could be advantageous in terms of responsiveness to industry needs and innovation. However, it also raises concerns about equity and access, as private sector offerings may be more costly or selective.

The limited role of public sector providers is particularly troubling. Given that public institutions typically have the mandate to serve broader societal needs, their limited involvement could result in micro-credential offerings that do not adequately address national skills gaps or development priorities.

One respondent noted that "public sector providers have a limited role" due to factors such as "lack of awareness" and the "predominant traditional view of education." This points to systemic issues that need addressing. Another respondent mentioned that private sector involvement is "beneficial in terms of costs/economic effectiveness."

The relatively high percentage of "unsure" responses (23.7% for the public sector and 21.1% for the private sector) indicates a lack of clarity or information about micro-credential provision. This information gap could be hindering the growth and recognition of microcredentials in Namibia.

These findings further emphasise the early stage of micro-credential adoption in Namibia and the need for broader engagement and awareness-building efforts. The reviewed literature revealed that this landscape aligns with global trends. The European Training Foundation (ETF, 2022b)[21] highlights the increasing recognition of microcredentials owing to their ability to provide targeted learning opportunities that meet the demands of a rapidly changing job market. However, the disparity between public and private sector involvement in Namibia suggests a need for a more balanced approach to ensure that microcredentials serve broader societal

[21] ETF. (2022b). *The role of microcredentials in upskilling and reskilling.* European Training Foundation.

needs, as emphasised in the European approach to microcredentials (EC, 2020).[22]

While these survey results provide valuable insights, it is crucial to consider them within the context of Namibia's nascent micro-credential landscape. It is important to note that these survey results may reflect projected roles rather than the current reality, given that microcredentials are a relatively new concept in Namibia. The perception of greater private sector involvement could stem from assumptions about the private sector's agility and responsiveness to market demands, rather than actual implementation.

Traditionally, one would expect the public sector to take a lead in driving new educational initiatives, especially those with broad societal impact. The limited role attributed to public providers may indicate a lack of readiness or awareness rather than a deliberate strategy of non-involvement. This interpretation is supported by comments about the "lack of awareness" and "predominant traditional view of education" in the public sector.

To provide context, it is worth considering that in many countries, public higher education institutions have been at the forefront of micro-credential development. For example, in Australia, several public universities have collaborated to create a national microcredentials marketplace (Oliver, 2019).[18] Similarly, in New Zealand, the government has actively supported the development of microcredentials through its public education system (NZQA, 2020).[23]

The perceived private sector lead in Namibia could be due to factors such as quicker adoption of new trends by private training providers; greater flexibility in curriculum development and approval processes; closer ties to industry, thus allowing for rapid response to skills needs; and marketing efforts that have made private sector initiatives more visible. However, without concrete examples of implemented micro-credential programmes from either sector, these perceptions should be treated cautiously. It would be valuable to conduct follow-up research to identify specific micro-credential offerings in both sectors and assess their actual prevalence and impact.

Given the novelty of microcredentials in Namibia, there is an opportunity for public-private partnerships to leverage the strengths of both sectors. Such collaboration could ensure that microcredentials align with national development goals while maintaining the agility to meet rapidly evolving industry needs.

2.2. Benefits of Microcredentials

Respondents were asked to select the benefits that they think users could gain from microcredentials offered by public and private sector providers. The list includes industry recognition, cost-effective education, flexibility in learning, skills development, and career advancement. Table 4 presents participants' responses.

[22] European Commission. (2020). *A European approach to microcredentials*. https://education.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/document-library-docs/european-approach-microcredentials-higher-education-consultation-group-output-final-report.pdf

[23] New Zealand Qualifications Authority. (2020). Micro-credentials. https://www.nzqa.govt.nz/providers-partners/approval-accreditation-and-registration/micro-credentials/

Table 4: Benefits that users could gain from microcredentials

Benefits	Count	%
Career advancement	31	81.6%
Skills development	30	78.9%
Flexibility in learning	26	68.4%
Cost-effective education	24	63.2%
Industry recognition	18	47.4%
Other	4	10.5%
Total	38	

Question 20. What benefits do you think users could gain from microcredentials offered by these providers? (Select all that apply)

As can be seen in Table 4, respondents identified several key benefits that users can gain from microcredentials such as career advancement (81.6%); skills development (78.9%); flexibility in learning (68.4%); cost-effective education (63.2%); and industry recognition (47.4%).

These quantitative findings from the survey align with the qualitative responses from the stakeholder consultation workshop. For instance, one respondent mentioned that microcredentials "provide the needed flexibility," while another highlighted their potential for "skills development" and "career advancement."

The high emphasis on career advancement and skills development aligns with a workforce development perspective on microcredentials. This focus could be driving the greater involvement of private sector providers who may be more attuned to immediate industry needs.

However, the relatively lower emphasis on industry recognition (47.4%) is concerning. It suggests a potential disconnect between the perceived benefits of microcredentials and their actual value in the job market. This could be a significant barrier to widespread adoption and could explain the limited role of public sector providers, who may be hesitant to invest in offerings that lack clear recognition.

The emphasis on flexibility and cost-effectiveness indicates that microcredentials are seen as a more accessible alternative to traditional education. However, this perspective needs to be critically examined. If microcredentials are primarily offered by private sector providers, they may not actually be more affordable or accessible than public sector education options.

The stakeholder consultation workshop participants added that economic factors are the key drivers for adopting microcredentials. This aligns with the survey findings on career advancement and cost-effectiveness as primary benefits. Stakeholders identified the following benefits:

- For learners, microcredentials offer targeted skills acquisition and flexibility in the learning pace and content.
- For employers, microcredentials provide verification of specific skills and adaptability to changing industry needs.
- For educational institutions, microcredentials support innovation in curriculum design and expanded access to lifelong learning opportunities.

These findings are consistent with the literature. Cedefop (2022)[24] emphasises the potential of microcredentials to facilitate

[24] Cedefop. (2022). *The role of microcredentials in upskilling and reskilling.* European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training.

lifelong learning and professional development, particularly in rapidly evolving labour markets. The flexibility and targeted nature of microcredentials, as highlighted in our survey, align with the global trend of workers needing to upskill and reskill without committing to lengthy traditional degree programmes.

2.3. Varying Needs Across Education Sectors

The open-ended responses from the survey reveal how micro-credential needs vary across formal, non-formal, and informal education sectors. Table 5 summarises these findings.

Table 5: How micro-credential needs vary across formal and informal education sectors

Formal Education
• Microcredentials "would complement the curriculum which takes a long time to revise and update." • They provide specialised skills for teachers and students. • Enhance employability for graduates.
Non-Formal Education
• Fill "the gap by providing them with authentic and relevant learning opportunities to address immediate learning needs." • Offer practical skills for community development • Provide upskilling opportunities for adults • Support entrepreneurship and vocational training
Informal Education
• Facilitate quick skills acquisition for immediate job requirements • Support personal interests and hobbies • Enable flexible learning for self-employed individuals

Question 21. How do the needs of micro-credential users vary across the following education sectors in Namibia?

As Table 5 indicates, in formal education, microcredentials are seen as complementary to existing curricula. One respondent noted that they *"would complement the curriculum which takes a long time to revise and update."* This suggests a potential role for microcredentials in addressing the often-criticised slow pace of curriculum change in formal education. However, it also raises questions about how microcredentials can be integrated into the existing qualification frameworks and recognition systems.

In non-formal education, the emphasis on practical skills and community development aligns well with the flexible and targeted nature of microcredentials. As one respondent put it, they fill "the gap by providing them with authentic and relevant learning opportunities to address immediate learning needs." This sector may offer the most natural fit for microcredentials, but it also faces challenges in terms of recognition and quality assurance. From these findings, in this sector, microcredentials are seen as filling "the gap by providing them with authentic and relevant learning opportunities to address immediate learning needs." This sector may offer the most natural fit for microcredentials, but it also faces challenges in terms of recognition and quality assurance.

The informal education sector's focus on quick skills acquisition and personal interests highlights the potential of microcredentials to support lifelong learning. However, it also underscores the challenge of ensuring quality and recognition for such diverse and often unstructured learning experiences.

The stakeholder consultation workshop highlighted the need for the integration of microcredentials into blended learning

environments. Recommendations include conducting needs assessments, using open educational resources, recognising prior learning, and utilising digital badges. There's also an emphasis on gaining management buy-in and ensuring online accessibility of materials.

The varied needs across education sectors highlight the importance of a comprehensive approach to microcredentials. This aligns with the EC's (2020)[22] emphasis on the need for clear definitions and understanding of microcredentials across different educational contexts. The challenge of recognition and quality assurance, particularly in non-formal and informal education sectors, echoes the European standard's focus on specific constitutive elements for microcredentials such as identification of the learner, title, awarding body, and learning outcomes.

The current landscape of micro-credential provision in Namibia is characterised by private sector dominance, perceived benefits that may not fully align with recognition realities, and significant systemic challenges. While there are clear opportunities, realising the full potential of microcredentials will require a concerted effort to develop coherent policies, ensure quality and recognition, and balance market responsiveness with broader societal needs.

Furthermore, a coordinated, multi-stakeholder approach will be crucial for successfully integrating microcredentials into Namibia's education and workforce development landscape. This should involve policymakers, educational institutions, industry partners, and learners to ensure that microcredentials meet the diverse needs of all sectors while maintaining quality and recognition.

2.4. Summary and Recommendations

Summary

The study findings revealed a significant disparity between public and private sector involvement in micro-credential provision in Namibia. Private sector providers are perceived to play a more active role, with 44.7% of respondents indicating a moderate role and 18.4% suggesting a significant role. In contrast, public sector involvement is seen as limited, with 36.8% of respondents indicating a limited role.

The perceived benefits of microcredentials include career advancement (81.6%), skills development (78.9%), flexibility in learning (68.4%), and cost-effective education (63.2%). However, industry recognition is lower at 47.4%, suggesting a potential disconnect between perceived benefits and actual value in the job market.

Microcredential needs vary across formal, non-formal, and informal education sectors. In formal education, they are seen as complementary to existing curricula. Non-formal education emphasises practical skills and community development, while informal education focuses on quick skills acquisition and personal interests.

The current landscape is characterised by private sector dominance, perceived benefits that may not fully align with recognition realities, and significant systemic challenges. The novelty of microcredentials in Namibia presents both opportunities and challenges for integration into the education and workforce development landscape.

Recommendations

Based on the foregoing findings, the following recommendations are made, aimed at addressing the challenges identified and capitalising on the opportunities presented by microcredentials in Namibia's education and workforce development landscape.

- Develop a national micro-credential framework with clear definitions and standards aligned with international best practices and Namibia's specific needs.
- Enhance public sector involvement by providing resources and training to increase capacity for micro-credential offerings.
- Implement a robust system for recognising and accrediting microcredentials, particularly in non-formal and informal education sectors.
- Engage with employers to increase awareness and acceptance of microcredentials by developing them in close collaboration with the industry.
- Ensure that microcredentials remain accessible and affordable by exploring subsidies or financial aid options for learners.
- Develop pathways for microcredentials to be recognised within formal qualifications frameworks.
- Launch public awareness campaigns about the benefits and opportunities of microcredentials.
- Encourage educational institutions to use microcredentials as a tool for rapid curriculum updates and specialisation.
- Implement regular assessments of micro-credential effectiveness and impacts to continuously refine offerings and policies.
- Create a multi-stakeholder task force to ensure that micro-credential developments align with national development goals and industry needs.

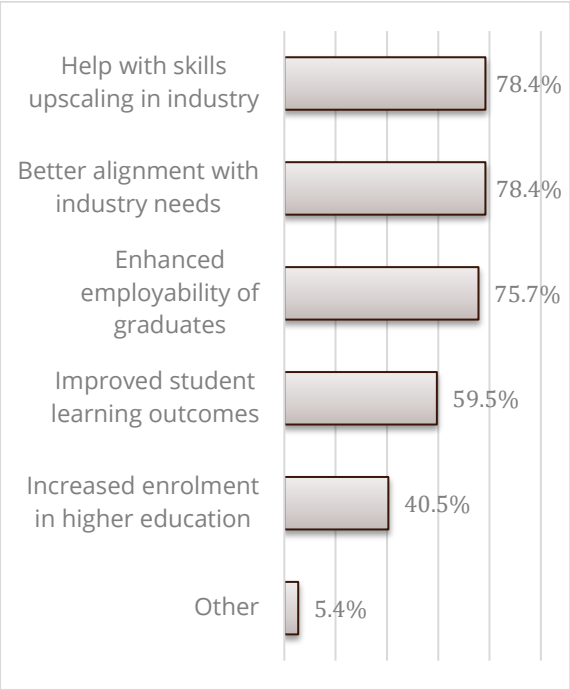
3. MICRO-CREDENTIAL IMPLEMENTATION AND EFFECTIVENESS

3.1. Criteria for Effective Implementation of Microcredentials

The previous sections underscored that microcredentials can play a vital role in meeting specific educational and vocational objectives, ranging from skills acquisition and professional development to facilitating career transitions and addressing industry skills gaps. By offering flexible, relevant, and recognised learning pathways, microcredentials aim to enhance both individual employability and overall workforce effectiveness in an ever-changing labour market. Collaborations between public HEIs and local industries foster micro-credential programmes tailored to industry needs. This entails the development of training that is relevant to the local economy such as programmes offered in agribusiness, tourism, and renewable energy sectors.

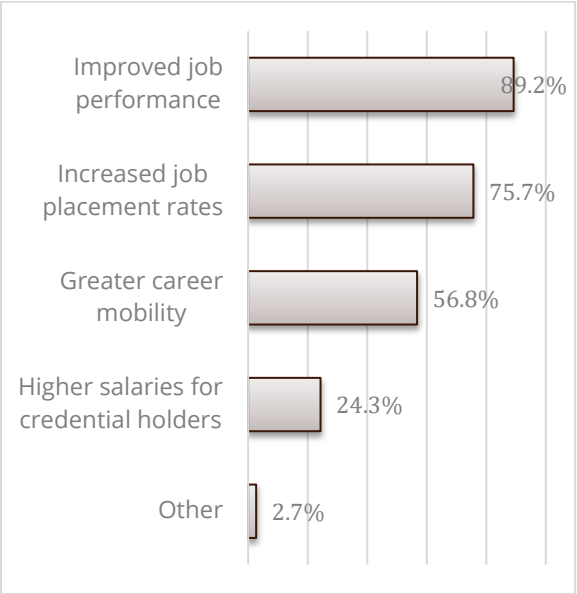
Participants in the survey were asked to identify criteria that would indicate that microcredentials effectively meet their envisaged educational and vocational objectives. These responses are summarised in Figure 7.

Figure 6: Criteria for meeting educational objectives



Question 24. What criteria would indicate that microcredentials effectively meet their educational objectives in Namibia? (Select all that apply)

Figure 7: Criteria for meeting vocational objectives



Question 25. What criteria would indicate that microcredentials effectively meet their vocational objectives in Namibia? (Select all that apply)

According to the survey results as presented in Figure 8, the primary criteria for the effectiveness of microcredentials in Namibia to meet their envisaged educational objectives revolve around their ability to enhance employability, alignment with industry needs, and assisting in skills upscaling, with a lesser focus on increasing enrolment numbers and improved student learning outcomes. Out of the 37 respondents, 75.7% indicated enhancing the employability of graduates as key, while 78.4% indicated better alignment with industry needs and helping with skills upscaling in the industry as essential for meeting educational objectives in Namibia.

The results on the effectiveness of microcredentials in meeting their envisaged vocational objectives in Namibia are presented in Figure 8.

The survey results in Figure 5 reveal a strong consensus among the 33 respondents regarding the value of credentials, with 89.2% stating that they improve job performance and 75.7% noting that credentials improve job placement rates. These findings underscore the critical role of credentials in boosting both job efficiency and employment opportunities. These findings further suggest that microcredentials equip individuals with essential skills and knowledge for their roles and they enhance the likelihood of securing employment after training or education. The lower count for "Higher salaries for credential holders" (24.3%) indicates that while these are relevant factors, they are viewed as less essential in assessing the immediate effectiveness of credentials compared to job performance and employment outcomes.

The Namibia Training Authority (NTA) works to provide skills training that meets national and industry standards. It has developed various competency-based training

programmes and microcredentials that focus on practical skills in vocational areas. For example, their partnerships with local industries to create tailored training programmes have effectively addressed skill gaps in sectors like hospitality, construction, and agriculture.

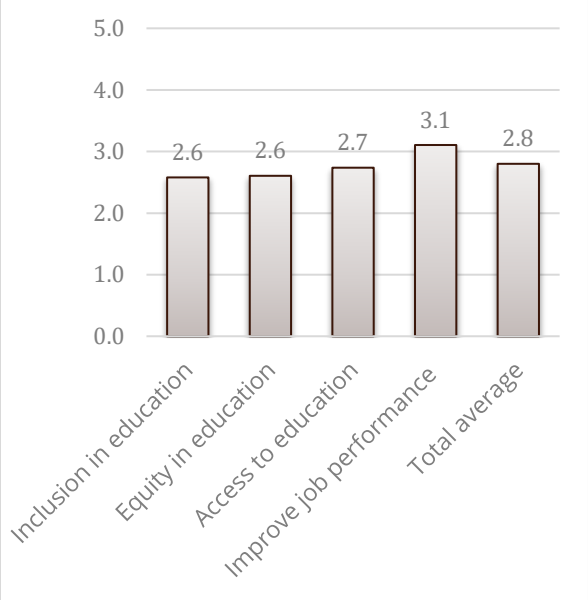
Furthermore, various vocational training centres across Namibia are beginning to recognise the importance of microcredentials in enhancing employability and skills. These centres focus on providing short, intensive training modules in trades such as carpentry, tailoring, plumbing, and electrical work. Many graduates successfully find employment or start their own businesses after completing these programmes.

3.2. Socio-economic Impacts of Microcredentials

Microcredentials have the potential to serve as an effective tool for promoting access, equity, and inclusion in education and the labour market. However, their successful implementation must be thoughtful and address existing disparities to achieve the desired socio-economic benefits. The survey sought to establish the extent of the socioeconomic impacts of microcredentials with regard to issues of access, equity, and inclusion in Namibia.

The survey results in Figure 9 reveal a generally low acknowledgement of micro-credential significance, with a total average score of 2.8. The areas of "Inclusion in education" and "Equity in education" both received an average score of 2.6, thus indicating that these aspects are only marginally considered in relation to the impact of microcredentials. "Access to education" is slightly higher but still marginal, with an average score of 2.7, thus suggesting a minimal role of microcredentials in enhancing educational accessibility. Notably, "Improve job performance" garnered the highest average score of 3.1, thus indicating a relatively greater recognition of the potential benefits of microcredentials in impacting workplace effectiveness. Overall, while there is some awareness of the socio-economic impacts of microcredentials, it is evident that these considerations are still not a primary focus within the Namibian context.

Figure 8: Socioeconomic impacts of microcredentials (average scores)

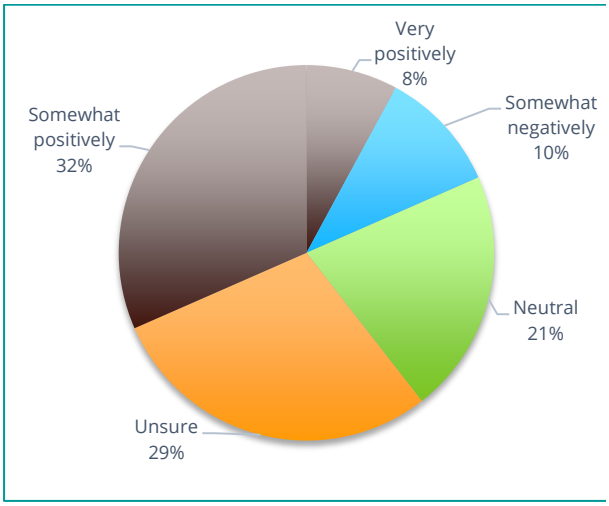


Question 26-29. To what extent are the following socio-economic impacts of microcredentials being considered in Namibia? (1=Not considered at all 5=Highly considered

3.3. Industries' Response to Recognise Microcredentials

Participants were asked to indicate how industries respond to and/or recognise microcredentials, and the challenges and opportunities this presents. Figure 10 presents the responses.

Figure 9: Industry response to microcredentials



Question 30. How do Namibian industries currently respond to microcredentials?

Responses from Namibian industries about microcredentials show a mix of opinions among the 37 respondents. Only 8% viewed them "Very positively," indicating limited enthusiasm in some areas, while 10% had a "Somewhat negatively" perspective, implying that outright rejection is uncommon. A significant 21% remained "Neutral," thus showing uncertainty, and 29% were "Unsure," suggesting a lack of awareness about the benefits of microcredentials. The largest group, 32%, responded "Somewhat positively," thus indicating cautious optimism, though overall support is not very strong.

3.4. Challenges Faced by Namibian Industry in Recognising Microcredentials

The respondents, through open-ended responses, highlighted several concerns surrounding microcredentials that may impact their effectiveness and acceptance in the job market. Due to the lack of a policy framework, as well as standardisation and quality assurance measures in certification processes that regulate microcredentials, employers often express scepticism regarding the quality of graduates with microcredentials. Regulatory agencies such as the NQA and NCHE have not widely recognised these credentials, thus further diminishing their credibility. As a result, traditional industries may overlook or undervalue microcredentials, resulting in unemployed graduates. There is also a risk of flooding the employment sector with micro-credential holders, thereby potentially diluting their marketability and value. Lack of awareness and understanding of microcredentials' value and how they are used is also another critical factor that was cited by respondents that might affect their acceptance by employers.

Additionally, the concerns about the authenticity of microcredentials raise questions about the legitimacy of the skills and knowledge claimed by holders, while concerns about consistency in job grading and evaluation remain problematic, thus leaving employers uncertain about how to assess these qualifications. Furthermore, the effective management of knowledge acquired through micro-credential programmes is crucial to ensure that learning outcomes align with industry needs. There is also a need for the development of suitable facilities to deliver these courses, which can pose logistical challenges. Lastly, securing adequate funding for micro-credential programmes is vital to ensure their sustainability and accessibility, hence posing another hurdle to their widespread adoption.

Addressing these concerns is essential for enhancing the recognition and reliability of microcredentials in the labour market. Overall, there is a need for more information about microcredentials, including how they are used, when they are used, and why they are used.

3.5. Opportunities Presented by Industry Recognition of Microcredentials in Namibia

The recognition of microcredentials in Namibia is anticipated to provide numerous advantages, including enhanced skills development, improved employability, and support for lifelong learning. This initiative aims to close the skills gaps and facilitate flexible training, ultimately helping to decrease unemployment and foster self-employment. It is expected to elevate living standards for all Namibians and offer better qualifications and job opportunities for unemployed youth. Additionally, microcredentials will promote continuous learning and upskilling, incentivised by recognition and potential salary increases. Fostering collaboration between academia and industry will enable more relevant curriculum development and skills assessments. Furthermore, it will lead to the creation of affordable and flexible courses that can benefit both the unemployed youth and those looking to enhance their skills. The recognition of microcredentials is set to generate a more competitive job market, thereby allowing employers to easily identify and assess candidates' skills. However, to ensure quality education and avoid exploitation by profit-driven institutions, a robust quality assurance system will be essential.

Overall, the introduction of microcredentials in Namibia has the potential to revolutionise the education system, making it more efficient, effective, and relevant to the needs of the workforce.

3.6. Key Factors Most Likely to Influence the Implementation of Microcredentials

Participants were asked to indicate the key factors that are most likely to positively or negatively influence the implementation, impact and long-term sustainability of microcredentials. The survey respondents highlighted several factors that could positively influence the implementation of microcredentials in Namibia, categorised by key stakeholders:

- Education-related factors: the importance of the level of education, standardised microcredentials recognised by the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) and the NCHE, as well as ensuring quality assurance and compliance with established standards.
- Industry-related factors: the necessity of job scaling and the sustainability of microcredentials, along with industry engagement, validation, and collaboration among stakeholders to achieve recognition that aligns with national development goals.
- Government factors: the need for strong government support and the development of a comprehensive policy framework, as well as compliance with quality standards.
- Student factors: accessibility demand-related factors. For these, the participants stressed the importance of reducing study costs and enhancing access to HE while building and improving existing unit standards. Furthermore, they highlighted the growing need for flexible and targeted learning options and the increasing digitalisation of education.

Additionally, participants underscored the importance of proper planning and implementation of microcredentials, a shift in

attitude from the industry, parents, and students towards recognising microcredentials, and the involvement of strong industry partners to ensure programme relevance, alignment with employee needs, and adherence to government policies.

The implementation of microcredentials is expected to positively influence Namibia's education sector, particularly in the oil/gas and hydrogen industry. It will also reduce the cost of higher education, thereby making it more accessible to students from all walks of life.

However, the respondents highlighted several negative factors that could impede the long-term implementation of microcredentials. These include a lack of knowledge and understanding among stakeholders such as employers, the public, and students; alongside unclear policies and regulations, which can result in limited awareness and recognition of microcredentials. Additionally, insufficient financial resources, inadequate quality assurance procedures, and a lack of sustainable communication can hinder progress. Resistance to change in traditional academic structures, coupled with perceptions, misinformation, and miscommunication, further complicate the situation. Other obstacles include a shortage of qualified personnel to develop and deliver microcredentials, limited standards and alignment with emerging frameworks, and poor acceptance and low demand from industry.

Moreover, the current HE system's inflexibility, the availability of low-quality microcredentials, concerns about value for money, and issues related to internet access and technology, including the irresponsible use of artificial intelligence, also pose significant challenges to the successful adoption of microcredentials.

In response to the challenges highlighted by the survey respondents, stakeholders during the consultation workshop underscored that the sustainable long-term implementation of microcredentials can be achieved through a multifaceted approach that emphasises technology, flexibility, and relevance. First, leveraging technology significantly increases access to learning opportunities, enhanced by learning management systems that support various instructional methods. Developing new skills that align with industry needs and ensuring the relevance of microcredentials is vital to maintaining their value. Additionally, utilising social media for awareness creation and marketing contributes to building trust and fostering public buy-in. Establishing effective public and private partnerships can facilitate resource-sharing and collaborative initiatives.

The workshop participants further highlighted funding as one of the critical elements that can foster the sustainable implementation of microcredentials. These can be achieved through interventions such as resource mobilisation including grants and donations from organisations interested in skills development. Corporate funding can provide substantial support, as businesses may invest in microcredentials to upskill their workforce and enhance productivity. Implementing micro-credential levies where fees are collected to provide financial support, such as the Vocational Education and Training (VET) levy used by the NTA to fund the upskilling and training of Namibians in key national priority fields and occupation areas. Furthermore, staff development budgets can be allocated to train lecturers in delivering these programmes effectively. Additionally, support from national organisations such as NSFAF, the NCHE, and

the NTA can provide critical funding and regulatory oversight, thereby facilitating the growth and recognition of microcredentials within the educational framework. Together, these funding methods create a well-rounded financial ecosystem that can sustain micro-credential initiatives over the long term.

Additionally, strong frameworks and policies, along with backing from all stakeholders, are crucial for a cohesive implementation strategy. Continuous monitoring and research-based implementation will help to refine and adapt the micro-credential offerings to meet evolving demands and reinforce their credibility within the educational landscape.

A collaborative approach involving HEIs, employers, policymakers, and students can foster an ecosystem where microcredentials thrive and contribute positively to education and workforce development. Addressing these dynamics holistically will be crucial for realising the full potential of microcredentials in Namibia.

3.7. Summary and Recommendations

This section provides a thorough examination of the current landscape of microcredentials in Namibia, emphasising their potential role in addressing educational and vocational needs. Through survey data, it highlights key criteria for effective micro-credential implementation, noting that enhanced employability and alignment with industry needs are paramount in achieving educational objectives. Vocationally, microcredentials are recognised for their contribution to job performance and placement rates, although socio-economic impacts related to access, equity, and inclusion remain underappreciated.

The responses from the industry further reflect cautious optimism about microcredentials, although concerns regarding their recognition and value persist due to a lack of policy frameworks and standardisation. Challenges such as inadequate awareness, the varying quality of micro-credential programmes, and resistance from traditional education structures further complicate their acceptance. Nonetheless, potential opportunities exist in Namibia for microcredentials to enhance skills development, encourage lifelong learning, boost employability, improve job performance, and create robust partnerships between academia and industry.

Overall, the findings underscore that while microcredentials can transform the educational and vocational landscape in Namibia, successful implementation requires addressing stakeholder concerns, aligning with industry standards, and establishing a supportive policy environment.

Recommendations:

- Fostering collaboration between academia and industry will enable more relevant curriculum development skills assessments and alignment with market needs.
- Strong frameworks and policies, along with backing from all stakeholders, are crucial for a cohesive implementation strategy.
- A collaborative approach involving HEIs, employers, policymakers, and students can foster an ecosystem where microcredentials thrive and contribute positively to education and workforce development.

4. MICRO-CREDENTIAL POLICY DEVELOPMENT

4.1. Management of Quality Assurance for Microcredentials

Having expressed their views on the knowledge, types of providers and implementation of microcredentials in Namibia, the survey respondents were further asked to indicate how quality assurance for microcredentials should be managed in Namibia. The results as presented in Table 6, and the results show that the majority (48.6%) of stakeholders upheld the view that no quality assurance systems are in place, while others (21.6%) revealed that some informal quality assurance practices are in place. Other views varied between some formal institutional-level quality assurance (16.2%) as well as the national-level quality assurance framework (8.1%) and others (5.4%).

Table 6: Quality assurance for microcredentials

Quality assurance for micro-credential	Count	%
No quality assurance system in place	18	48.6%
Informal quality assurance practices	8	21.6%
Formal institutional-level quality assurance	6	16.2%
National-level quality assurance framework	3	8.1%
Other	2	5.4%
Total	**37**	**100.0%**

Question 35. How is quality assurance currently managed for microcredentials in Namibia?

What can be deduced from the feedback is that stakeholders are not necessarily aware that a quality assurance framework for microcredentials is in existence in Namibia though institutional frameworks could be available both at informal and formal levels. Suggestions for areas to be included within a quality assurance framework highlighted the importance of the accreditation of microcredentials, assessment, monitoring and evaluation.

The slight reference to a national quality assurance framework from the feedback could perhaps just refer to the fact that we have a Namibian Qualifications Framework (NQF) through the NQA but not necessarily a quality assurance framework for microcredentials. This notion was clarified during the stakeholders' meeting.

Over and above the survey results, stakeholders during the stakeholder consultation meeting also emphasised that other role players could be considered if a separate, commercial arm would render best practice for the management of microcredentials in Namibia.

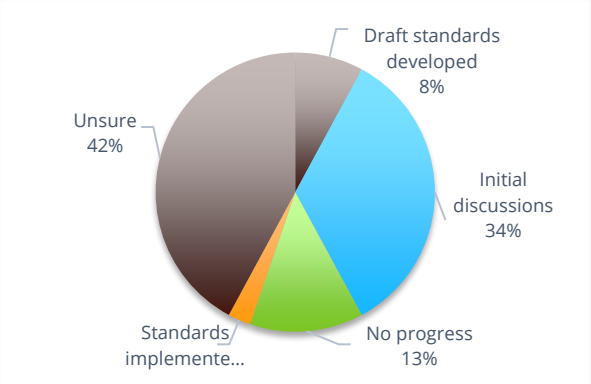
Since the NQF in Namibia is already used for the registration of all relevant and legal qualifications in Namibia (NQA, website 2024)[25] on its ten-level (10) framework, it is proposed that the NQF should be flexible in accommodating the registration of microcredentials, thereby availing a sound platform for the regulatory oversight of microcredentials. This could be in collaboration with other key stakeholders such as the NCHE and NTA (the respective regulatory arms for higher education and vocational training) which could aid in the accreditation thereof while involving educational institutions and other role players during the testing and implementation phases. Stakeholders clearly identified the role of the NQA, NCHE and NTA to serve as custodians of a micro-credential framework at the national level, while adhering to their respective mandates.

[25] https://namqa.org/

4.2. Progress Towards Institutional/National Standards in Namibia

Participants in the survey were asked to indicate progress that has been made towards institutional/national standards in Namibia and these responses are presented in Figure 11.

Figure 10: Institutional standards



Question 37. What progress has been made toward institutional standards for microcredentials in Namibia

The development of **institutional standards** for microcredentials in Namibia would appear to be an unfamiliar phenomenon to stakeholders, as most stakeholders (42.1%) expressed that they were not sure of such developments in Namibia as well as an impression of no progress in this regard (13.2%), while some indicated that there could be initial discussions (34.2%). There was a reference to some efforts in the development of draft standards (8%) and a hint of standards implemented (3%), with no reference to whether it is already in existence.

While some educational institutions could have started with the development of draft micro-credential policies that can be reflected as a success, highlighting areas to be considered in such policies, there is no actual evidence of standards developed to date, hence such standards are non-existent for implementation now. Educational institutions could take the lead in institutional micro-credential policy development and need to ensure, through the collaborative efforts of various role players, that the requisite national policy framework and standards at the national level will also be developed for seamless integration.

The overall picture in respect of the development of **national standards** for microcredentials as reflected in Table 7 below is not very different from the views for institutional standards development.

Table 7: National standards for microcredentials

Progress Made	Count	%
Unsure	17	44.7%
Initial discussions	14	36.8%
No progress	5	13.2%
Draft standards developed	2	5.3%
Total	38	100.0%

Question 38. What progress has been made towards national standards for microcredentials in Namibia?

With respect to national standards development, most responses (44.7%) as reflected in Table 6 revealed an almost similar view to that of institutional standards development, in that stakeholders remained uncertain if such national standards for microcredentials were developed. Initial discussions stood at a 36.8% response rate, while some felt that there was no progress (13.2%) at all in this regard. Again, there appeared to be some sentiments (5.3%) in respect of the draft national standards developed.

Initial discussions about the drafting of national standards for microcredentials would need to be moved into actual action, as Namibia could be behind within the region.

Stakeholder views from the actual engagement meeting also reiterated the importance of the development of national

standards that would cater for the design and quality of microcredentials, thereby ensuring that they are rigorous and credible.

Some challenges were also revealed as stakeholders indicated that:

- overall buy-in from all stakeholders at the national level, could be a problem;
- if microcredentials are to avail a shorter route in obtaining qualifications, this could have an impact on formal qualifications; and
- if all blueprints must be developed from scratch, it could be costly and could result in a lack of standardisation with industry needs.

4.3. Integration of Microcredentials into the National and Regional Qualifications Frameworks

The question that was posed to participants in the survey was: To what extent are microcredentials integrated into or being considered for integration with the national and regional qualifications frameworks? In their responses, participants indicated the following (Table 8):

Table 8: Integration of microcredentials into the national and regional qualifications frameworks

Extent	Count	%
Not integrated at all	15	39.5%
Partially integrated	4	10.5%
Under consideration for integration	5	13.2%
Unsure	14	36.8%
Total	38	100.0%

Question 39. To what extent are microcredentials integrated into Namibia's national qualifications framework?

In the absence of any evidence-based national micro-credential policies and standards, the integration of microcredentials with national and regional qualifications frameworks is not at a desirable level, as most stakeholders (39.5%) indicated that there is no integration in their opinion, as well as uncertainty (36.8%), thus reflecting the highest feedback scores. The feedback scores for 'under consideration for integration' (13.2%) and 'partially integrated' (10.5%) appear as nuances for possible consideration.

The rationale for integrating microcredentials with national and regional qualifications frameworks, once in existence, would be to ensure widespread adoption among all stakeholders, thereby avoiding resistance and better industry recognition.

Some of the stumbling blocks with respect to the integration of microcredentials with national and regional qualification frameworks, to mention a few, could be:

- a lack of clear and committed government support within a country;
- resistance from some stakeholders due to wrong impressions/perceptions; and
- lack of articulation between formal microcredentials and qualifications, non-assurance of maintaining the quality and academic rigour, while developing microcredentials.

There could be widespread opportunities for the integration of microcredentials if national awareness-raising events continue, such as the stakeholders meeting that was organised by the Namibian PoMiSA steering committee members. Policy and standard development could be actioned with the consent, contribution and validation of key stakeholders.

Continuous key stakeholder identification in the development of microcredential policy and standards formed part of the

stakeholder meeting and this needs to be sustained if microcredentials are to form part of national and regional qualification frameworks.

4.4. Practical Steps to be Taken in Developing National and Regional Micro-credential Policy Frameworks

Participants in the survey were also asked to indicate the practical steps that could be taken in developing national and regional micro-credential policy frameworks. The questions took an open-ended approach.

Stakeholders revealed that the development of a national micro-credential policy framework cannot be done in isolation. Instead, it needs proper stakeholder engagement and consultation of all key stakeholders while following national processes when it comes to policy development, in line with national country development goals. Some indicated that there should be a national workshop and plan with funding being availed for such an exercise. Reference was also made to the importance of industry involvement from the onset. The essence of carrying out a needs assessment among stakeholders also came into discussion. Stakeholders also expressed the importance and value of benchmarking, so as to not repeat the mistakes of those that already developed and implemented the use of microcredentials. Key stakeholders that should be involved in such a micro-credential policy development were identified as the NQA, NCHE and NTA.

Further practical steps should unpack national problems of high dropout rates of learners, and establish if microcredentials can address this need. Implementation should be piloted and follow a phased approach and this should not become overwhelming or unbearable while ensuring the right entity should be identified to steer the process. There is also a need to consider piloting and then reviewing and implementing.

The involvement of stakeholders was also mentioned; the following stakeholders should be considered for national micro-credential policy development:

- Regional Councils & Local Authorities
- Communities
- Community-based organisations
- Employers
- HEIs (public + private)
- Industry
- Internet Service Providers (Telecom, Paratus, etc.)
- Ministry of Higher Education, Technology and Innovation
- Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture
- Namibia Commerce and Industries representing the interests of business communities and industries
- NCCI (Namibia Chamber of Commerce and Industry)
- Non-governmental organisations (NGOs), NGOs – funding
- National Institute for Educational Development (NIED)
- NIPAM
- Professional bodies
- Electoral Commission of Namibia
- Namibia Employment Federation
- Regulatory bodies (including NTA, NQA)
- Research organisations
- Small and Medium Entreprises
- Sports clubs
- Student bodies
- Teacher Unions
- Teachers
- Trade Unions
- Unemployed graduates
- Unions (workers unions, farmer's unions)
- Vocational Training Centres
- Youth (National Youth Council)

For the practical steps to be taken in developing a regional micro-credential

framework, stakeholders maintained that proper consultation and establishment of communication channels will assist with information dissemination and stakeholder engagement. Some perspectives were that regional policies must avail best practices and should be aligned; the creation of a task force from various participating countries is essential; to ensure cooperation at the highest levels, be guided by already existing bilateral agreements; various regional bodies/entities with interest in the development of microcredential policy frameworks should be engaged to promote cross border recognition of microcredentials, to mention a few.

4.5. Summary of Findings and Recommendations

Summary of Findings

A quality assurance system or framework does not seem to be available in Namibia, with very little evidence with respect to implementation and non-alignment to different modes of offerings. A separate entity could be considered for the management of microcredentials at the country level. The existing qualifications framework entity in the country should play a pivotal role in the registration of microcredentials.

Institutional and national standards for microcredential implementation are non-existent in Namibia. The development of such standards should, therefore, be prioritised. Challenges are foreseen if microcredentials are to replace formal qualifications. Moreover, a lack of standardisation with industry needs could also be problematic and must be addressed.

The integration of microcredentials with national and regional qualification frameworks could avoid resistance and aid better recognition. More awareness-raising events are needed at the national level. More so, the identification of key stakeholders should be considered.

Stakeholder consultation and frequent communication are key to the development of a national micro-credential framework. Industry involvement and benchmarking would aid the development of a national micro-credential framework.

National challenges should be considered during the development of a micro-credential framework with a phased implementation consideration. Such challenges include but are not limited to, lack of clear and committed government support, resistance from some stakeholders due to wrong impressions/perceptions, lack of articulation between formal qualifications and microcredentials, and non-assurance of maintaining the quality, and academic rigour while developing microcredentials.

Recommendations

- Initial discussions about the drafting of national standards for microcredentials need to be moved into actual action
- Stakeholder views indicated the importance of the development of national standards that would cater for the design and quality of microcredentials, thereby ensuring that they are rigorous and credible.

SUMMARY

OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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Summary of Findings

The Namibian economy is gradually recovering from the adverse effects of the global pandemic, mainly driven by the natural resources sector. The education, training, and development system is well established, starting from early childhood development to tertiary education and an institute for public servants training. Similarly, the national quality assurance system covers all levels of education, namely: general education, TVET, and HE.

Notwithstanding this conducive environment, the following challenges exist:

1. **Low Staff Motivation:** A concern within civil service and professional organisations, such as primary and secondary education, is the lack of motivation among employees.

2. **Unemployment and Skills Gap:** A significant number of unemployed youths possess only secondary education or less, thus lacking the necessary vocational training and employability skills. Some graduates also struggle to find jobs. This highlights the urgent need for rapid skills development frameworks to enhance employability and entrepreneurship competencies.

3. **Quality Assurance Gaps:** The national quality assurance system for HE in Namibia is identified as needing improvement. There is a notable absence of quality assurance policies and minimum standards for open and distance education, which are essential for ensuring the relevance and quality of micro-credential offerings.

4. **Lack of Institutional Standards:** A significant portion of stakeholders (42.1%) expressed uncertainty regarding the development of institutional standards for microcredentials, with only a small percentage indicating that draft standards have been developed (7.9%) or implemented (2.6%).

5. **Limited Awareness and Engagement:** There is a general lack of awareness and engagement among stakeholders regarding microcredentials. Institutions have not yet initiated discussions or policies related to microcredentials, thereby indicating a need for increased dialogue and collaboration.

6. **Regional Disparities:** The majority of respondents in the study were from the Khomas region, thus indicating a concentration of educational institutions and industries in Windhoek, which may limit the representation of perspectives from other regions.

Summary of Recommendations

To effectively conceptualise and implement microcredentials in Namibia, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. **Develop a national micro-credential framework:** The MHETI, in collaboration with the NQA, should establish a national framework that defines standards, accreditation processes, and recognition of microcredentials. This framework should align with international best practices while considering local contexts.

2. **Alignment with national development goals:** The MHETI should facilitate the establishment of a multi-stakeholder taskforce to ensure that the micro-credential development aligns with national development goals and industry needs.

3. **Address low staff motivation through a combination of human resources management and human resource development functions:** To boost staff morale and enhance job performance, the Office of the Prime Minister, NIPAM, HEIs and employers should promote continuous professional development through microcredentials to encourage individuals to enter, leave, and re-enter the education, training, and development system.

4. **Complement youth employment creation initiatives with employability skills and entrepreneurship competencies:** Taking advantage of microcredentials, the Ministry of Labour, Industrial Relations and Employment Creation (MLIREC), and MHETI, in collaboration with the NCHE and HEIs should develop a framework for rapid employability skills and entrepreneurship competencies development in various areas for the unemployed population and for continuous training of the labour force to ensure relevance and adaptability to evolving labour market needs.

5. **Foster industry-education partnerships:** Strong partnerships between educational institutions and industry stakeholders are essential to ensure that microcredentials align with market needs. Collaborative efforts should focus on identifying skill gaps and co-developing relevant courses.

6. **Enhance digital infrastructure and literacy:** Investment in digital infrastructure, particularly in rural areas, is crucial to ensure equitable access to online learning opportunities. Additionally, implementing digital literacy programmes will equip learners with the necessary skills to thrive in an online learning environment.

7. **Raise awareness and promote acceptance:** The MHETI should initiate public awareness campaigns to educate education providers, learners, employers, and the general public about the benefits of microcredentials. Moreover, highlighting successful case studies will promote the value of these credentials in the job market.

8. **Pilot programmes and research:** The NQA and other relevant bodies should conduct pilot programmes to test the effectiveness of microcredentials across various sectors. This will provide valuable insights and data to inform future policy and practice.

9. **Monitor and evaluate:** The quality assurance framework should include a monitoring and evaluation plan for regular assessments of micro-credential effectiveness and impacts to continuously refine offerings and policies.

By addressing these findings and implementing the recommended actions, Namibia can enhance its micro-credential landscape, ultimately contributing to improved educational outcomes and better alignment with labour market needs.

METHODOLOGY

METHODOLOGY

Research Method

The lack of published materials in Namibia on microcredentials led to the use of surveys and workshops as primary instruments to collect data and gauge the level of understanding of microcredentials.

The research targeted stakeholders with the knowledge and skills in quality assurance, programme curriculum development, and industry stakeholders, to provide the structural lens through which microcredentials and their fit into the higher education ecosystem are assessed (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). A purposive sampling method was employed to identify study participants. Twenty-seven (27) organisations, including regulatory agencies, professional bodies, and higher education institutions were identified to participate in the study. The study employed a mixed research method, using a literature review, a survey and discussions with various stakeholders, including faculty administrators, quality assurance professionals, industry stakeholders, and academics. The mixed research method was considered appropriate in providing a comprehensive view of the status of microcredentials.

Data Collection

A project introduction letter accompanied by an invitation to participate in the survey was sent out to 30 organisations to recommend participants. The list of invited organisations is presented in Annexure A. Respondents completed the online questionnaire (Annexure B). The survey was followed by two workshops. The first workshop programme, held on 23 July 2024, aimed at facilitating discussions and gathering inputs from the participants on the status quo of microcredentials in Namibia (Annexure C). Some participants joined the workshop online. The same participants were invited to participate in the second workshop held on 21 October 2024. The main agenda of the second workshop was to allow the stakeholders to validate the study report. The workshop agenda is attached in Annexure D. The list of institutions that attended the validation workshop is presented in Annexure E.

Data Analysis

The quantitative data was analysed using SPSS (the statistical package for social sciences). Thematic analysis was used to analyse the qualitative data by identifying patterns and themes from qualitative data and providing a description of the findings.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were followed as informed consent was clarified in the questionnaire as per PoMiSa standards. This was to ensure that participants were fully informed about the study and consented to participate. The questionnaire further clarified the element of confidentiality, that the participants' privacy would be protected and to ensure that data is securely handled and used for the intended purpose. The workshop participants were also requested to consent to the use of workshop photographs for the purpose of the project (Annexure F).

The Respondents

A total of 39 individuals (Table 9) responded to the survey.

Table 9: Institutions represented by the participants who completed the questionnaire

Type of Institution	Count	%
Public Higher Education Institutions and TVET	16	41.0%
Private Higher Education Institutions	14	35.9%
Quality Assurance Agency	7	17.9%
Professional Body	2	5.1%
Total	39	100.0%

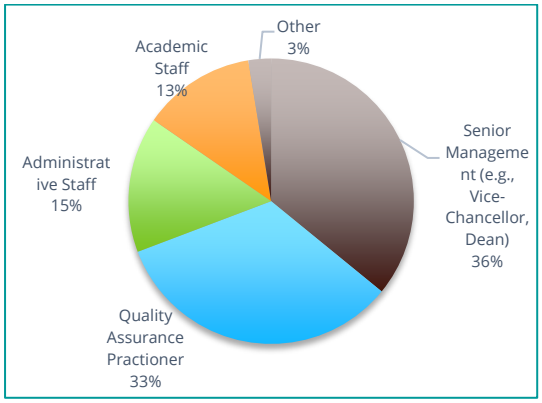
Question 1: What type of institution do you represent?

The respondents represented four different types of organisations:

1. **Public Higher Education Institutions**: These formed the largest group, with 16 respondents, making up 41% of the total sample. This significant representation suggests that public universities and colleges were well-engaged in the study.
2. **Private Higher Education Institutions:** With 14 respondents, private institutions accounted for 35.9% of the participants. The relatively high number of private institutions indicates a strong interest in this sector as well.
3. **Quality Assurance Agencies:** Seven quality assurance agencies participated, representing 17.9% of the total. While fewer in number, their participation was crucial as these organisations play a crucial role in maintaining educational standards.
4. **Professional Bodies:** This category had the smallest representation, with only two respondents, accounting for 5.1% of the total. The limited participation of professional bodies might indicate either a lower relevance of the study to these organisations or potentially a need for greater engagement with this sector in future research.

Figure 14 shows that Senior Managers accounted for 36% of the survey respondents, followed by Quality Assurance Practitioners (33%), administrative staff (15%), academic staff (13%) and others (3%).

Figure 11: Role of participants in the participating institutions



Question 2. What is your role within the institution?

The regional representation in the survey was rather skewed with the majority (92%) of the participants being from the Khomas region, the seat of the capital city where the headquarters of the organisations and most higher education institutions that participated in the study are primarily located (Table 10).

Table 10: Regions represented by the participants

Region	Count	%
Khomas	36	92.3%
Otjozondjupa	2	5.1%
Erongo	1	2.6%

Total	39	100.0%

Question 4. In which region(s) of Namibia is your institution primarily located?

A total number of 56 persons participated in the consultative workshop held on 23 July 2024, and 66 participated in the validation workshop held on 21 October 2024. The majority of the participants in both workshops were females. The breakdown of participation by gender is presented in Table 11.

Table 11: Number of participants in national consultation workshops

Workshop	Number of Participants		
	Male	Female	Total
National Consultative workshop, 23 July 2024	12	34	46
National Consultative Validation Workshop, 21 October 2024	22	44	66

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ANNEXURES

Annexure A: List of Organisations Invited to Participate in the Study

1. African Leadership Institute (ALI)
2. Botho University Namibia PTY (LTD)
3. Engineering Council of Namibia (ECN)
4. Headstart Montessori Teacher Training College
5. Health Professions Council of Namibia (HPCNA)
6. I-Care Health Training Institute cc
7. Institute for Open Learning (IOL)
8. Institute of Chartered Accountants of Namibia (ICAN)
9. International University of Management (IUM)
10. International Training College - Lingua
11. Law Society of Namibia (LSN)
12. Limkokwing University of Creative Technology
13. Namibia College of Open Learning (NAMCOL)
14. Namibia Council for Architects and Quantity Surveyors (NCAQS)
15. Namibia Evangelical Theological Seminary (NETS)
16. Namibia Qualifications Authority (NQA)
17. National Trainings Authority (NTA)
18. Namibia University of Science and Technology (NUST)
19. Namibia Veterinary Council (NVC)
20. National Council for Higher Education (NCHE)
21. Philippi Trust Namibia
22. River Higher Institute of Technology (Formerly known as Monitronic Success College)
23. Shiramed Medical Institute Pty (Ltd)
24. St. Charles Lwanga Major Seminary
25. Sunshine Private College
26. Triumphant College
27. University of Namibia (UNAM)
28. Welwitchia University (PTY) LTD (formerly known as Welwitchia Health Training Centre)

Annexure B: Online Questionnaire

Thank you for participating in this survey on the current state of microcredentials in Namibian higher education. This questionnaire is part of the Potential of Microcredentials in Southern Africa (PoMiSA) project. Your insights will help us understand the conceptualization, implementation, and policy development of microcredentials in Namibia.

The survey should take approximately 20-30 minutes to complete. Your responses will be kept confidential and used only for research purposes. Please answer the questions to the best of your knowledge.

[redacted] Switch account

Not shared

A. Institutional Profile

1. What type of institution do you represent?

- ◯ Public Higher Education Institution
- ◯ Private Higher Education Institution
- ◯ Quality Assurance Agency
- ◯ Government Education Department
- ◯ Professional Body
- ◯ Private Organisation/Company
- ◯ Other:

2. What is your role within the institution?

- ◯ Senior Management (e.g., Vice-Chancellor, Dean)
- ◯ Academic Staff
- ◯ Administrative Staff
- ◯ Quality Assurance Practioner
- ◯ Policy Maker
- ◯ Other

3. How many students are enrolled in your institution? (If applicable)

- ◯ Less than 1,000
- ◯ 1,000 - 5,000
- ◯ 5,001 - 10,000
- ◯ 10,001 - 20,000
- ◯ More than 20,000
- ◯ Not applicable

4. In which region(s) of Namibia is your institution primarily located?

- ◯ Erongo
- ◯ Hardap
- ◯ //Karas
- ◯ Kavango East
- ◯ Kavango West
- ◯ Khomas
- ◯ Kunene
- ◯ Ohangwena
- ◯ Omaheke
- ◯ Omusati
- ◯ Oshana
- ◯ Oshikoto
- ◯ Otjozondjupa
- ◯ Zambezi

5. Are you familiar with microcredentials?

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No

5. Does your institution currently offer any form of microcredentials?

- ○ Yes
- ○ No
- ○ In development
- ○ Unsure

6. If yes, how long has your institution been offering microcredentials?

- ○ Less than 1 year
- ○ 1-3 years
- ○ 4-5 years
- ○ More than 5 years
- ○ Not applicable

7. What is the primary mode of education delivery at your institution? (Select all that apply)

- ☐ Blended learning
- ☐ Traditional face-to-face
- ☐ Fully online
- ☐ Distance education
- ☐ Other

8. Has your institution participated in any national or regional discussions about microcredentials?

- ○ Yes
- ○ No
- ○ Unsure

B. Microcredential Conceptualization

9. What do you consider to be the key drivers for adopting microcredentials in Namibia? (Select all that apply)

- [ ] Political factors
- [ ] Economic factors
- [ ] Social factors
- [ ] Technological factors
- [ ] Other

10. How would you rate the alignment of microcredentials with current educational trends in Namibia?

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not aligned at all	○	○	○	○	○	Perfectly aligned

11. How would you rate the alignment of microcredentials with current workforce trends in Namibia?

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not aligned at all	○	○	○	○	○	Perfectly aligned

12. How would you define microcredentials in the Namibian context? (Open-ended)

Your answer

13. In your opinion, how well do the following stakeholders understand microcredentials? Educational institutions

	1	2	3	4	5	
Poor understanding	○	○	○	○	○	Excellent understanding

14. In your opinion, how well do the following stakeholders understand microcredentials? Students

	1	2	3	4	5	
Poor understanding	○	○	○	○	○	Excellent understanding

15. In your opinion, how well do the following stakeholders understand microcredentials? Employers

	1	2	3	4	5	
Poor understanding	○	○	○	○	○	Excellent understanding

16. In your opinion, how well do the following stakeholders understand microcredentials? Policymakers

	1	2	3	4	5	
Poor understanding	○	○	○	○	○	Excellent understanding

17. In your opinion; How will stakeholders' views on microcredentials impact their practical implementation in Namibia? (Open-ended)

Your answer

C. Public & Private Sector Microcredential Providers.

18. What is the current role of public sector providers in offering microcredentials in Namibia?

- ○ No role
- ○ Limited role
- ○ Moderate role
- ○ Significant role
- ○ Unsure

19. What is the current role of private sector providers in offering microcredentials in Namibia?

- ○ No role
- ○ Moderate role
- ○ Significant role
- ○ Unsure

20. What benefits do you think users could gain from microcredentials offered by these providers? (Select all that apply)

- ☐ Skill development
- ☐ Career advancement
- ☐ Flexibility in learning
- ☐ Cost-effective education
- ☐ Industry recognition
- ☐ Other

21. How do the needs of microcredential users vary across the following education sectors in Namibia? (Open-ended) Formal education

Your answer

22. How do the needs of microcredential users vary across the following education sectors in Namibia? (Open-ended) Non-formal education

Your answer

23. How do the needs of microcredential users vary across the following education sectors in Namibia? (Open-ended) Informal education

Your answer

D. Microcredential Implementation & Effectiveness

24. What criteria would indicate that microcredentials effectively meet their educational objectives in Namibia? (Select all that apply)

- [ ] Improved student learning outcomes
- [ ] Increased enrolment in higher education
- [ ] Better alignment with industry needs
- [ ] Enhanced employability of graduates
- [ ] Help with skills upscaling in industry
- [ ] Other

25. What criteria would indicate that microcredentials effectively meet their vocational objectives in Namibia? (Select all that apply)

- [ ] Increased job placement rates
- [ ] Higher salaries for credential holders
- [ ] Improved job performance
- [ ] Greater career mobility
- [ ] Other

26. To what extent are the following socio-economic impacts of microcredentials being considered in Namibia? Access to education:

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not considered at all	○	○	○	○	○	Highly considered

27. To what extent are the following socio-economic impacts of microcredentials being considered in Namibia? Equity in education

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not considered at all	○	○	○	○	○	Highly considered

28. To what extent are the following socio-economic impacts of microcredentials being considered in Namibia? Inclusion in education

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not considered at all	○	○	○	○	○	Highly considered

29. To what extent are the following socio-economic impacts of microcredentials being considered in Namibia? Improve job performance

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not considered at all	○	○	○	○	○	Highly considered

30. How do Namibian industries currently respond to microcredentials?

- ○ Very negatively
- ○ Somewhat negatively
- ○ Neutral
- ○ Somewhat positively
- ○ Very positively
- ○ Unsure

31. What challenges does industry recognition of microcredentials present in Namibia? (Open-ended)

Your answer

32. What opportunities does industry recognition of microcredentials present in Namibia? (Open-ended)

Your answer

33. What factors do you think will positively influence the implementation and long-term sustainability of microcredentials in Namibia? (Open-ended)

Your answer

34. What factors do you think will negatively influence the implementation and long-term sustainability of microcredentials in Namibia? (Open-ended)

Your answer

E. Microcredential Policy Development

35. How is quality assurance currently managed for microcredentials in Namibia?

- ◯ No quality assurance system in place
- ◯ Informal quality assurance practices
- ◯ Formal institutional-level quality assurance
- ◯ National-level quality assurance framework
- ◯ Other

36. How should quality assurance be managed for microcredentials in Namibia? (Open-ended)

Your answer

37. What progress has been made toward institutional standards for microcredentials in Namibia?

- ◯ No progress
- ◯ Initial discussions
- ◯ Draft standards developed
- ◯ Standards implemented
- ◯ Unsure

38. What progress has been made toward national standards for microcredentials in Namibia?

- ◯ No progress
- ◯ Initial discussions
- ◯ Draft standards developed
- ◯ Standards implemented
- ◯ Unsure

39. To what extent are microcredentials integrated into Namibia's national qualifications framework?

- ◯ Not integrated at all
- ◯ Under consideration for integration
- ◯ Partially integrated
- ◯ Fully integrated
- ◯ Unsure

40. What practical steps should be taken in developing a national microcredential policy framework for Namibia? (Open-ended)

Your answer

41. What practical steps should be taken in developing a regional microcredential policy framework that includes Namibia? (Open-ended)

Your answer

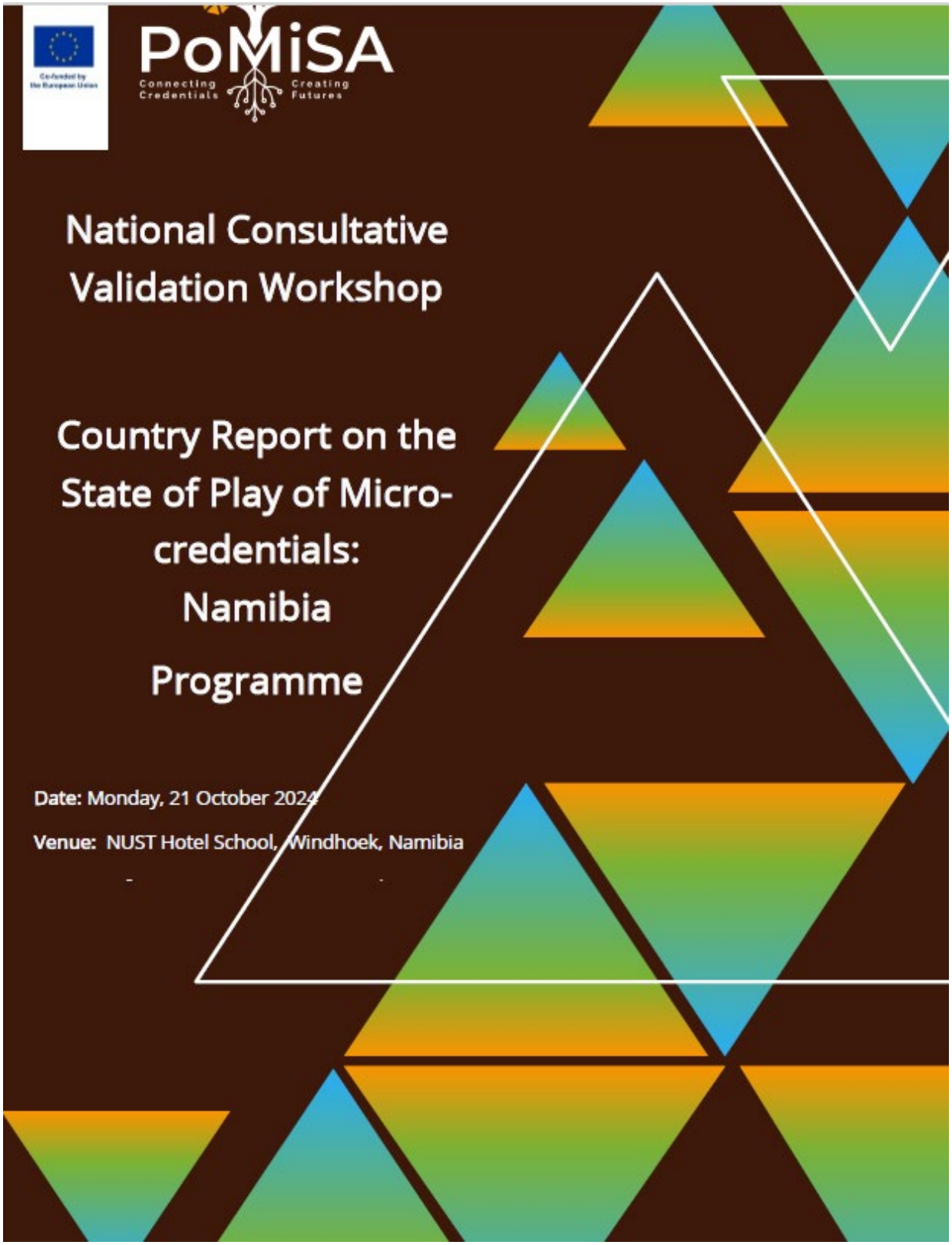
Submit Clear form

Annexure C: National Consultative Workshop Agenda

Agenda

TIME	ITEM	FACILITATOR
08h00-08h30	Arrival and Registration	Administrators
08h30-08h45	Welcoming & Introduction	Dr Sylvia Demas
08h45-09h00	Brief overview of the Project	Ms Bertha Njembo
09h00-09h30	**Presentation** on the conceptualisation of Micro-credentials	Dr Colen Tuaundu
09h30-10h00	Plenary Discussions	All
10h00-10h30	**TEA BREAK**	
10h30-11h00	**Presentation** on Who are Public and Private Sector Micro-credentials Providers	Dr Ngepathimo Kadhila
11h00-11h40	**Group discussion** on the Role of public and private sector providers in offering Micro-credentials	All
11h40-12h10	**Presentation** on the implementation of Micro-credentials in Namibia	Dr Sylvia Demas
12h10-12h50	**Group discussion** on the effectiveness of Micro-credentials in Namibia	All
12h50-14h00	**LUNCH**	
14h00-14h30	**Presentation** on Policy Frameworks for Micro-credentials in Namibia	Dr Maggy Beukes Amiss
14H30-15h10	**Group discussion** on Policy recommendations for supporting Micro-credentials in Namibia	All
15h10-15h30	**HEALTH BREAK**	
15h30-16h00	Wrap-up and way forward	Dr Maggy Beukes-Amiss Director of Ceremonies

Annexure D: National Validation Workshop Agenda



Agenda

TIME	ITEM	FACILITATOR
08h00-08h30	Arrival and Registration	Administrators
08h30-08h45	Welcoming Remarks	Prof Erold Naomab Vice-Chancellor: Namibia University of Science and Technology
08h45-09h00	Introduction & Overview of the Workshop & Objectives	Dr Sylvia Demas
09h00-09h30	**Presentation** of Key stakeholders' Insights on Micro-credentials in Namibia	Dr Colen Tuaundu
09h30-10h00	Plenary Discussions: Validating Findings	ALL
10h00-10h30	**TEA BREAK**	
10h30-11h00	**Presentation:** Public and Private Sector Micro-credentials Providers	Dr Ngepathimo Kadhila
11h00-11h40	**Group discussion:** Refining Providers Roles in Micro-credentials	ALL
11h40-12h10	**Presentation:** Implementation of Micro-credentials Findings in Namibia	Ms Bertha Njembo
12h10-12h50	**Group discussion:** Identifying Gaps and Refining Recommendations	ALL
12h50-14h00	**LUNCH**	
14h00-14h30	**Presentation** on Policy Frameworks Findings on Micro-credentials in Namibia	Dr Maggy Beukes Amiss
14H30-15h10	**Group discussion:** Validation of Policy recommendations forMicro-credentials	ALL
15h10-15h30	**HEALTH BREAK**	
15h30-16h30	Wrap-up and way forward	Dr Colen Tuaundu

Annexure E: The list of institutions that attended the validation workshop

1. African Leadership Institute (ALI)
2. Hovia Educational Consultants (HEC)
3. Headstart Montessori Teacher Training College
4. International University of Management (IUM)
5. Institute of Chartered Accountants of Namibia (ICAN)
6. Institute for Open Learning (IOL)
7. Limkokwing University of Creative Technology
8. Namibia Council for Architects and Quantity Surveyors (NCAQS)
9. National Council for Higher Education (NCHE)
10. Namibia Open Learning College (NAMCOL)
11. NTA/Zambezi Vocational Training Centre
12. Namibia University of Science and Technology (NUST)
13. Namibia Qualifications Authority (NQA)
14. Rundu Vocational Training Centre
15. Sunshine Private College
16. University of Namibia (UNAM)
17. Welwitchia University (PTY) LTD
18. Windhoek Vocational Training Centre

NOTES: