

**ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS INFLUENCING LEARNER ABSENTEEISM  
IN SIX SCHOOLS IN THE KAVANGO REGION, NAMIBIA**

A HALF THESIS SUBMITTED IN FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE DEGREE OF

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## ABSTRACT

This study on learner absenteeism takes place in the Namibian context with a focus on the Kavango region, located in Northern Namibia, where absenteeism has been identified as a problem. The intention of the study is to find out the relationship between learner absenteeism and environmental factors. The research question was framed as: *How do environmental factors influence learner absenteeism in schools, conceptualised as human activity systems in the Kavango Region (Namibia)?*

The wider intention of this study is to inform processes that can be put in place to reduce the impact of environmental factors on learner absenteeism, with the ultimate view of improving the quality of education. The literature review provides insight into learner absenteeism in developing and developed nations. It outlines the Namibian policies developed for improving learner attendance and retention of learners in schools, with the view of improving access to school. The study is located within the broader goals of education of Namibia.

The research adopts a qualitative interpretive approach, and focuses on environmental factors influencing learner absenteeism in six case studies, which are selected schools in the Kavango province. The study uses a variety of tools such as questionnaires, focus group interviews, observations and interviews as well as document analysis. It uses a combination of inductive and abductive modes of inference in the data analysis. It draws on systems thinking to develop a model that theorises the inter-related roles of different stakeholders, namely, learners, teachers, parents, educational officials (including the regional office and the Ministry of Education). It proposes possible strategies for reduction of learner absenteeism that could contribute towards the improvement of the quality of education. It also mentions the benefits of reducing learner absenteeism in the schools involved in the case study.

The findings clearly show that poverty is the main environmental factor that influences learner attendance. The impact of poverty does not, however, occur in isolation; it interacts and has influence over other environmental factors such as alcohol abuse, sickness, lack of parental involvement, lack of motivation from stakeholders and household work. The study also found certain educational factors influenced learner absenteeism, such as teacher attitude, pedagogical styles, and lack of security.

The study ends with recommendations to reduce learner absenteeism and recommendations for further research.

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## ABBREVIATIONS

<b>AEC</b>	Annual Education Census
<b>AIDS</b>	Acquired Immuno-Deficiency Syndrome
<b>DoE</b>	Department of Education
<b>EFA</b>	Education for All
<b>ECE</b>	Early Child Education
<b>EMIS</b>	Education Management Information System
<b>EO</b>	Education Officer
<b>ESPPMLP</b>	Education Sector Policy for the Prevention and Management of Learner Pregnancy
<b>HSRC</b>	Human Scientific Resource Council
<b>LASA</b>	Learner Absenteeism in South Africa
<b>NBC</b>	Namibia Broadcasting Cooperation
<b>NSPI</b>	National Standard Performance Indicators
<b>ME</b>	Ministry of Education
<b>PAAI</b>	Plan of Action for Academic Improvement
<b>OVC</b>	Orphans and Vulnerable Children
<b>SACMEQ</b>	Southern and East African Consortium for Monitoring Education Quality
<b>SES</b>	Social Economic Status
<b>SDF</b>	School Development Fund
<b>SFP</b>	School Feeding Programme
<b>UNAIDS</b>	United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS
<b>UNDP</b>	United Nations Development Programme
<b>UNEP</b>	United Nations Environmental Programme
<b>UNESCO</b>	United Nations Education, Scientific, and Cultural Organization
<b>UNICEF</b>	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund

# CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

## 1.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter introduces the study, provides a rationale for the research and outlines the research question. It links these back to the general broad goals of the Ministry of Education in Namibia to show that the research is located within the context of the Namibian educational policy context. The research seeks to reflect on environmental factors that have a negative impact on learner attendance in schools, which affects access to and quality of education achievements. The core focus of the study is to investigate the environmental factors that affect learner attendance resulting in school absenteeism. I work as an Inspector of Education in the Kavango Region in Northern Namibia, an area that is plagued with problems of learner absenteeism. In the context of my work I have noticed that despite new policies being formulated, this issue is not well understood or dealt with in practice, and that interventions appear to be inadequate to address this. As a result I developed considerable interest in probing the question further in the study (see also Chapter 2).

## 1.2 OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

This chapter introduces the study and the research questions. It also provides an introduction to the theoretical framing of the study, and an overview of the study as a whole.

Chapter Two provides a literature review which serves as background to the research question and context. It reviews policies that are in place to address issues affecting access to school. These same policies also have the objective of ensuring quality education through attending to issues of access. This is followed by a discussion on the concept of learner absenteeism and other related concepts. The chapter provides an insight into rates of learner absenteeism and links this to various causes of learner absenteeism. Causes of learner absenteeism are further discussed under categories of learner absenteeism and with the use of models. The chapter also covers various strategies that are in place to reduce learner absenteeism and ends with a discussion on the benefits of reducing learner absenteeism.

Chapter Three focuses on the research methodology. It discusses the use of the systems approach that underpins the study, as this is a significant factor in the analysis of the study, and the generation of

data. It explores the view that a school is an open human activity system; hence various elements of the system need to be considered in order to fully understand a complex problem such as learner absenteeism. The chapter describes the methods used to generate information during the research and indicates how issues of ethics, validity and trustworthiness were dealt with. The chapter ends with a model of roles in a school human activity system and their relationship with the environmental factors influencing this system. This model was used to guide data generation and analysis. The chapter therefore also discusses the analytical processes used in this study.

Chapter Four presents the data using a combination of tables that represent the findings, and discussion. The chapter also provides different respondents' views on the environmental factors that influence learner absenteeism. The chapter discusses ranking or prioritisation of the environmental factors as indicated by various stakeholders in the school system, and considers how these factors impact on learner absenteeism.

Chapter Five, the final chapter, provides a condensed discussion of the research findings and concludes the thesis. The findings are discussed using analytical statements covering: rate of absenteeism, poverty and learner absenteeism, school-based factors and learner absenteeism, roles of stakeholders in reduction of learner absenteeism. A systems approach model provides a way of engaging with the issues. Critical factors influencing the systems approach are also discussed, and recommendations are made at two levels: addressing learner absenteeism, and recommendations for further research.

### 1.3 RATIONALE FOR THE RESEARCH

The Namibian broad goals of education are equity, democracy, quality and access. To achieve the goals of quality and access, learners need to be in class or rather learners should not be absent from school when access and quality are being addressed (Namibia Ministry of Education [ME], 2002). As this is stated in policy, but not matched in practice, the rationale of this research is to investigate the relationship between environmental factors and learner absenteeism with the view to improving the quality of education, access to education and retention of learners who have the right to basic education. This interest has influenced the formulation of research questions and goals.

## 1.4 RESEARCH QUESTION AND GOALS

The main research question guiding this study is:

**How do environmental factors influence learner absenteeism in schools, conceptualised as human activity systems in the Kavango Region (Namibia)?**

To investigate this research question, I developed three research goals:

1. Investigate what the environmental factors are, and what the relationship between environmental factors and learner absenteeism is.
2. Investigate learners', teachers', parents' and Education Officers' views on the relationship between these factors and learner absenteeism.
3. Develop a systems model showing roles in a school human activity system, and their relationship with environmental factors influencing absenteeism and potential responses.

The study is undertaken with a view to:

- Developing a broader understanding of reasons for absenteeism of learners from within a systems perspective,
- Identifying possible strategies for reducing learner absenteeism influenced by environmental factors,
- Improving access and the retention of learners in school that could have a positive impact on the quality of education, and
- Developing more in-depth understandings of the school system and its effective functioning.

## 1.5 RESEARCH CONTEXT

As indicated briefly above, Namibia has favourable legislation and policies that support and enhance learners' access to school and reduce absenteeism from school (see Chapter 2, Section 2.2). Article 20 of the Namibian Constitution provides that all persons shall have the right to education, primary education shall be compulsory, and children shall not be allowed to leave school until they have reached the age of 16 (Namibia ME, 2002b).

To facilitate the implementation of the above, broad goals of education have been formulated and stated as access, equity, quality and democracy (Namibia ME, 2002a). However, the effective implementation of access has been a concern. The Government of Namibia has therefore put

additional policies in place to respond to problems of access, and to reduce absenteeism from school. Policy initiatives in this direction include promulgation of the Education Act 16 of 2001 (Namibia ME, 2001a), the Code of Conduct for Teaching Service (Namibia ME, 2004), the HIV and AIDS Charter of Rights (Namibia ME, 1997a), the National Policy Options for Educationally Marginalised Children (Namibia ME, 2001b) and the Policy on Teenage Pregnancy (Namibia ME, 1997b) that has recently been revised as the National Policy on Prevention and Management of Teenage Pregnancy (2009). (These are all discussed in more detail in Chapter 2, Section 2.2.)

Despite the abovementioned policies which have been developed to improve access and reduce absenteeism in Namibia, learner absenteeism in the Kavango region (Northern Namibia) and at a national level still remains a great concern. The Ministry of Education produces annual reports that inform the nation of the progress and constraints. Between 1995 and 2005, 40% of annual reports state that learner absenteeism is a concern at a national level. Similarly 50% of the same reports indicate that teacher absenteeism is also a problem (Namibia ME, 2007).

The Namibian Education Management Information System (EMIS) for 2008 of the Ministry of Education (Namibia ME, 2008a) provides school leaving statistics. The school leaving rates for non-external examination classes of Grade 1 to 9 including Grade 11 refers to dropouts. Table 1.1 below shows the school leaving rates between 2001 and 2007.

**Table 1.1** *The school leaving rates in percentage between 2001 and 2007*  
(Source: Namibia ME, 2008a)

GRADES	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
1	2.7	2.3	4.4	4.8	3.3	4.7	1.9
2	0.8	1.0	1.8	2.9	1.6	1.9	0.0
3	1.1	0.8	1.5	2.5	2.0	2.4	0.6
4	0.6	0.1	0.9	2.0	2.4	1.8	0.8
5	5.5	4.6	4.9	5.2	4.9	6.6	4.0
6	5.1	4.4	4.9	4.3	4.5	4.2	2.6
7	7.3	6.5	6.6	7.5	7.3	8.0	5.0
8	10.0	8.2	9.6	11.3	8.7	10.7	6.7
9	10.9	9.3	9.0	10.6	9.0	10.2	7.2
10	38.3	43.4	43.2	46.6	43.6	37.3	38.2
11	3.1	2.3	4.0	3.5	1.9	0.7	2.0

Table 1.1 above depicts that school leaving rates are higher for Grade 10 because of an external examination demanding higher entry requirements for Grade 11. Therefore the 38.2% shown for

Grade 10 for the year 2007 is not the dropout rate, but reflects the failure rate at this level. For the rest of the grades, the school leaving rates refer to dropout rates. These remain relatively high (1.9%) for Grade 1 for 2007, decrease for Grade 2 and then drastically increase from Grade 3 to Grade 9 ranging between 0.6% and 7.2%. No reasons are provided by EMIS for 'school leaving'. Continuous absenteeism can, and frequently does, culminate in drop out. Similarly high school leaving rates could have been attributed to absenteeism and hence absenteeism could be in existence, possibly with higher rates than the dropout rate.

In the Kavango region (see Figure 1.1 below for the location of this region), information obtained from attendance registers in primary schools usually indicate the number of girls present as being more than boys. However, as they progress from primary to secondary schools, especially in the senior secondary level, the numbers of girls begins to decrease and boys tend to be in the majority. This indicates increased absenteeism due to socio-cultural environmental factors.

Research carried out by the Namibian National Population and Housing Census (Namibia ME, 2001a) in the Otjozondjupa region in the area called Tsumkwe, indicated that attendance of learners (San community) at school was as low as 62.7%. The low attendance was due to a number of reasons such as: abuse of alcohol by some teachers, teacher absenteeism, lack of learning materials, unqualified teachers, application of corporal punishment by some teachers, lack of trust between teachers, school boards and community members. These are good indications of how environmental factors influence absenteeism, although they are particularly relevant to the Tsumkwe area.



*Figure 1.1 Map of Namibia showing the position of Kavango region*

The statistics on learner absenteeism described above provide an indication that the school system in the Kavango region is under stress, and that schools are struggling to achieve goals, maintain patterns, and reach the 'state of equilibrium' that is needed for schools to function as effective systems (see the section below where I discuss these aspects of systems in more detail). This research hopes to provide further insight into the 'equilibrium' of the school system, particularly as it relates to environmental factors influencing learner absenteeism.

Teacher absenteeism is also a great concern and it appears to be higher than that of learners. Most studies undertaken by organisations have focused on teacher absenteeism due to the impact of HIV and AIDS. Some teacher absenteeism research conducted by the United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2007), undertaken in the Caprivi and Kavango regions, focused on teacher absenteeism in the HIV and AIDS context. High teacher absenteeism was recorded with figures given as follows:

At school K1, 100 absences were recorded for 7 teachers in 2005.

At school C7, 35 absences were recorded for 6 teachers, in 2004.

At school K7, 48 absences were recorded for 3 teachers in 2005.

Similar research was also carried out in South Africa on learner absenteeism, commissioned by the Department of Education (South Africa, Department of Education [DoE], 2007). Findings indicated that absenteeism rates in South African schools ranged between 5% and 15%. The report also stated that in other African countries, absenteeism could be as high as 50%.

In South Africa's Nelson Mandela Foundation Study (2005) on education in rural areas, it was found that children were required to collect wood and water for homesteads and this prevented them from going to school or being able to participate fully in school activities. Other socio-cultural environmental factors also have an influence on learner absenteeism. Such factors include gender issues, value attributed to schooling by society and the cultures of teaching and learning (le Roux, 2000).

All the above issues of absenteeism could be linked to environmental factors clearly indicating that social, economic, political and environmental factors are complex and interrelated and arise in all of these four dimensions of environment and in the relations between them (Ekins, 1993; see Figure 2.1 in Section 2.3.3). Economic factors influence environmental problems, which in turn create social problems. Socio-ecological factors such as water availability, ability to produce food, and floods and droughts are factors that could play a role in learner absenteeism. Similarly socio-economic environmental factors such as poverty levels, household income and health care could also influence learner absenteeism.

A study by Hogan (2008) showed that learners in the Rufiji District in Tanzania could not attend school due to regular flooding of the wetland. Consequently the district had the lowest pass rates of all the districts in Tanzania. Her research suggested the use of a flexible curriculum that was also contextualised to adapt to the learners' environmental constraints (Hogan, 2008).

## 1.6 THE THEORITICAL CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

To explore these issues in this study, I drew on some of the tools provided in systems thinking to interpret the realities and the research question in the Kavango region context. Systems thinking is an epistemology or way of viewing factors from a broad perspective including seeing interrelationships

between components (learners, teachers, and parents) of a system (school) and their relationship to the broader environment (Lynes et al., 1995, as cited by Togo, 2009).

Bertalan (1968, as cited by Togo, 2009) defined a system as a set of elements that are interrelated. In the context of this research I consider different elements in the life of the school, and how they are interrelated with the more complex environment surrounding the elements influencing aspects of school life (in this case learners' participation in schooling). A school system, using the description of what a system is provided by Abercrombie, Hill and Turner (2006) would, like all systems, have four sub-systems which correspond to functional imperatives, namely, a) adaptation: the need to relate to the environment by taking resources from it; b) goal attainment: the setting of goals for the system; c) integration: the maintenance of the internal order; and d) pattern maintenance (latency): the generation of sufficient motivation to perform tasks. In adapting to their internal and external environments, social systems have to solve these four problems in order to continue to exist. Parsons as cited by Abercrombie et al. (2006) refers to the four sub-systems as 'functional needs'.

In the case of this study, the problem of absenteeism requires the school system to change its practices to achieve its goals (i.e. it needs to find solutions to absenteeism to achieve its goals) hence the necessity of research such as this. This is important for the regular pattern of schooling to continue (i.e. pattern maintenance). Abercrombie et al. (2006) explain that to achieve pattern maintenance, goal attainment etc., the system needs to achieve higher levels of integration of their parts i.e. the parts of the system need to work together better.

In this study I particularly consider how the roles of teacher (T), learner (L), parent (P) and Education Officers (EO) may be considered as interrelated components of a social organisation system which has a relationship with the environment (see Chapters 4 and 5). I propose through the findings of this study (see Chapters 4 and 5) that if these roles are more closely aligned in addressing learner absenteeism, the school system may become more effective in achieving its goals, which is to educate all children as described in the policies.

The investigation among teachers, learners and parents as components of the school system links to systems thinking epistemology, i.e. how we know what we know (Banathy, 1992) and is concerned with organised components. The Nelson Mandela Foundation Research (2005) into learners experiences of rural schooling, adopted a systems approach in that it considered various components

of a schooling system (including the environment) such as community poverty, communities' histories, experiences of childhood, children's well-being, community roles, and teachers', parents', and learners' roles and experiences of teaching and learning, as well as democratic practice in the schools. For this study I will also consider the environment of learners, and the roles of parents, teachers, learners and education officers in addressing the learner absenteeism issue.

In developing an understanding of the systems dynamics associated with learner absenteeism, I draw on constructivist epistemology to consider the understandings and experiences of these members of the school system, and what reasons are generated to explain absenteeism. I also consider how they define and construct their different roles, and what interrelations they see in relation to the roles that they might play in enabling effective strategies that could be applicable to overcome the current challenges experienced (see Chapters 4 and 5). Constructivist theories, according to Davis, Sumara and Luce-Kapler (2008: 99) "tend to be concerned with the sense that individuals make of the world". I therefore consider the views of these different role players in the schooling system in relation to the points that Abercrombie et al. (2006) raise about systems and their need to seek ways of adapting to new issues, responding to goal attainment imperatives, integration and pattern maintenance. Abercrombie et al. (2006: 389) state that evidence of goal attainment, adaptation to change, maintenance of patterns and integration, provide the 'real evidence' of a system's adaptation to its environment.

Some of the critiques of systems theory perspectives are that they assume that there will be enough consensus or 'equilibrium' within a system to enable such adaptation or goal attainment, and that a system is able to manage its own process of adaptation. Other critiques are that systems approaches are too reliant on functional descriptions (i.e. how things function), and therefore neglect to focus on, for example, the meanings that people construct. I therefore want to focus on the meanings and roles of people in the system, as well as the functional elements of the system, and its adaptations.

## CHAPTER 2: LEARNER ABSENTEEISM AND ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS

### 2.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter reviews literature that provides insights into the relationship between learner absenteeism and environmental factors, particularly in a Namibian context. It also covers the attached importance of the right to education as enshrined in the Namibian Constitution (Article 20) and related policies. In addition there is an overview of Namibian commitments to achievement of the broad goals of education, namely, access, efficiency, equity, quality, democracy and effectiveness within the context of lifelong learning. These policy goals are important for sustained and sustainable economic development, human development, social development and poverty reduction. To achieve the above the nation needs to render quality education (Namibia ME, 1993)

There are, however, some environmental obstacles that keep learners away from school and these provide challenges for achieving quality in education. These environmental obstacles need to be addressed if the country is to achieve success in the education system. Therefore the chapter ends by discussing possible strategies to manage absenteeism and highlights the benefits of effective management of absenteeism within the Namibian educational policy framework.

### 2.2 POLICIES ENACTED

#### 2.2.1 INTRODUCTION

The policies discussed below are directly focused on improving learners' access to education. They also have a positive influence on learner attendance in school, with a view to improving the quality of education, and learner's successful completion of schooling. A key policy of relevance to this topic is Article 20 of the Namibian Constitution adopted in 1990 (Namibia MIB, 1999). The Constitution has a range of associated policies which are introduced in the section below. These provide the policy framework for education in Namibia, and as mentioned above, provide insight into some of the national attempts (at least from a policy perspective) to ensure that learners are attending school, and that they are successfully able to remain in schools until they have completed Grade 12.

### 2.2.2 ARTICLE 20 OF THE NAMIBIAN CONSTITUTION

Article 20 of the Namibian Constitution states that all persons have the right to education and that primary education shall be free and compulsory. It commits the state to provide reasonable facilities to render effective this right for every resident within Namibia, by establishing and maintaining state schools at which primary education will be provided free of charge (Namibia MBI, 1999).

The statement on education in the Constitution makes full provision for access to quality education up to the age of 16 years a right. It also predates the World Declaration on Education for All (EFA) in Jomtien (EFA, 1990). Through this, the Namibian government seeks to attain the goals of Education for All, as stated in the Jomtien Declaration.

### 2.2.3 TOWARDS EDUCATION FOR ALL (EFA)

The Jomtien (UNESCO, 1990) Declaration identified the following goals for a global initiative to work towards inclusion in education, and towards Education for All:

#### **GOAL 1**

Expanding and improving comprehensive early childhood care and education for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children.

#### **GOAL 2**

Ensuring that by 2015, all children particularly girls, children in difficult circumstances and those belonging to ethnic minorities have access to and complete free and compulsory primary education of good quality.

#### **GOAL 3**

Ensuring that, the learning needs for all young people and adults are met through equitable access to appropriate learning and life skills programme.

#### **GOAL 4**

Achieving, a 50 percent improvement in levels of adult literacy by 2015, especially for women and equitable access to basic and continuing education for all adults.

#### **GOAL 5**

Eliminating gender disparities in Primary, and Secondary education by 2005 and achieving gender equality in education by 2015, with a focus on ensuring girls' full and equal access to and achievement in basic education of good quality.

## GOAL 6

Improving all aspects of the quality of education and ensuring excellence of all so that recognised and measurable learning outcomes are achieved by all especially in literacy, numeracy and essential life skills. (UNESCO, 1990)

Towards Education for All is an important goal guaranteed in the Namibian constitution and is central to the national development strategy. The national priority objectives have been developed from relevant EFA goals I to VI (outlined above) that are focused towards improving access and reducing learner absenteeism from school thereby aiming to meet the learning needs of all children, youth and adults by 2015 as intended by EFA. The six internationally agreed Education for All (EFA) goals are furthermore linked to the Namibian major goals of education published in 1993.

### 2.2.4 MAJOR GOALS OF EDUCATION

The Namibian EFA National Plan of Action (Namibia ME, 1993) outlined four major goals for education.

These are:

- Access
- Equity
- Quality
- Democracy

The assumption behind discussing these goals is that when equity, access and quality are addressed in a democratic approach, the result could have a positive impact on reducing absenteeism as discussed in more detail below.

#### • Access and equity

The implementation of the education policy on access aims to enable Namibia to have achieved a 95% enrolment rate of 6-16 year old learners by 2015 (Namibia ME, 1993). However, while significant progress is being made towards this objective, dramatic improvements in access need to be sustained as they are faced with challenges. The nation has sought to sustain and improve access in the following ways:

- *Equitable access:* This is addressed by developing a fair and transparent system for allocating all financial and human resources to the Ministry and being able, through this system, to accommodate all learners in the pre-primary age group seeking admission to school and enable

them to progress to and complete Grade 7 by the time they are 15 years old. It was anticipated that this would be done by 2006. The availability of such physical and human resources motivates learners not to be absent from school and at the same time contributes to the quality of education (Namibia ME, 1993).

- *Teacher education:* Similar efforts have been made to improve teacher education and support with focus on knowledge empowerment to improve teacher competence. Teachers, teacher educators, and school managers have had continuous access to opportunities for acquiring any additional knowledge and skills needed with the intention that they would gain capacity to demonstrate the understanding, knowledge, competences and professional attitudes required in their field. The underlying assumption is that if teachers are competent, teaching and learning tends to be effective and learners are motivated to go to school and to learn. Thus motivation has a positive impact on attendance (Namibia ME, 1993).
- *Improved physical structures:* Efforts have also been made to improve physical structures by providing and maintaining physical facilities that create an environment that is conducive for learning. The ministry has improved schools' access to clean water and has been able to ensure a continuous supply of electricity in some schools. Nearly all schools with permanent structures are equipped with furniture (Namibia ME, 1993).
- *Quality and Democracy:* Issues of quality are quite contestable and the notion of quality could imply efficiency, relevance, something special and inclusive. Nickel and Lowe (2009) discuss quality using the metaphor of a 'fabric' involving interwoven elements of effectiveness, efficiency, equity, responsiveness, relevance, reflexivity and sustainability, all of which, they argue, are needed to attain quality in education. The Namibian education system has responded to quality by improving teacher qualifications through in-service training and expanding Colleges of Education with changes in the teacher and learner curriculum. These have recently been integrated into the University of Namibia. The introduction of the Education Act 16 of 2001 (Namibia ME, 2001c), discussed in more detail below, is also part of a continued effort to improve quality, as well as key aspects of democracy or learners' abilities to participate in education even if they are vulnerable, marginalised or affected by complex circumstances.

- *Education Act 16 of 2001*: Section 10 of the Education Act 16 of 2001 (Namibia ME, 2001c) directs that the School Board may partially or fully exempt any parent from payment of their School Development Fund (SDF) contribution and a failure to contribute cannot be used as a reason to remove a child from school. This is an effort to improve access and reduce absenteeism due to failure to be able to make contributions to the School's Development Fund. The Act also explains the role of teachers with regard to learners who are not able to contribute to the SDF and the process of exemptions from the contributions (Namibia ME, 2001c). This policy addresses the issue of equity of access, which Nickel and Lowe (2009) note is an important aspect of quality, as mentioned above.

In addition, this policy forbids the administration of corporal punishment as well as the sexual, physical, emotional or psychological humiliation or abuse of a learner in any form. Such acts discourage learners from attending school and increase the rates of absenteeism (Namibia ME, 2001).

The Education Act 16 of 2001 also includes a focus on the code of conduct for teaching service. The Education Act 16 of 2001 was amended in 2004. The amendment was done on one of the objectives stated in the regulations made in section 64 (1) of 2004 indicating that

Teachers are generally expected to establish a safe, disciplined, and purposeful school environment, dedicated to improvement and maintenance of quality of the learning and teaching process. (Namibia ME, 2004:2)

The assumption is that such an environment will have a positive effect on learner participation in the education system. However, with the advent of HIV/AIDS in Namibia and in other southern African countries, and the increased impact of HIV and AIDS on effective instruction, the ministry has had to come up with additional policies, in this case, a National Policy on HIV and AIDS to assist schools with ways of responding to the increasing numbers of orphans.

- *HIV and AIDS Charter of Rights*: Following high incidences of HIV/AIDS in Namibia, the government has put forward a National HIV and AIDS policy for the Education Sector. This policy contains a specific section on the needs of Orphaned and Vulnerable Children (OVCs). It takes care of orphans at school by provision of exemptions from payment of School Funds, Examination Fees and Hostel Fees. Furthermore, it states that vulnerable children are to be given priority with respect to hostel

accommodation and that they should be able to access and complete general education of good quality. The assumption here is that hostel accommodation will improve access to school and reduce absenteeism of vulnerable children (Namibia ME, 1997a). This policy is also linked to the National Policy Options for Education of Marginalised Children (Namibia ME, 2001b) discussed next.

- *National Policy Options for Educationally Marginalised Children:* This policy identifies various groups of educationally marginalised children who are in a need of special interventions to ensure that they access quality education. These are children from poor communities and who therefore walk long distances without having eaten any breakfast. Such children find it difficult to concentrate on school work during the day. The government has therefore put in place a School Feeding Programme (SFP) that enables the learners to be fed at school at least one meal a day (Namibia ME, 2001b). The SFP is also meant to cover the Orphans and Vulnerable Children (OVC) who are also addressed by the policy *Education Sector Policy for Orphans & Vulnerable Children* (Namibia ME, 2008b). This demonstrates a continued commitment to improve school attendance and reduce absenteeism due to poverty or hunger.
  
- *Policy on Teenage Pregnancy:* The policy on teenage pregnancy among learners (Namibia ME, 1997b) has been revised as the Education Sector Policy for the Prevention and Management of Learner Pregnancy (Namibia ME, 2009a) whose goal is to "... improve the prevention and management of learner pregnancy in Namibia, with the ultimate aim of decreasing the number of learner pregnancies and increasing the number of learner-parents who complete their education" (Namibia ME, 2009b: 4). Information from the revised policy indicates that 1465 learners in 2007 dropped out because of pregnancy related factors. At the same time the Education Management Information System (EMIS) of the Ministry of Education Namibia (Namibia ME, 2008b) indicated that 570 623 learners were enrolled the same year. This means that 0.3 % of these learners became pregnant and dropped out of school. This policy is aimed at improving the quality of education through improved access and continued participation in schooling, based on six guiding principles which include the right to education, the need for prevention, information, respect, and support and respect for cultural and family values (Namibia ME, 2009b:4). The policy aims to improve attendance of girls at school despite pregnancy being an obstacle.

This range of emerging policies shows that the government remains committed to the provision of quality education for learners, and that it has instituted a range of policy interventions to address what is clearly a deep concern in Namibia, namely equal and full access and successful completion of schooling.

In addition to understanding the policy processes that are in place to reduce learner absenteeism, it is also necessary to understand the *meaning of learner absenteeism*, and related concepts, which I turn to next in Section 2.3 below.

## 2.3 LEARNER ABSENTEEISM AND RELATED KEY WORDS

### 2.3.1 LEARNER ABSENTEEISM

Much of the literature on learner absenteeism tends to focus on types of absenteeism. Without differentiating types of learner absenteeism, the concept of learner absenteeism becomes a collective one. Most of the education institutions distinguish between authorised and unauthorised absenteeism. The Education Welfare Services of Birmingham City Council (2001) as from January 1998 registered four categories of attendance in registers:

- (a) **Present:** refers to a student within the school premises during the time of registration.
- (b) **Approved education activity:** refers to a student involved in school activity under the supervision of authorised person.
- (c) **Authorised absence:** refers to absence endorsed and authorised by the school either before or after it has taken place.
- (d) **Unauthorised absenteeism:** refers to when a student is absent and no explanation is given or the explanation provided is unacceptable. This is also referred to as absent without authorisation from the educator concerned.

The above covers absenteeism without communication or justification (Tasmanian Government, 2002). In Namibia, according to the regulations, absent simply means not within the school premises whether authorised or not (learner attendance register). Similarly, the South African Department of Education (South Africa DoE, 2007: 20) indicates that a learner is considered absent when "he or she is not at school the entire day".

### 2.3.2 OTHER RELATED KEY WORDS

There are a number of related words that relate to and explain the phenomenon of learner absenteeism. These include:

- **School withdrawal:** refers to parents deliberately keeping a child from school for various reasons (Kearney, 2004).
- **School refusal behavior:** refers to a child's motivated refusal to attend school and/ or problems to remain in class for the whole day (Kearney, 2003).
- **Truancy:** there is no agreed definition to this social problem among government departments, practitioners and academic writers. Different government regulations define it as pupils' unauthorised absence while most academics refer to it as overall school absence (Zhang, 2003).
- **Non-problematic school absenteeism:** Kearney (2008) defines this as formal or informal school absence agreed upon by parents and school officials as legitimate and not being detrimental to the child. Whitney (1994) refers to this as authorised absence.
- **Problematic absenteeism:** is used in relation to specific days absent or percentage of days missed from school. Lyon and Cotler (2007) refer to problematic absenteeism as to 10-40% days absent from school per year. The term could be used interchangeably with chronic or excessive absenteeism.
- **School phobia:** is fear-based absenteeism referring to a learner who refuses to go school due a fear of specific stimulus such as a fire alarm (Tyler, 2005 as cited by Kearney, 2008).
- **Delinquency:** refers to rule breaking behaviours or status offences such as stealing, or property destruction which is often associated with absenteeism (Frick & Dickens, 2006).
- **Physical poverty:** refers to inability for parents/ caregivers to meet costs of schooling like fees, shoes, uniform etc. which results in absenteeism (Porteus, Clacherty, Mdiya, Pelo & Matsai, 2000).
- **Social isolation:** is frequently accompanied by physical poverty. It is not only a situation where social support structures are lacking or difficult to access but also means that there is "...no one else to turn in times of need for help", and this often also results in absenteeism (Porteus et al., 2000).
- **Psychological disempowerment:** refers to different levels of despair or losing control over a child. It could also refer to a case of inability to translate 'wishes into will', for example wanting a child to be at school but not doing anything about it (Porteus et al., 2000).

While these different meanings of learner absenteeism provide a more detailed understanding of the various dimensions of learner absenteeism, it is also necessary to discuss environmental factors and

their influence on learner absenteeism, a point introduced in Chapter 1, but which I discuss in more detail in the next section.

### 2.3.3 ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS AND LEARNER ABSENTEEISM

As indicated in the research questions and in Chapter 1, this study is interested in understanding the environmental factors that may influence learner absenteeism. In Chapter 1 I referred to other research reporting on environmental factors and how they influence learner absenteeism, for example Hogan's (2008) study that describes how the changes in the wetland conditions in Tanzania kept children from school, and the Nelson Mandela Foundation Research in South Africa which describes how poverty related factors keep learners from school (2005).

Fien (1993) writes that the environment refers to a social construct, meaning our understandings of the interactions between social and biophysical systems. Hannigan (1995) explains that key concepts associated with environment, such as nature, ecology and environmentalism have been socially constructed and contested over a period of time and as a result they keep on changing meaning. For the purposes of this study, I draw on a model of environment which depicts environmental factors as a set of interrelated factors that influence each other. These include social factors such as gender relationships; economic factors such as poverty; political factors such as lack of democracy; and biophysical factors such as availability of water and land (see Figure 2.1). The wheel of interacting factors, shown in Figure 2.1 below, shows that poverty may be related to degradation of natural resources, or to political conditions, such as is the case in Namibia, where pre-independence policies marginalised the majority of Namibian citizens, leaving them in poverty. Poverty in turn, is exacerbated by a lack of access to plentiful natural resources and drought conditions, as is also the case in Namibia (UNEP, 2006). A lack of democracy and a lack of peace in the northern part of the country pre-independence (before 1990) also influenced the conditions for development.

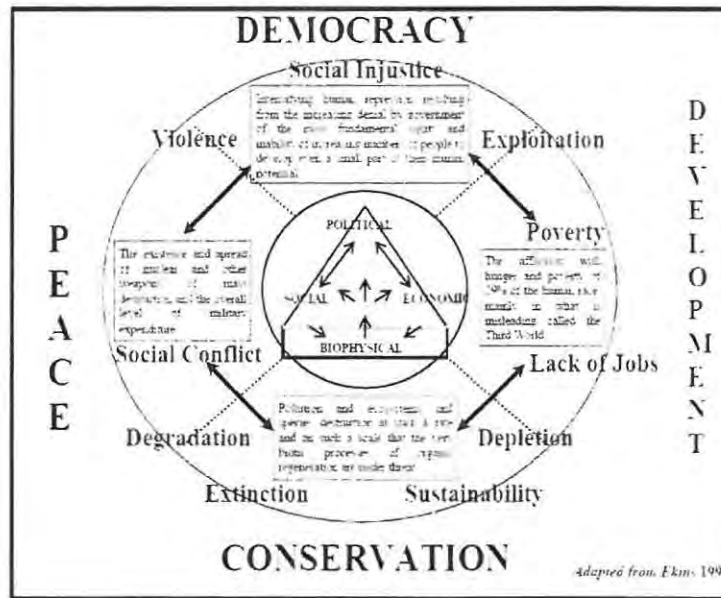


Figure 2.1 Model of environment showing interacting factors (O'Donoghue & Janse van Rensburg, 1995, adapted from Ekins 1993)

Of interest to this study, is which of these factors influence learner absenteeism, as shown in Figure 2.2 below.

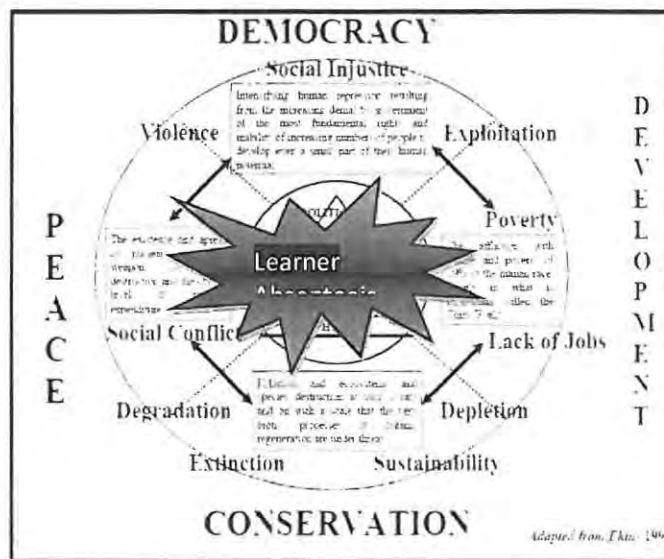


Figure 2.2 Possible environmental factors influencing learner absenteeism

This diagram depicts a broader view of the environment and clearly represents it in the model shown above with four complex dimensions of the environment as being economic, biophysical, social and political. These in turn are related to levels of peace, democracy, development and conservation that exist in society.

## 2.4 CATEGORIES OF LEARNER ABSENTEEISM AND RELATED CAUSES

### 2.4.1 CATEGORIES OF LEARNER ABSENTEEISM

As shown in the definitions and words associated with learner absenteeism discussed above, learner absenteeism is most often considered and described in terms of social and socio-economic factors. Conceptions of factors influencing learner absenteeism seldom take wider environmental or social-ecological factors into account. This can be seen in the way that Kearney (2008) categorises what he refers to as 'problematic absenteeism'. He categorises factors influencing learner absenteeism into the following six key factors: child factors, parent factors, family factors, peer factors, school factors, and community factors. Similarly Chang and Romero (2008) divided causes of absenteeism into four categories: family factors, school factors, economic factors and student variables. Drawing on literature I will summarise factors influencing learner absenteeism into seven main categories of absenteeism as shown in Figure 2.3 below. The model is based on a consideration of the concept of the environment discussed above which gives attention to the interactions between social, cultural and biophysical systems, not only social factors.



**Figure 2.3** Categories of factors influencing learner absenteeism

As indicated in Figure 2.3 above, the seven categories of factors shown in the model are: socio-economic, socio-cultural, socio-political, school-based personal, biophysical and community-based factors interacting among themselves. These are discussed in more detail below:

#### 2.4.2 CAUSES OF ABSENTEEISM

As mentioned above, I will discuss the causes of learner absenteeism drawing on the categories of learner absenteeism identified above. Where possible I have tried to find related southern African literature as the factors here are heavily influenced by conditions of poverty with southern Africa one of the poorest regions in the world (UNDP, 2010). While the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) reports regularly on the status of human development in southern African and other developing countries (UNDP, 2010), and UNESCO reports regularly on the status of Education for All through their annual Global Monitoring Reports (UNESCO, 2009a), there is not much literature that discusses learner absenteeism as a specific factor in these wider reporting contexts. They do, however, report on the ongoing imperative to ensure that more scholars remain in schools, and in places there are references to issues such as gender relations, poverty and HIV/AIDS and how these are affecting learner participation in schools (UNDP, 2010; UNESCO, 2009a). The UN Agency for AIDS (UNAIDS) for example, reports that:

The pandemic is also affecting the number of potential learners ... there will be a reduction in the school-age population in 6 of the 26 countries worst affected by AIDS by 2015 (World Bank, 2002) ... The pandemic is also responsible for a certain level of skepticism regarding the value of education caused by hopelessness and fatalism among students and their families and communities. Thus, education needs, more than ever, to be attractive in order to engage and maintain learners. (UNAIDS, 2006: 12)

In 2009 UNESCO produced an EFA Global Monitoring Report (UNESCO, 2009b) focusing primarily on those learners that are marginalised from the education system, in other words those that tend to drop out. In their various monitoring reports they state that:

- Completion of primary school remains a major cause for concern: delayed enrolment is widespread, survival rates (retention rates) to Grade 5 are low (below 75% in thirty of the ninety one countries with data) and grade repetition is frequent (UNESCO, 2004a: 21).
- National budgets in poor countries are under pressure. Sub-Saharan Africa faces a potential loss of around USD 4.6 billion annually in financing for education in 2009 and 2010, equivalent to a 10% reduction in spending per primary school pupil (UNESCO, 2010: 4), and that

- Millions of children are leaving school without having acquired basic skills. In some countries in sub-Saharan Africa, young adults with five years of education had a 40% probability of being illiterate (UNESCO, 2010: 4).
- Globally, millions of children still suffer the consequences of hunger, micronutrient deficiency and infection which undermine attendance, learning and chances of completing school. HIV/AIDS in Sub-Saharan Africa is presenting a formidable obstacle to achievement of universal primary education, and is affecting retention rates, particularly in Sub-Saharan African countries.
- In many countries rural children are less likely than urban children to attend school, and are more likely to drop out. Poverty is a part of the explanation, as is the structural provisioning of school facilities, transport etc. (UNESCO, 2010).

From this it is possible to see that the issue is acute in sub-Saharan Africa, and that the factors causing learner absenteeism range from inequalities in society, to poverty, health, gender, urban-rural divides and quality of teaching and learning amongst others. Recently UNICEF has published a paper on climate change and children, which predicts that children's participation in education will be substantively affected by migrations and unpredictable conditions (such as droughts and floods) (UNICEF, 2007). I now discuss the factors in more detail, using the framework provided in Figure 2.3.

- **Socio-economic factors**

There are a number of different socio-economic factors that influence absenteeism, as briefly introduced above. They include issues such as ability of parents to pay school fees to more extreme issues such as HIV/AIDS impacts on households and childcare.

- **School fees:** School fees and associated costs of school materials and uniforms that learners are expected to have for attendance at school, are among the barriers discouraging learners from going to school. While progressive policies exist in this regard (as reported in Section 2.2. above), learners and their parents are often not aware of their constitutional rights to free education, and thus feel 'obliged' to provide the uniforms and materials for attendance at school. Access to school is compromised by costs of school fees, uniforms, transport and costs of clinic visits (Nelson Mandela Foundation, 2005). Porteus et al. (2000) indicated that in some cases in South Africa's rural areas, children are sent away from school because they are unable to pay school fees, even though policies exist for free attendance at schools. They also report on 'social norms' that create a situation where parents are expected to provide for basic items for school, and if they don't are socially stigmatised as 'poor'.

As indicated above, the Namibian Education Act 16 of 2001 states that school attendance is compulsory for every child up to the age of 16, and in state schools non-payment of school fees is not a sufficient reason to send a learner away from school or withhold a school report. However, it seems that not all parents and learners are fully aware of this policy (Namibia ME, 2001c).

- **Domestic work:** Porteus et al. (2000) refer to 'domestic work', and a 'lack of family stability and support' in the South African context as being a factor that influences learner absenteeism from school. Children are often expected to do household work, and in situations of HIV/AIDS children are also increasingly being retained at home to care for the sick. This particularly affects girl children (UNAIDS, 2006). Porteus et al. cite a case of a mother who destroyed her child's books because she did not want the child to attend school. In the words of the child concerned:

My mother burned my books ... She burned them so that I cannot go to school. She wanted me to look after the young children. (Porteus et al., 2000: 11)

According to the Nelson Mandela Foundation research report (2005) on rural education in South Africa, it is common in rural areas to find that children are absent from school because their parents need them to work in order to supplement meals at home. As far as domestic and agricultural duties are concerned, parents and learners face a challenging dilemma. The research report indicated that this affects boys who have to stay home to contribute to livestock management, and girls who have to stay home to produce food and care for the home. In the report, one learner clearly articulated this:

You cannot leave cattle at home and go to school ... you cannot desert your father's bank like that. 'Deserting your father's bank like that' means there is no money to put food on the table, for school fees, and uniform. (Nelson Mandela Foundation, 2005: 48)

On a similar note Bell, Rose and Dynlacht (1994) indicated that learners from families of low social economic status (SES) find themselves looking after younger children during school hours because their parents cannot afford day care. Parents with high social economic status tend to have more economic involvement in learners' education than those of low social economic status. Such participation enhances attendance and learner's performance (McNeal, 1999). This is also reflected in the UNESCO (2004a, 2004b) studies which report that higher household income tends to lead to higher levels of completion and success in school.

- **Over-provision of desired facilities:** This phenomenon occurs when parents provide more than the desired facilities such as cell phones, expensive luxury clothing and too much pocket money. The learner enjoys the facilities to the extent of abusing them and as a result resorts to absenteeism. Rohrman (1993) writes in the European context that when parents' style is permissive, a child has autonomy in taking decisions and this increases the possibility of truancy. I was not able to find examples of this in the southern African literature, although there are cases of learners who are absent from schools due to gangster activities that give them high levels of income (South Africa DoE, 2006).
  
- **Food security:** The Nelson Mandela Foundation research survey carried out in South Africa indicated that 14% of children in rural areas go to school with barely a cup of tea or nothing at all while 75% had tea or bread or porridge. In the Limpopo province (one of the study areas in South Africa) it was reported that 22% of children had nothing except tea for breakfast. Poor nutrition results in learners being unhealthy at school with signs of starvation, skin diseases and other health related conditions (Nelson Mandela Foundation, 2005: 53). The issue of children going to school hungry is more widely spread than South Africa, and UNESCO reports that school feeding schemes increase learner participation in education (UNESCO, 2009b), particularly in areas where poverty levels are high.
  
- **Life of learners in urban and rural areas:** The Nelson Mandela Foundation (2005) study in South Africa reported that absenteeism is higher in rural areas when compared with urban areas. Attendance of learners improves as one moves from commercial farming areas to homelands [referring to former 'Bantustan' homelands in South Africa created under apartheid policy as 'reserves' for black people] and from homeland to urban informal areas. Children located in schools in inner deep rural areas are more involved in economic domestic work related activities than those in commercial areas (Nelson Mandela Foundation, 2005: 47). UNESCO (2009b) reports this as a more widespread phenomenon, and also associated learner absenteeism in rural areas with longer distances to walk to school, and poor road and transport infrastructures.
  
- **Daily long distance walk:** The Nelson Mandela Foundation research (2005: 47) states that "the walk to school is a bridge between home and formal education". This bridge is both unreliable and can be life threatening especially to girls who are vulnerable to threats by boys and outsiders. It is

not only a matter of distance, but also the difficult and sometimes unsafe conditions that are associated with long walks to school that affect learner attendance at school.

I walk a long distant from home to Nongeke. I have to buy shoes approximately three times in a year. Our journey is not right ... We have to pass scurvy bushes. When we get to school we are no longer tidy as we were when we left home. It is worse when it is raining.

This indicates that walking long distances under such environmental conditions can be an obstacle to attendance at school.

- **HIV and AIDS:** HIV and AIDS is a factor increasingly impacting on learner absenteeism in Southern Africa as whole. In South Africa 5.6% of children aged 2-18 years are subject to the prevalence of HIV according to information from the Human Sciences Research Council (South Africa DoE, 2007). The prevalence is higher in the age group 0-9 years and the school attendance of children infected and affected by HIV/AIDS is increasingly affected (Nelson Mandela Foundation, 2005:57-8). This is also reported on by UNAIDS as noted above. They state for example that in a study involving children aged 13 to 18 with one or both parents living with HIV/AIDs in Uganda that "... there was a decline in school attendance of 26 percent, and a reported decline in educational performance of 28 percent" (UNAIDS, 2006: 12). In Namibia the number of Orphans and Vulnerable Children (OVC) were estimated to be at 140 000 in 2005. This is about 28% of the learners and was projected to increase to 180 000 by 2010 (about 30% of learners). The 2001 Namibian National Census states that 97 000 children below the age of 15 have lost both parents. This has resulted in policy measures (as noted above), and the imperative for schools to provide an accessible, safe and conducive environment, free of stigma and financial barriers with the aim and focus of reducing absenteeism (Namibia ME, 2008b).
  
- **Teenage pregnancy:** As indicated in the discussion above, teenage pregnancy is also an issue affecting learner absenteeism in Namibia. Having a child at a young age has an immediate and long term disadvantage for a young woman. However both the Namibian and South African policies have provisions for young mothers to return to school after having a child despite this not being easy due to difficulties in finding someone to take responsibility for care of the child. For this reason most of the mothers who return to school find it hard to progress. In the Nelson Mandela Foundation (2005) study in South Africa, a youth researcher, Nyiko interviewed a young mother (school girl) about her teenage pregnancy. Here is what she said:
  - *Question:* Did you plan to have a baby?

- *Answer:* No it was by accident, but I also wanted the Child Support Grant to buy food and clothes. (Nelson Mandela Foundation, 2005:60)

The above indicates that pregnancy could be linked to poverty. Sudden and frequent absenteeism may be a signal of pregnancy. In Brazilian studies early pregnancy was the primary reason for leaving school (Kearney, 2007).

- **Economic pull factor:** Contexts where plentiful well paid jobs exist that require little and low education can influence a child to be absent and eventually drop out of school (Kearney, 2008). UNESCO (2009b) states that in 2004 there were around 218 million child labourers, of whom 166 million were between 5 and 14 years of age. Child labour is most often associated with poverty. Practical measures such as providing child support grants and free school fees has been shown to reduce child labour (ibid., cited in Lotz-Sisitka, 2010).

While these socio-economic factors are significant in a discussion on environmental factors influencing learner absenteeism, dropout rates and learner absenteeism can also be linked to school-based factors, which I discuss next.

- **School-based factors**

There are a number of school-based factors that may influence learner absenteeism, as outlined below in more detail.

- **Teacher competence:** Teacher competence is a school-based factor. Lack of teacher competence has an impact on effective teaching and learning (UNESCO, 2004b, 2009b). This was reported on in the Nelson Mandela Foundation (2005) study on rural education in South Africa, where it was stated that teaching styles remain largely unchanged and hence uninteresting. Learners continue to be taught by rote and with little understanding: "While there are some innovative teachers, the majority of them continue to use very old styles" (Nelson Mandela Foundation, 2005: 86-87). Similar issues have been reported in other southern African countries, where the quality of teacher education has not improved substantively (UNESCO, 2004b, 2009b). Kearney (2008) writing from the USA indicates that if teachers are not competent to carry out their duties effectively, they may be tempted to be absent from teaching. Absenteeism strains the relationship between teachers and learners.

- **Relationship between educator and learner:** Research by Nath, Sylva and Grimes (1999) suggests that most absenteeism (authorised or unauthorised) tends to be higher where the educator and learner relationship is not positive. Kearney (2008) refers to such a relationship as 'a student-teacher relationship'. Negative attitudes displayed by educators may drive certain learners out of school. Insults and humiliating remarks by educators can lead to school non-attendance (Moseki, 2004: 35). Here is an example of a discouraging remark from a teacher, reflected in a child's words:

This I will never forget ... I remember my former Tsonga teacher saying how bad I am. She also said that I would never succeed because my relatives whom she knew never succeeded and she told me that education and poverty don't go hand in hand. So as I was poor I heard every word she said. I thought about it and realised she was right. (Nelson Mandela Foundation, 2005: 61)

Porteus et al. (2000: 11) in South Africa share this perspective as noted in this citation from their publication:

Bongi left school because of how the teacher treated her, "she used to beat me and say to me you are to be a witch". She used to write things in my book and say to me, "you are stupid girl ... I hate you, you are ugly".

If comments like the above are heard by the parents of the girl, it could also weaken the relationship with the educator. Often, learners in such situations are also not empowered enough to know how to react or respond, and therefore choose to exit the school system, rather than confront the abuse.

- **Relationship between the educator and parent:** If the school has poor communication with parents, there is no co-operation between the two. There is a system of not getting involved and as a result parents tend to become spectators. It is easy for learners to stay away from school because they can take advantage of the vacuum between the educator and the parent (Nelson Mandela Foundation, 2005: 15). The poor relationship could also adversely affect the quality of teaching and learning and the effective implementation of the curriculum, as parents remain uninvolved in providing learners with support for schooling (UNESCO, 2004a, 2009b). UNESCO (ibid.) cites parental involvement as an important factor influencing quality of education, and learner participation in education.

- **Lack of information on exemption policy:** In the South African Nelson Mandela Foundation research, only 11% of respondents in Limpopo, 10% in Kwazulu Natal, and 10% in the Eastern Cape had information on the exemption policy related to school fees (Nelson Mandela Foundation, 2005).
- **Excessive homework and fear of assessment:** Excessive homework can be a factor influencing learner absenteeism. It can also be coupled with other factors, such as the fear of school programmed assessment and tests. The fear of poor performance keeps away learners from school as observed in Colombia (Chang & Romero, 2008). This phenomenon is more widely experienced in other contexts (Kearney, 2008) and in the southern African / sub-Saharan context is exacerbated by lack of parental support for homework which leaves children with the complex task of completing excessive homework without any support (UNESCO, 2004a, 2009a).
- **Corporal punishment:** Many schools are still practising corporal punishment despite it having been abolished by most education systems. Learners are therefore tempted to absent themselves from school due to a fear of the expected corporal punishment for any school offence. The phrase from a learner extracted from Nelson Mandela Foundation (2005: 44) study on rural education in South Africa gives some indication of the emotional upheaval caused by corporal punishment, as experienced by learners:

During the Bantu Education we were beaten. I don't understand why they beat us so. I always asked myself: to be educated must I be beaten? They should not punish us as if they are killing a snake.

Writing from a different context, Kearney (2008) confirms that highly punitive measures can contribute to learner absenteeism. Kearney also indicates that inconsistency and minimal consequences for absenteeism can lead to learner absenteeism. Excessive use of corporal punishment can lead to consistent teacher violence and this could also influence learner absenteeism.

- **Violence, bullying and sexual abuse:** Despite most revised curriculums making provision for teaching and how to recognise and act on harassment and abuse of learners, discrimination and maltreatment by both learners and teachers is still common (Nelson Mandela Foundation, 2005:61). During the public hearings conducted by the South African Human Rights Commission (South Africa DoE, 2007), there was evidence that male teachers sexually abused female learners

to the extent of exchanging 'food for sex'. I was able to find information on such issues in the Namibian context (see Sections 4.3.3 and 4.5.3) and similarly, UNESCO (2009b) reports that bullying and violence, particularly in war torn societies is a factor influencing learner participation in schools.

- **Poor infrastructure in schools:** Poor infrastructure at schools such as lack of or inadequate libraries, flush toilets and lack of electricity all contribute to poor attendance. There are additional difficulties for girls: "girl learners tended to stay home when they are menstruating because sanitation facilities at school tend to be inadequate" (South Africa DoE, 2007:33).
  
- **Teacher/ learner ratios and class size:** In Namibia the national teacher learner ratio is set as 1:30 for secondary schools and 1:35 for primary schools. However in most urban schools, the ratio remains relatively quite low and it is higher in state schools than in private schools. The average teacher learner ratio was 1:26.5 in 2006 (Namibia ME, 2008a).  
  
In South Africa the national teacher learner ratio is 1:30. However the ratio varies from private to government schools and from rural to urban schools as well. For example, the national average for public schools is 1:33.9 while for private schools is as low as 1:16.5 per teacher. In some schools, however, the ratio can increase to 1:80 or 1:100, particularly when there is a shortage of teachers (South Africa DoE, 2003 as cited by Nelson Mandela Foundation, 2005).  
  
UNESCO (2004a, 2009b) reported that high school teacher pupil ratios significantly influence the quality of education and learners' chances of being able to learn effectively. When learners are overcrowded they tend not to concentrate and as a result they tend to lose interest. Loss of interest can slowly and gradually lead to absenteeism from school. Kearney (2008) indicates that class sizes are inversely related to school climate and school attendance. The school climate and school attendance are also positively related to absenteeism and school dropout.
  
- **Grade retention and lack of motivation:** When a school has a higher level of grade retention, absenteeism is likely to be high. Most repeaters tend to be absent from school for various reasons. This is also sometimes coupled with a lack of motivation (Kearney, 2008). On a similar note, Porteus et al. (2000) in South Africa writes that a 12-year old girl passed Grade 1 after repeating the grade three times. She later left school because she learned things slowly. UNESCO (2009b) notes that high levels of repetition lead to lack of retention in schools.

➤ **Poor monitoring strategy and ineffective truancy policies:** UNESCO (2004c) notes that educational institutions should establish effective mechanisms to monitor and control learner attendance. A failure to establish, implement and monitor the above could lead to increased absenteeism (Kearney, 2008). A school therefore needs well established policies to combat absenteeism. However some policies developed to combat truancy could instead influence student absenteeism and truancy (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002), as also shown in the citation from Reid below:

When students do not feel the system is supporting them, they disconnect. Some truancy causes are ineffective and may inadvertently cause this disconnect by rewarding the non attendance of particular peer groups. (Reid, 2003:352)

Reid (2003) notes further that it is apparent that a change in learners', teachers' and parents' attitudes towards the schools' culture and ethos is necessary in order to combat absenteeism and truancy.

- **Personal factors**

A number of personal factors can also influence learner absenteeism, as discussed below.

➤ **Personal interest in studies:** For a variety of reasons that could be either external or internal, losing interest in studies can have a severe impact on learner attendance in school. Kearney (2008) refers to inadequate or non-praise for student achievement and attendance as resulting in lack of motivation among learners. Motivation is hence essential as it can lead to self esteem, school commitment and self confidence.

➤ **Ill health:** Most caregivers say ill health is the main reason for absenteeism. If reported with evidence it is recorded as authorised absence (Nelson Mandela Foundation, 2005). Kearney (2008) relates poor health to academic proficiency. UNESCO (2004a) and UNAIDS (2006) also report that poor health is a factor influencing retention of learners in schools and affecting the quality of education. This has risen in prominence in southern Africa, with the advent of HIV/AIDS, and the effects that HIV/AIDS have on children affected by the disease.

➤ **Age, Race and Class:** International research findings indicate clearly that there is a relationship between learner absenteeism and age. In Victoria, Australia, unauthorised absences due to age are commonly found in secondary schools (South Africa DoE, 2007). Kearney (2008) indicates that both race and age contribute to school absence, as do UNESCO (2004c, 2009b), although race is often associated with poor socio-economic conditions or histories of discriminatory politics as is

the case in both South Africa and Namibia. Christie (1999) for example explains how policies of racial discrimination disadvantaged most black South African children in education, with associated lack of retention in schools. Chisholm (2004) explains that it is not only racial factors, but class factors that influence learner success in schools. She explains how, after 1994 in South Africa, an exodus occurred of black middle class children from former Department of Education and Training (Bantu Education) to former White, Coloured and Indian schools, where the quality of education was perceived to be better. She explains that this has been exacerbated by various policies including school fee policies, and the South African Schools Act itself, which established School Governing Bodies around "projected parental identity around a restrictive middle class notion of who parents were, and the cultural and financial resources they can draw on" (Chisholm, 2004:17). The result of this is that former black schools have remained impoverished, which affects learner participation in these schools.

- **Lack of experience of Early Child Education (ECE):** Early Child Education provides a safe environment for young children before they enter formal schooling. It allows young children to learn the cultures of schooling and to develop the basic competences necessary for successful participation in education. In South Africa children who have not undergone this programme are likely to be frequently absent from school during the first and second years, as their first experiences at school are unfamiliar and young children tend to lack the confidence and competences necessary for participation in school cultures and systems (Nelson Mandela Foundation, 2005). Expanding and improving comprehensive early childhood care and education, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children is an Education for All goal. Implementation of this goal is recognised by UNESCO as an important goal for improving learner participation in education (UNESCO, 2005), and also for reducing learner absenteeism especially among young children in the early years of schooling (Namibia ME, 1993).
  
- **Children with disabilities:** Many children with learning problems or physical disabilities remain unnoticed and parents or teachers do not give the learners the attention that they require or deserve. The discriminatory practices by parents, learners and teachers affect their access to school. Namibian curriculum policy for Basic Education has a provision for Inclusive Education in the mainstream and is provided in Section 6.1.7 on page 28. The curriculum makes a provision for learners with special needs (Namibia ME, 2010a). However, this policy is not easy to implement as

it requires teachers to be given special training so that they have the competence to respond to learners with a diverse range of learning needs.

➤ **Peer pressure and proximity:** Group choice exerts pressure on individuals to conform to group demands. Harris (1996) indicates that parents shaping values are less powerful than peer groups. Peers tend to group themselves in peer groups that place value on their goals. There are more opportunities for peer pressure within contexts such as schools, where peer proximity is high. It is hence assumed that a choice of a group could have an impact on attendance as well as academic achievements of students. Peer pressure appears to have a high impact on learners' behaviour in high schools (Nelson Mandela Foundation, 2005) and could be observed when learners get swayed easily to absent themselves from school in the interests of group activities. This particularly becomes a problem when learners in schools are exposed to deviant peers such as members of a gang (Kearney, 2008). Peer pressure can lead to gang related activities and associated forms of absenteeism, as observed in USA. Harris (1996) and Kearney (2008) both report that participation in gangs could have a negative effect on school attendance. They also attribute gang related activities to social cultural factors, indicating that factors influencing absenteeism are often inter-related.

- **Socio-cultural factors**

There are also a number of socio-cultural factors that influence learner absenteeism discussed below.

➤ **Inferiority complex, stigma and ethnic minority status:** Inferiority complexes can result from a variety of factors such as poverty, culture, religious beliefs, being part of marginalised groups and others. In many schools especially public schools, ethnic minority students may develop a feeling of not being part of the group. This could result in alienation, isolation and later have an influence on truancy (Boykin & Ellison, 1995). In such cases, culture and linguistic differences of the ethnic minority students are not taken care of in teaching approaches and the content of the national curriculum. Students who are faced with this tend to be faced with a loss of their own culture and traditions (Klein, 1994). In a southern African context, stigma resulting from poverty and /or HIV/AIDS is increasingly being recognised as a factor influencing learner absenteeism. For example, UNAIDS (2006: 16) states that:

Numerous instances have been documented of children affected by HIV experiencing a range of subtle and more obvious forms of stigma and violence, from rejection, name-calling and

physical aggression, to not being able to participate in physical education or share sanitary facilities, to the denial of education.

- **Traditional Ceremonies:** Initiating rites, weddings and funerals also have an influence on learner absenteeism. The Nelson Mandela Foundation (2005) study reported that in the three provinces being studied - Kwazulu Natal, Limpopo and the Eastern Cape, 13%, 48% and 52% respectively stated that they sent school girls to participate in traditional ceremonies. Corresponding figures for boys were 7%, 53% and 89% respectively. The periods of attending such ceremonies have, however, been shortened in the Eastern Cape and Limpopo as these ceremonies are now held during the school holidays (Nelson Mandela Foundation, 2005). Writing from Zimbabwe, Chikunda and Shoko (2009) reported that both girls and boys tended to lose interest in schooling after attending initiation ceremonies.
  
- **Disorganised and unsafe neighbourhood:** A child living in an environment that is disorganised is also likely to be influenced by the conditions dictating the environment (Kearney, 2008). A disorganised environment is due to lack of programmed activities that learners should follow with teachers' guidance throughout their school days. It is well known that in South Africa, many schools fail to provide an adequately organised school day, as teachers sometimes arrive late for school, or are absent from classes due to a variety of reasons. UNESCO (2009b) reports that children in Africa are exposed to far less formal teaching time than children in developed countries. Few schools provide for after school care or additional activities to provide for additional stimulation.
  
- **Geographical sub-cultural values:** Culture of most if not all communities is greatly influenced by the environment. This normally goes with beliefs and cultural values (Kearney, 2008). A community that develops a culture of less participation in school affairs has a negative impact of learner attendance, as was shown to be the case in the San community in Northern Namibia (Namibia ME, 2001b) cited in Chapter 1. This also affects the education of girls as some communities value educated boys more than educated girls (UNESCO, 2004c, 2009b).

- **Family Factors**

As in the other categories above, there are a number of family factors that influence learner absenteeism, discussed below:

- **Weak parent-child relationship:** Klein (1994) reports that a weak parent-child relationship when coupled with inadequate parental involvement regarding education is linked to truancy. UNESCO (2009) reports that where parent-child relationships are strongly established, and where parents tend to have a greater interest in their children's education, children are more likely to succeed in school. Increased parental involvement in education has also been linked to changes in class in the South African context (Chisholm, 2004).
  
- **Alcohol and drug abuse:** Parental alcohol and drug abuse and domestic violence are grouped under potential family factors that influence learners' participation in education. In California, USA, excessive use of alcohol is described as having a financial impact on household income that in due course has an effect on constant availability of food at home. Food security at home has an impact on learner attendance (Rumberger, Ghatak, Poulos, Ritter & Dornbusch, 1990).
  
- **Single parenting:** Klein (1994) reports that research has revealed that learners from single-parent homes tend to accumulate higher rates of absenteeism and truancy than those from two-parent families. I was not able to obtain data on this in a southern African context, and this data also does not fully account for more complex extended family structures that are often the norm in a southern African context. The closest available data on this issue is linked to learners whose parents are HIV/AIDS positive, where it has been shown that learners with single parents are more vulnerable to the impacts of HIV/AIDS than households with two parents (UNAIDS, 2006).
  
- **Lack of or reduced parental participation:** Kearney (2007) indicates that there is no consensual definition for what 'parental involvement' means, but states that the USA National Education Association focuses on behaviours such as;
  - Reading to a child
  - Attending school meetings/ conferences
  - Checking homework
  - Limiting hours of watching television
  - Monitoring a child's school attendance.

In South Africa the School Act of 1996 (South Africa DoE, 1996a) brought School Governing Bodies into existence, with the aim of enhancing parental involvement in schooling. Similarly, the

Namibian Education Act 16 of 2001 (Namibia ME, 2001c) allows for the establishment a similar body called a School Board. Both bodies are democratically elected and are meant to ensure democratic participation of parents in the running of the school. But these have been variously successful, with many School Boards affected by power relations, parental inexperience of the school system, or general lack of involvement of parents.

Railsback (2004) reported a positive correlation between parental participation in lower education and attendance. On a similar note, Kearney (2007) indicates that a child's performance is commonly linked to parent's involvement in a child's education and progress. Research also shows that family dynamics play a key role in absenteeism and truancy (Dougherty, 1999; Klein, 1994). When parents play a role in a learner's education, truancy decreases (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002).

➤ **Parental over-expectation:** Absenteeism can also be linked to parental over-expectation. This is when parents expect too much from their child in terms of academic performance. Sometimes parents make comparisons between their own child and those of their friends. Such over-expectation from parents can affect a child's performance. Similarly low expectation of academic performance could also lead to low attendance (Kearney, 2008).

- **Biophysical factors**

Much less widely reported on in the school absenteeism literature, are biophysical conditions which affect learners' attendance at school. With the advent of climate change, however, these are being increasingly emphasised.

➤ **Specific year or season:** The Nelson Mandela Foundation (2005) study, indicated that attendance is lower in the beginning (Monday) and at the end (Friday) of the week. The study also notes that absenteeism is similarly higher during the cold and rainy seasons, a finding also reported by Moseki (2004). This is because extreme weather conditions affect learner mobility between school and home.

➤ **Environmental conditions:** There are other environmental conditions that can affect learner absenteeism. Hogan (2008) reported that the physical changes in the local environment (regular changes to the floodplains in the Rufiji wetland system) necessitated parents moving their croplands regularly. This was not provided for in the schooling system and children often had to move with their parents away from where the school was located, a factor which regularly affected

their ability to attend school. Similarly, many children are affected by nomadic conditions where families have to move livestock grazing sites, and or move in search of water sources. UNESCO (2009b) reports that nomadic activities linked to environmental conditions have an impact on regularity of school attendance.

- **Extreme weather conditions (droughts, floods, heat waves):** UNICEF (2007) has recently published a report on the projected impact of climate change on children. In this report they note that incidences of extreme weather conditions such as droughts, floods and heat waves are likely to affect learners' participation in education. Such factors have recently affected the north of Namibia which has experienced severe flooding. Southern Africa is projected to be exposed to more severe weather conditions, and in Namibia increased heat, drought and flooding is said to be going to affect behaviour and livelihood patterns of people, particularly those living in poverty (UNEP, 2006). Little is said about this in educational policy and provisioning at present.
- **Water and sanitation facilities:** Another biophysical factor affecting learner absenteeism in schools is availability of adequate water and sanitation facilities. UNAIDS (2006: 17) states that:

The establishment of adequate hygiene and sanitation facilities is also a key to the learning environment. About 1 in 10 school-age African girls do not attend school during menstruation or drop out at puberty because of the lack of clean and private sanitation facilities in schools (United Nations World Water Assessment Programme, 2003). Moreover, there is evidence that when children have to leave school and walk significant distances for clean drinking water, for example, they may not always return to class.

## 2.5 RANKING CATEGORIES OF CAUSES OF ABSENTEEISM

Porteus et al.'s (2000) study of the causes of absenteeism among a group of marginalised urban children in South Africa between 7-15 years old ranked the following in order of importance:

1. Poverty
2. Individual child related factors
3. Family stability and support
4. Residential mobility/ documentation
5. School-based related factors
6. Community violence

The above ranking indicated that poverty was the factor that contributed most to children being absent from school. By poverty the Porteus et al. study referred to an interaction between physical, social and psychological factors. As shown in the discussion above on factors influencing absenteeism, it is, however, difficult to isolate poverty from other factors (even when viewed from this interactional perspective), as poverty related factors often tend to function within a systemic context associated with poverty, where many of the other factors influence or exacerbate factors directly associated with poverty. Hence there is a need for a systems view of the issues (see also Chapters 4 and 5).

## 2.6 OVERALL RATES OF ABSENTEEISM

Overall rates of absenteeism refer to the percentage of learners absent for a specific period of time. Sometimes school principals could be asked to estimate the number of learners absent on average in their schools. This provides an approximate rate. However, this can be best done by using learner attendance registers to get number of days learners have been absent for a given period from which the percentage can be calculated (South Africa DoE, 2007).

Rates of absenteeism vary from school to school, from region to region, and between developed and undeveloped countries. In developed nations absenteeism usually ranges from between 6% and 8% (South Africa DoE, 2007). In Tasmanian schools, the absenteeism per day was 8% (Tasmanian Government, 2002). Kearney (2006) stated in America that the rates tended to be higher among adolescents (6.6%) and lower among younger children (4.9%). In African countries absenteeism is sometimes as high as 50%. In South Africa the absenteeism rate ranges between 5% and 15% (South Africa Government Communication and Information System, 2008). In Namibia studies were conducted by SACMEQ to determine the quality of education. During this study it was revealed that absenteeism was as high as 50% among Grade 6 learners (SACMEQ, 2005). These were schools where learner absenteeism was considered to be a 'huge problem'. However, in the same report it was indicated that learner absenteeism was not as huge as teacher absenteeism. In Namibia absenteeism is highest amongst marginalised communities. According to the 2001 National Population and Housing Census, participation in schooling amongst 6-24 year olds in the San community settlement (Tsumkwe) was only 62.7%. This implies a very high rate of absenteeism.

However, the School Development Plan (SDP) and Plan of Action for Academic Improvement (PAAI) document in lines with National Standards and Performance Indicators (NSPI) states that "a school should establish learner attendance patterns of 97% or better and reduce absenteeism to 3% or

less”(Namibia ME, 2008c: 6). In other words rates of absenteeism should not be higher than 3%. However, the document neither provides reasons why learners stay away from school, nor does it propose strategies to reduce absenteeism.

The question is “how does a school maintain 97% attendance without knowing why learners are absent from school?” For this reason, it is essential to find out why learners are absent from school in order to establish realistic learner attendance patterns and to more accurately determine the extent of learner absenteeism. It is this question that this study seeks to address, as indicated in Chapter 1. Overall absenteeism rates are therefore only broadly useful, and a much more in-depth understanding of the issue is needed for these to have meaning in context, and for reasonable absenteeism management strategies to be put in place, a point I discuss in more detail in the next section.

## 2.7 STRATEGIES TO MANAGE ABSENTEEISM

### 2.7.1 BEST PRACTICE RELATED TO ABSENTEEISM AND TRUANCY INTERVENTION

Teasley (2004) describes what he terms ‘best practices’ related to absenteeism and truancy intervention under the headings: individual interventions, school-based interventions, interventions with families, interventions with ethnic minority students and neighbourhood and community interventions. While these are useful strategies to think through for managing absenteeism, it should be noted that they have been developed in the USA. I was not able to find equivalent literature on best practices to manage absenteeism in a southern African context beyond general recommendations for improving educational quality, teacher proficiency, and reducing school fees (recommended by UNESCO, 2009b).

- **Individual intervention**

Teasley (2004) states that this involves the teacher/social worker determining and addressing individual reasons of truancy or absenteeism. Flexible tutoring is then done as a means of motivation. This could involve peer tutoring as an effective means of making use of older students to work with young students. Mentoring is also effective among single-parent households or with youths who have disconnected from their parents. School social workers or school counselors may be involved (Teasley, 2004). In a southern African context, emphasis seems to be more towards identifying children who suffer from health and malnutrition related issues, particularly HIV/AIDS conditions, or issues related to child abuse and planning interventions for these (UNESCO, 2004a). There is also evidence of individual

intervention associated with teenage pregnancy, where counseling is recommended, as indicated in the policy framework described in Section 2.2.

- **School-based intervention**

To prevent and reduce truancy problems, Epstein and Sheldon (2002) recommend that schools need to change their administrative structures so as to improve the quality of instruction. This improves the interpersonal relations between teacher and learners. To achieve this, the following three broad strategies could be adopted: taking a comprehensive approach to attendance with activities that involve students, families and communities, using more positive involvement than punishing activities and sustaining a focus on improving attendance over time.

UNESCO (2004a, 2009a) makes similar types of recommendations but these tend to focus more directly on issues of quality instruction, learner care, strategies for inclusivity, and strategies to improve parental literacy and involvement in the schooling system.

- **Intervention with families**

Bell et al. (1994) and Klein (1994) identified essential elements applicable to practitioners that should be considered in the assessment and interactions with families with the goal of reducing truancy. This involved understanding family values and attitudes towards school and education that could be coupled with parental knowledge of the child's academic performance. This could easily be possible when there is good communication between children, parents, and the school. Both the child and parent should be well informed and have a good understanding of the local truancy laws. This enables parents to adopt effective methods of disciplining children and making sure they attend school. As indicated in the discussions above, the situation in Southern Africa would seem to be more complex, as families are affected by poverty, and issues such as HIV/AIDS and low levels of literacy, which makes it more complex than simply suggesting that parents should improve communication with the school, or change their attitudes to schooling. Efforts to intervene at a family level have been made, especially to reduce payment of school fees, which has had an enormous effect on reducing learner absenteeism (UNESCO, 2004c, 2009b).

- **Interventions with ethnic minority and marginalised students**

Teasley (2004) recommends that schools should assess whether teaching and learning are related to the environment to determine whether the curriculum meets the cultural needs of ethnic minority

students. He states that school's social workers should play an important role in this case. They should help to reduce the alienation and disassociation by acquiring knowledge of the students' background. The recommendation is that a curriculum could be designed specifically for the minority implemented in special classes afterschool programme (Teasley, 2004; Boykin & Ellison, 1995). In a southern African context, the emphasis tends to be on linguistic inclusivity where language policies are being made to ensure that learners can learn in their mother tongue, particularly in the early years. This is because the languages of learning have tended to be influenced by colonial and apartheid policies in the past. Most recently, after independence in South Africa and Namibia, there has also been a strong emphasis on racial inclusivity and equity in schools as strategies for inclusion. The concept of ethnic minority is not as widely used in the southern African context as in the USA. However, there are efforts to address marginalised groups, such as the study of Hogan (2008) which recommended a flexible curriculum for children who could not attend school due to migration patterns associated with a local wetland. These are, however, not easily mainstreamed as is also shown by the lack of effective forms of inclusive education in southern African schools.

- **Neighbourhood and community intervention**

This is mostly applicable in contexts of high level single-parenting, low income, high unemployment and under employment. The publication 'Juvenile Justice Bulletin' focusing on truancy reduction and keeping students in school in Washington DC (Baker, Sigmon & Nugent, 2001), mention the following successful evidence-based programme which shows how community-based interventions can address issues of absenteeism:

- Coming up with community education awareness programmes and effective truancy reduction programmes. This could be coupled with enforcement of attendance regulations.
- To achieve the above would demand parental involvement and community involvement and where weaknesses are observed parents could be sanctioned for continued non-compliance and holding them responsible for failure to comply with regulations in place.
- To achieve the above a diversion programme should be offered that addresses causes of truancy for parents and the affected learners.

Neighbourhood and community intervention is also seen as an important strategy for supporting HIV/AIDS affected children in a sub-Saharan African context. Parents, teachers, administrators and community service centres such as health care clinics and social services all need to co-operate to

address HIV/AIDS issues, and to ensure that learners can access and participate in education (UNAIDS, 2006).

UNICEF (Zaalouk, 2004) reports on an initiative to establish community schools as a social movement to address the problems of access and poor quality of education in Egypt. Zaalouk (ibid.) reports high levels of participation in the establishment and management of the 154 community schools and recommends the use of learner-centred pedagogy, as well as careful monitoring of daily attendance. In these schools, there are between 0.8% and 2.4% dropouts, mainly from girls getting married, and boys dropping out during the agricultural season. However, through ongoing anti-early marriage campaigns, and the institution of a flexible curriculum for boys during the agriculture season, these issues are being addressed at a community level and more learners are completing their education.

- **Cash payments**

There are also other types of interventions that are aimed at addressing absenteeism. A study recently undertaken by the World Bank shows how young women between the ages of 13 and 22 in Malawi who were given cash payments had significantly lower school absenteeism and at the same time lower HIV and other sexually transmitted infection rates than other groups in their communities. The beneficiaries of the cash transfer were as many as 3796 young women who were randomly enrolled from a district in Malawi with high rates of HIV and school dropouts. The agreed condition for cash benefits every month was that girls who were enrolled in the programme had to attend school regularly. Eighteen months after the commencement of the programme results showed that school attendance improved and the HIV infections among the participants in the programme was 60% lower than those who were not part of the programme (control group) and who did not receive the cash payment. This in itself implies that poverty can influence learners to find other unacceptable means of getting money or support (World Reduce Absenteeism, 2010)

## 2.8 BENEFITS OF REDUCING ABENTEEISM IN SCHOOL

While absenteeism remains an obstacle to effective teaching and learning improving learners' performance, there is little argument that a school will benefit in several ways by reducing absenteeism. Reid (2003) discusses various ways in which primary schools can benefit from reducing absenteeism:

- Reducing absenteeism in the primary phase is geared towards the needs of the secondary phase. It increases the confidence between the two related phases of primary and secondary schools as they strive to achieve quality education.
- The inheritance of truants is reduced from primary to secondary and this improves the working relations.
- Parents of the low attenders and low achievers realise the need to be more supportive to schools, children and the importance of attendance. This aids to drastically lower sibling-related absence.
- It helps schools to realise that their own developed environmentally friendly regulations policies are more effective than adapting policies from elsewhere.
- Effective management of attendance in all schools has an effect on the effectiveness of teaching and learning. This has a direct effect on the school's levels of literacy, numeracy and performance in the external examination, thereby improving the image of the school from an 'underachieving' school, to an improving and rising school.
- Improving schools' rates of attendance is a good means of setting good records and as a result this in turn improves parental and stakeholders' participation in school programmes with confidence.
- Discipline improves and makes the school environment generally conducive for learning as the levels of bullying are reduced.

In a Southern African context, reducing absenteeism has the positive benefit of providing learners with greater chances of getting out of poverty, improving health and well-being and quality of life opportunities, especially for girls. Increased education amongst the population also contributes to improved economic conditions and reduction of poverty (UNESCO, 2004c, 2009b). The benefits are therefore broadly social and socio-economic; hence the emphasis of government on trying to reduce absenteeism and improve access to education through various policy measures. This chapter has also shown that while the policies are important, they do not always function in practice, due to a complex set of systemically linked factors that influence learner absenteeism.

## CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides an outline of the research design consisting of Phase 1 of the research which involved data collection and Phase 2 of the research, which focused on providing feedback to schools participating in the study to develop the systems model. This involved providing evidence of data collected that was interpreted and analysed prior to the feedback phase.

This chapter also provides further insight into the systems theory approach which underpins the study (as introduced in Chapter 1) and the methods utilised. It explains how the theoretical vantage point allowed for considering the school as a human activity system, and how this influenced data generation, and data analysis, as well as the research design decision to include feedback in Phase 2 of the research to refine the systems model. It further covers validity and trustworthiness as considered through an interpretive lens and addresses how ethical issues were dealt with in the research.

### 3.2 RESEARCH DESIGN

#### 3.2.1 OVERVIEW

The research design was sub-divided into two phases namely: Phase 1 and 2, as mentioned briefly above.

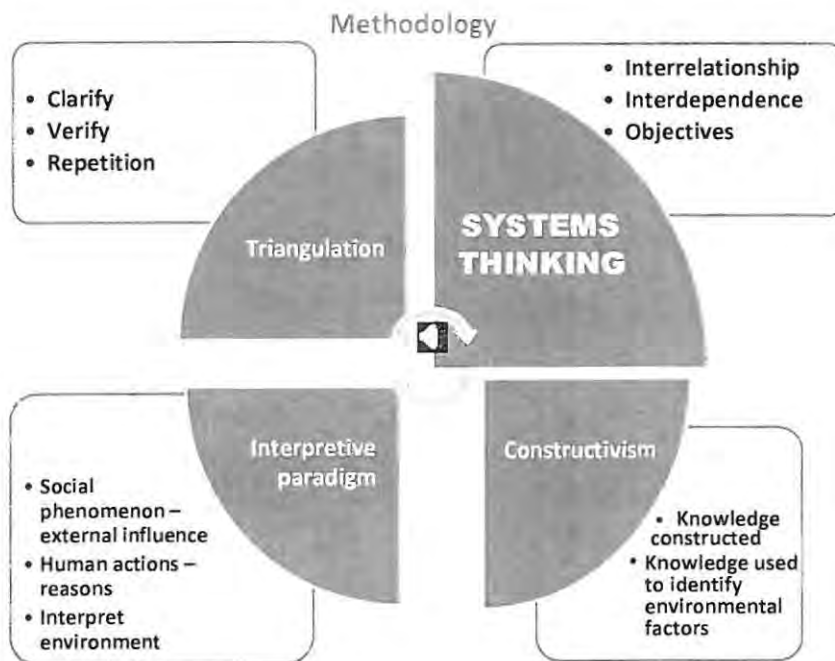
- Phase 1 involved data collection based on the understanding of the school as a human activity system influenced by its environment.
- Phase 2 involved analysis and feedback within the systems framework, to refine a model of the school as a human activity system, influenced by its environment, with specific emphasis on absenteeism issues.

Both Phase 1 and Phase 2 were influenced by systems theory and a constructivist, interpretive approach to the methodology, which is discussed next. A research design, according to Yin (2009: 26) is “the logical sequence that connects the empirical data to a study’s initial research questions, and ultimately, to its conclusions”. A research design should guide a researcher in the process of collecting, analysing, and interpreting observations.

### 3.2.2 METHODOLOGY

#### • Theories and methodology influencing the research

As introduced in Chapter 1, theories of constructivism and systems thinking were used within an interpretive paradigm using qualitative data and triangulation to develop insight into the research question and goals guiding this study. Systems thinking underpinned the whole research design. The theories and their explanations are depicted in Figure 3.1 below, and are discussed in more detail in the following sections.



*Figure 3.1 Model showing theories underpinning the whole research*

#### • The interpretive paradigm and interpretive case study

The research was carried out within the framework of an interpretive paradigm. This is because I was seeking to investigate a social phenomenon (learner absenteeism) influenced by external factors and I was dependent on various human perspectives on this phenomenon; I also had to understand them to make sense of the phenomenon in its system. From an interpretive perspective, human actions have reasons and actions occur within given social structures with social rules that are meaningful to both the observer and the actor (Philips, 1987; Carr & Kemmis, 1986). Therefore, to understand actions of the school system within a given context, it was necessary to understand different interpretations of the environment, as expressed and understood by actors in the school system (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000). As explained below in the section on data collection techniques, this meant

understanding the phenomenon from the point of view of the parents, teachers, education district officials and the learners themselves in the selected schools in the Kavango region. From this perspective, the study can also be viewed as an interpretive case study (Yin, 2009) of factors influencing learner absenteeism in a number of selected schools in the Kavango region.

I intended to provide an overview of different types of schools in the Kavango region, which is where I work as an Inspector of Education (as explained in Chapter 1). Yin (2009) explains that it is important to define the unit of analysis in case study research. In the case of this study, the unit of analysis is the environmental factors influencing learner absenteeism in six school human activity systems in the Kavango region in Namibia.

Patton (1997: 271) states that an interpretive approach seeks *understanding* and “places emphasis on the human capacity to know and understand others through sympathetic introspection and reflection based on detailed narrative gathered through direct observation, in-depth, open-ended interviewing, and case studies”. As I wanted to develop an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon, the case study approach, located within the interpretive paradigm was an appropriate form of research. It also led me to make a careful selection of six schools from the 325 that exist in the Kavango Region (rather than working with too many schools). I hence identified six schools located in different geographic locations with variations of environmental factors (Cohen et al., 2000). The intention was to have a selection of diverse schools that could provide a maximum diversity of viewpoints on the potential environmental factors influencing absenteeism in the Kavango District, in rural and urban areas, as well as the formal and informal settlements found there.

Using the above different locations as a starting point, I identified two schools in each of the following areas: urban, semi-urban and rural. These were selected firstly on the criteria of diversity of environmental context because I was interested in probing the environmental factors that influenced learner absenteeism. A second factor influencing the selection of the schools (after diversity of environmental context) was close proximity to the Regional office. In making the selection of these schools, it was assumed that the diversity of environmental context could provide more meaningful insights into this phenomenon than if I only focused on one type of environmental context. Proximity was also a factor influencing selection, as the Kavango Region is large with several hundred schools, and since I wanted to include an element of constructivism in Phase 2 of the research, it seemed better to be closer to the schools to enable opportunities for considerable feedback.

- **Short description of the six schools:**

All six schools are located in the Kavango region – see Figure 1.1 in Chapter 1.

- a) School 1 (SMa)**

School 1 is also referred to as SMa where 'S' is for 'school' and 'Ma' relates to the initials of the school's name. This description applies to all schools listed below where the first 'S' letter will represent the word 'school' and the following letter(s) will stand for the school's initials. School 1 is located about 200km from Rundu the provincial town within the vicinity of farms in the Mangetti area south of the Kavango region. It is a combined school operating from pre-primary up to Grade 10 with about 198 males and 134 females combining to a total of 332 learners. It has 11 male teachers and 3 female teachers totaling 14 teachers in all (Namibia ME, 2010b). Among the 332 learners, 13 (about 4.0%) of these belong to the San community group (see Analytic memo 9). About 70% of the 332 learners are living in temporary grass thatched huts that are referred to as 'informal hostels' (SMaM1). Nearly all teachers are qualified according to Namibian standards (Namibia ME, 2008a).

- b) School 2 (SN):**

School 2 is located about 100km East of Rundu town in the Kavango region. Like other schools, it also it is a combined school operating from pre-primary to Grade 10 with about 262 male and 209 female learners (total learners: 471) (Namibia ME, 2010b).

Among the 471 learners, only two learners belong to the San community group. About 56% of the learners are day scholars while 44% are accommodated in the government hostel. None of the learners are living in 'informal hostels' (see Analytic memo 9).

The school has 9 female teachers and 11 male teachers (total of 20 teachers) of which nearly all are qualified, meaning they have the minimum of three years tertiary training as prescribed by the Ministry of Education (Namibia ME, 2008a).

- c) School 3 (SO)**

School 3 is located about 280km east of Rundu, the metropolitan area of Kavango region. It is beside the main trans-Kalahari road leading to Botswana and Zambia via the Caprivi region, the region normally described as the 'arm of Namibia'. It is a combined school for Grade 1 to 10 with a learner population of about 169 males and 151 females giving a total of 320 learners

(Namibia ME, 2010b) and among these 22 learners belong to the San community group called the Barakwena (see Analytic memo 9).

School 3 has a hostel that accommodates about 65 learners (20%). Among these, 8% are San community learners and are exempt from paying hostel fees. About 255 (80%) of the learners are day scholars and none of them are living in informal hostels (Namibia ME, 2010b). This was the school with largest number of San community learners among the six schools in which the research was conducted. The school has 6 female teachers and 7 male teachers (total of 13 teachers) and nearly all are qualified teachers with the minimum of three years of tertiary training (Namibia ME, 2008a).

**d) School 4 (SR)**

School 4 is located in the centre of the town Rundu. It is the biggest senior secondary school in the Kavango region with 1157 learners consisting of 609 boys and 548 girls and more than half of the learners are accommodated in the hostel. The school has 22 male teachers and 16 female teachers totaling 38 teachers (Namibia ME, 2010a) and nearly all the teachers were qualified to teach at the various levels where they were placed (Namibia ME, 2008a).

**e) School 5 (Mu)**

School 5 is located about 80km west of Rundu town and adjacent to the Kavango River. It is a combined school with 466 learners consisting of 258 boys and 208 girls and has no hostel accommodation. It has 11 male teachers and 3 female teachers totaling 14 teachers (Namibia ME, 2010b). Most of teachers are qualified to teach at the various levels where they are placed including the principal and one Head of Department (Namibia ME, 2008a).

**f) School 6 (SS)**

School 6 is located west of Rundu town in a suburb called Sauyemwa. Sauyemwa is an informal shanty compound about 3km from the centre of the town. The settlement is administered by the Rundu town council. Rundu town is the main central metropolitan town in the Kavango region located on the banks of the mighty Kavango River which marks the boundary between Namibia and Angola.

School 6 is the biggest combined school in the Kavango region offering Grades 5-10. It has a total learner population of 1294 learners with 621 boys and 773 girls, all day scholars. The school has a total of 40 teachers of which 19 were males and 21 females (Namibia ME, 2010b).

About 90% of these learners come from within the informal settlement (shanty compound) in which the school is located. Only a few learners come from the formal settlement of Rundu town (see Analytic memo 9).

- **Constructivism in the research process**

In addition to simply interpreting the data within the case study framework, I also included an element of constructivism in the research design, particularly in Phase 2 of the research. Here I verified the initial analysis of Phase 1 data with stakeholders in the six schools, and worked with them to construct the systems model presented in Chapter 5 of the study with proposed solutions. Lincoln and Guba (1985: 77) explain that constructivism is consistent with an interpretive approach, as it involves “coming to an understanding of the view of the world held by those people involved in a situation”. They go on to say that Schutz (1967, cited in Lincoln & Guba, 1985: 77) noted that the aim of constructivist research was to “interpret the actions of individuals in the social world and the ways in which individuals give meaning to social phenomena”. However, in this study, I was also interested in the environmental factors, and therefore had to understand how the environment constructs human experiences and actions. This is referred to as a ‘materialist’ form of social constructivism by Clarke (2005: 7) who states that the material world is itself constructed by meanings given by us, and it also constructs how we view the world. She states further that “we routinely make meaning about, within, through and as embodied parts of the material world human, non-human and hybrid” (ibid.). This indicates that we make meaning by interactions with the environment, which is significant to this study, as environmental factors are being investigated for the way in which they influence learner absenteeism. The constructivist process in this research is described in more detail in Section 3.3.

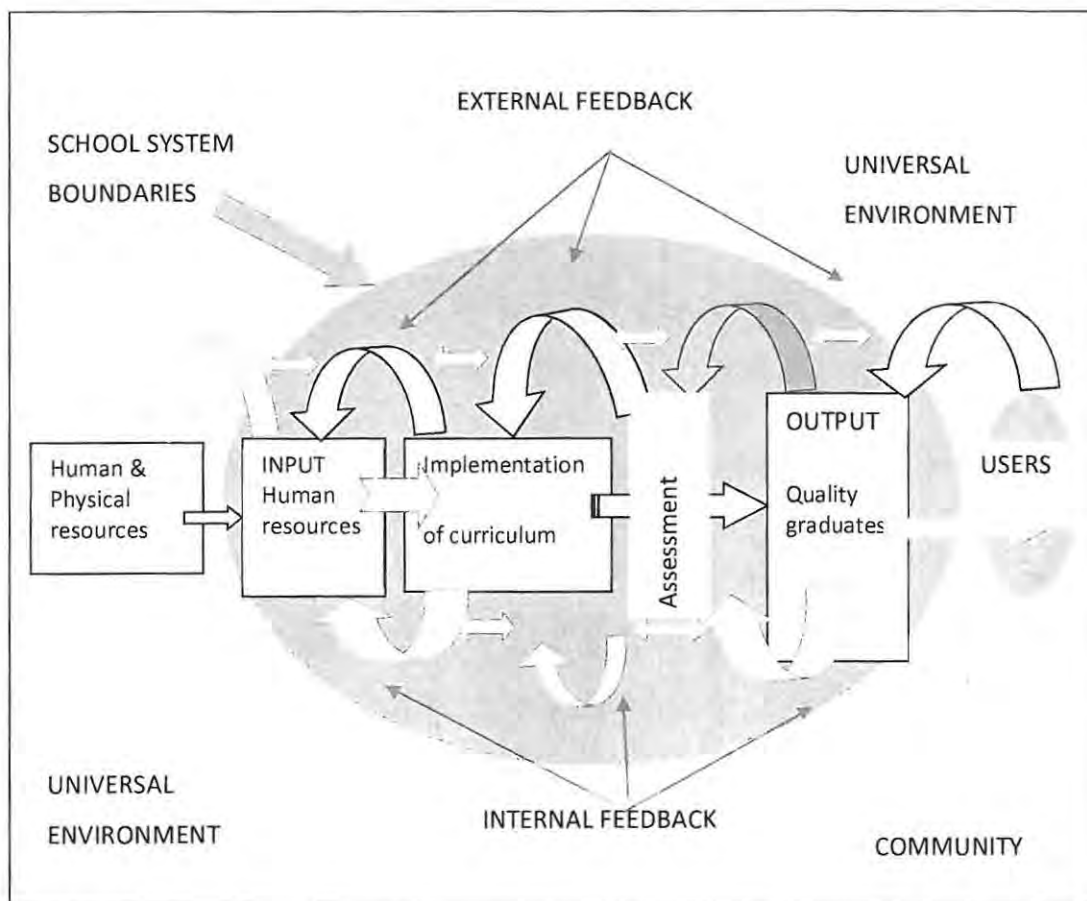
- **A systems perspective and systems theory**

As indicated in Chapter 1 where the systems theoretical approach to this study was introduced, a system is perceived as a whole whose elements ‘hang together’ because they continuously affect each other over time and operate toward a common goal. The word originates from ‘sunistanai’, a Greek verb which originally meant “to cause to stand together” (Senge, Kleiner, Roberts, Ross & Smith, 1994: 90). There are two types of systems, namely, natural and designed systems. The school system, as viewed in this research, is a human activity designed system (Banathy, 1992) and a school as a human activity system exhibits the following characteristics:

- It is an assembly of people and other resources well organised as a whole in order to attain its desired goals. The participants in a system participate and their participation affects the functioning of the system and the people in turn are also affected by the system.

- The participants select and carry out activities individually and collectively for a common goal.
- The participants maintain a set of relations and are committed and motivated.
- It is open and interacts with the environment and while it depends on it, it also contributes to it. As a mutually dependent system it carries out its commitment to the environment responsibly. The environment provides resources for the system to get the support required, and affects the environment in certain ways.
- It acts as a whole toward itself and by itself. It can also sustain itself while being part of and embedded in the environment. (Banathy, 1992)

A given system denotes interdependence, interconnections, and interrelatedness and constitutes an identifiable whole (French & Bell, 1973). Figure 3.2 illustrates a school as an open system showing elements of boundaries, external and internal feedback, as well as input and output factors and relations with the external environment.



**Figure 3.2** School as an 'open system' interacting with the environment (modified from French & Bell, 1973)

To understand how a school operates as a complex system it is necessary to understand the general theory of systems and to link it to systems thinking. This understanding has influenced the data collection and analysis process, as well as the study design, as described in this chapter.

Systems theory views organisations as open systems in active exchange with their surroundings (French & Bell, 1973). Open systems theory emphasises the importance of interaction between the organisation and the environment (Katz & Kahn, 1996); hence many of my interview questions, and the design of the model in Phase 2 focused on this aspect first articulated by the general theory of system theory in 1950 and later when Katz and Kahn first applied open systems theory in 1966. It is a powerful conceptual tool that can be utilised to understand the dynamics of a school as an organisation (French & Bell, 1973).

A school system is an open system in the sense that it is not insulated from the effect of the environment in which it is situated. It is in constant dynamic interaction with the environment and in turn also influences the environment, as was indicated by the various factors that influence learner absenteeism and learner participation in the school system described in Chapter 2. A school system is hence regarded as self regulatory in the sense that it is sensitive to the environmental changes relevant to the system (Banathy, 1992). Self regulation is triggered by:

- Change in the environment (e.g. changes that took place after independence in Namibia towards Education for All, which significantly influenced the schools systems);
- Receiving transformation from the environment by changes required (e.g. new policies that are being put in place to deal with access and retention of learners in schools, such as reduction of school fees).
- The process of feedback on the inadequacy of the output (e.g. the feedback on the inadequacy of learner achievement or learner participation in schooling by national and international research and policy programmes such as UNESCO's EFA monitoring reports). (Banathy, 1992)

Feedback is important as a source of information from the environment about any system such as a school and its performance. A school potentially has two types of feedback, namely, internal and external. Both indicate the inadequacy of the output being produced internally within the system and also externally from the environment by the users (as shown in Figure 3.3). The information provided through feedback enables a comparison to be made between the actual production and the expected production and the difference could either be negative or positive. The output, whether negative or positive, will determine the type of change desired in the environment. For example, if learners are

absent from school, the outputs cannot be achieved, hence feedback on why this is the case is needed to ensure self regulation and adjustment of the system (Banathy, 1992).

Banathy (ibid.) indicates negative feedback gives indications whether the output is within the purpose and goals while positive feedback reflects whether the purpose and goals are aligned. In this research design, I used the constructivist process in Phase 2 to provide feedback to the six schools participating in this study, thus giving them external feedback on the issue being studied, supporting internal discussion and decision making on how the system could improve, and also allowing them to provide feedback (see Chapter 5).

Forrester and Klir (1991) state that there is no comprehensive definition of systems thinking. However, systems thinking involves the use of mental models that acknowledge complex interrelationships. In a systems model we look at problems that have surfaced as result of multiple causes. Multiple causes could have arisen as a result of strategies applied earlier to solve other related problems. Strategies or actions have multiple outcomes including unanticipated side effects. Sometimes strategies taken as immediate relief could produce worse results. Similarly good strategies could produce no immediate solution, hence models need to be developed and regularly reviewed for their efficacy. In this study I sought to develop a model that could be used by stakeholders involved in managing the school system (see Chapter 5). This model can, in future, be reviewed and changed as more knowledge of the phenomenon is gained.

Carpenter (2008) recommends that in all systems approaches with all strategies, all parties should be involved in striving for the solutions gained from feedback, thus allowing for re-alignment of the system. When all parties are involved in a solution they stand a greater chance to come up with system-wide solutions and approaches that one person could have not easily have developed; hence my use of a constructivist approach to Phase 2 of this research. Solutions should also take into consideration individual actions and not only a systems approach (Carpenter, 2008), thus I centred discussions in the constructivist phase on the roles of different actors in the school system to address the issues raised through Phase 1 of the research.

Systems thinking in educational research and application of the systems approach in sharing and responding to the research outcomes, particularly in schools, has the potential to make explanations clearly understood to those involved in the system. It also has potential to support those involved in the research to develop an understanding of education in schools as taking place within a complex human activity system with various levels of interrelated operations that are interdependent, with

interacting components. Systems thinking, also clearly outlines the dynamics of interdependence and relationships of different components of the education system within a given school. The system also explains systems behaviour and the associated systemic changes that can potentially depict the characteristics of the wholeness of the school as an education system (Banathy, 1992).

- **Triangulation to develop a systems perspective**

As indicated above, this research was designed within an interpretivist, case study design, using Phase 1 data generation processes to develop an in-depth understanding of the environmental factors influencing learner absenteeism in the six schools. In this phase questionnaires, interviews and observations were used as the main data generating tools (see Section 3.3 below). This data was analysed using triangulation (testing insights gained from one data source against other data sources) to develop insights that were shared with stakeholders from the six schools in Phase 2 in a constructivist workshop. In this process, data was triangulated and verified against stakeholders' experience and knowledge of the situation and the environmental factors, thus introducing a second level of triangulation to the study. This was used as the basis for refining the systems model presented in Chapter 5 and used by the stakeholders in the study to form and understand the potential solutions to the issues identified in and through the research.

Triangulation was therefore an important interpretivist and constructivist strategy used in the research. Lincoln and Guba (1985: 305) describe triangulation as "a way of making sure that the findings and interpretations will be found *credible*". They also talk about the importance of *contextual validation* (ibid.) in which evidence gained from one source can be assessed by comparing it with evidence from another source (as I did in this study by collecting evidence of the phenomenon of environmental factors influencing learner absenteeism from a diversity of schools, using a diversity of methods), or to collect other kinds of evidence about the source, as I did in this study (by verifying and re-contextualising the data through a constructivist workshop to develop a systems model).

### 3.3 METHODS OF DATA GENERATION

#### 3.3.1 METHODS USED IN PHASE 1 DATA GENERATION

As noted above, a variety of methods of qualitative data generations were used within the interpretivist case study design. Data collection methods were also structured to cover different roleplayers within the school, which as noted earlier, is viewed as a complex human activity system. The methods used were focused on generating data from learners, teachers, school boards (parent

representatives) and education officers. This selection of participants covered a wide range of stakeholders in education of different groups with interrelated roles. This selective engagement of different groups of different categories of ages was deliberate in order to include knowledge and experience of the present and the past and thus gain different perspectives (Masuku, 1999).

- **Questionnaires**

Questionnaires provided structured data collection across the six schools. Administration is possible without representation of the researcher and data is easy to analyse (Mclean, 1994 as cited by Cohen et al., 2000). The questionnaires utilised in this study (see Appendix A-E) incorporated a variety of types of questions such as:

- Closed questions that required either yes or no responses;
- Open questions, that enabled respondents to write free responses of their own choices and opinions with explanations; and
- Ranking questions, which allowed respondents to order their own responses so as to indicate the extent of the impact of environmental factors influencing learner decisions and absenteeism from school. (Cohen et al., 2000)

Questionnaires allowed me to reach a large number of participants quickly and enabled respondents to provide meaningful inputs into the topic (Cohen et al., 2000). Questionnaires of no more than three pages were given to school boards, teachers, school principals and education officers in the six schools, as outlined above and were designed to provide basic information on the school context, and also to probe various factors that are influencing learner absenteeism (see Appendix A-E). The questionnaires also included questions on the scope and extent of learner absenteeism, and the consequences of learner absenteeism, as well as the various roles played by different people in the school system with regard to combating learner absenteeism. The questions were designed in such a way that they were all easily understood by all participants and so that information was easily captured (Cohen et al., 2000). The questions also provided guidance to initiate divergent thinking by looking at different environmental factors. Where clarity was necessary there was a follow-up discussion with each of the respondents.

The designed questionnaires were administered at the start of the research process to two teachers, two members of the school management team (principal included) and one parent representative (school board member) in each school. This was done to test their suitability and thereafter to adjust and make the necessary changes required to improve the tool.

At the end of the whole research process, a total of five questionnaires were completed by each of the six targeted schools and this meant an overall total of 30 questionnaires were received. Two additional questionnaires were administered to two education officers at the regional office (provincial level).

Questionnaire data was analysed using tables, and was triangulated with data from other sources (see Chapter 4).

- **Focus group interviews**

The focus group relies on interaction among groups of six to eight members. Data is generated in the process of interaction. This technique was used with learners because it was quicker, could easily bring together their opinions and was less intimidating than individual interviews (Cohen et al., 2000).

Patton (2002: 388) states that “the power of focus groups resides in their being focused”. This meant that I had to keep the discussions with the learners focused on the topic at hand, while also allowing them to contribute freely.

A specifically chosen group of learners, selected by their class teachers from different classes, was involved in responding to the given topic questions in the presence of the researcher in each of the schools. The responses provided by the group were captured by use of a flip chart. I reflected the main points on the flip chart to allow the group to read and follow the discussion logically. Using the flip chart allowed me to capture the information on environmental factors affecting learner absenteeism in a way that was clear to all. Environmental factors were listed and later categorised into political, social, economic etc. This was followed by ranking of the listed environmental factors to show which of them had the most impact on absenteeism.

There was only one focus group per school and in total six groups of learners in six schools were involved in the focus group interviews (see Appendix B for an example of a focus group interview record that was reflected on flip chart).

A social constructivist approach was used in the focus group interviews, as learners constructed knowledge based on acquired beliefs and experiences of interacting with the environment. Knowledge on environmental issues was mutually created, clarified, structured and organised through joint participation. Learners showed beliefs with serious claims and supported them with reasons as to why or how environmental issues impact on their attendance and learning. For example, if learners said absenteeism was caused by poor parental participation, they were required to support their arguments if possible with examples.

Focus group interviews require favourable conditions for the social construction of meaning. Drawing on Brophy (2002), I created the following conditions during the focus group interview:

- Learning was as a result of by-product of participation in groups;
- Learners shared prior knowledge with the same interpretation in small groups to allow openness;
- Learners had free exchange of beliefs and ideas among themselves based on previous experiences; and
- The researcher engaged the existing knowledge, beliefs and skills of learners by setting challenging problems or posing significant questions during the interview so as to engage learners' cognitive process in their minds. (Brophy, 2002)

- **Interviews**

Besides the focus group interviews and questionnaires, there was also a need for participants (interviewees) to discuss their own interpretations of their responses and to provide additional information through probing of questions by the interviewer. As a result both the management members and class teachers were interviewed after going through their specific responses reflected on questionnaires and learner attendance registers respectively. The above were conducted as follow-up interviews after observation and documental analysis had been completed.

Patton (2002: 343) explains that it is important to have an interview guide (or set of questions) for semi-structured interviews. Patton explains further that "the interview guide provides topics or subject areas within which the interviewer is free to explore, probe, and ask questions that will elucidate and illuminate the particular subject". Based on Patton's understanding, I developed semi-structured interview questions (see Appendix D) based on the inferences that were possible from the questionnaires that the teachers and principals completed and from the observations and documentary data collected.

- **Observations**

Qualitative data was also obtained through observations. Direct observation was an effective method in this research, as it allowed me to gain first-hand insight into some of the environmental factors influencing learner absenteeism, although not all of the factors could be observed directly.

Becker (1970) argued that participant observation is the most comprehensive of all types of research methods and strategies. This is because the observer gathers information while participants and spectators are able to explain what is actually happening (Becker, 1970). He states that the researcher

should make an effort to provide a detailed description of what is being observed, to provide a clear picture and understanding of what transpired and how it transpired.

Becker (1970) indicates that observation should be coupled with interviewing to gain further insight into what is being observed. Morrison (1973) claims that observation enables a researcher to gather data on different settings such as the physical environment and its organisational structure, internal setting and programme setting.

Based on this understanding, I conducted observations in the schools for about 15 minutes before the first period and another 15 minutes of the first period of the day. This involved observing the whole school system in terms of learner attendance, time of late and early arrivals of learners, as well as teachers' efforts and intentions to take note of and control attendance. This allowed me to see what actually happened rather than to only rely on reports of what happened from the respondents. It also served as an opportunity to gather live data (Cohen et al., 2000).

Patton (2002) recommends that field observations be captured immediately, and that one should also produce field notes to complement observation schedules (see Appendix E for an example of my observation notes). He notes that observations may be limited because they focus on external behaviors only and thus I had to complement the observations with interviews, document analysis and focus group data for a fuller picture of what was happening with regard to learner absenteeism. As mentioned above, the observations only allowed me to get an insight into *some* aspects of the research questions, as not all environmental factors can be easily observed. They were particularly useful to gain insight into the in-school environmental factors.

- **Document analysis**

I used document analysis as a quick way to access a lot of relevant information available in different records respectively. In this study, document analysis involved going through different class registers for the first quarter of 2010 for each school for the same specific period between 11 January 2010 and 12 March 2010 (fixed period) to determine the number of days present and absent. This was a period of 45 days. The percentage of absenteeism was calculated for the same period of 45 days for each of the six schools. This is what was referred to as the rates of absenteeism in this study (see Appendix C). Using this data allowed me to establish trends and to get a broader overview of learner absenteeism that would not be easy to achieve from the interviews and questionnaires only. Such contextual information is essential to establish meaning (Irwin, 2001) and hence documentation of class registers was a way of validating existence of absenteeism and its rates at each of the six schools.

### 3.3.2 DATA ANALYSIS AND PHASE 2 WORKSHOP

As noted above, I collected data using the instruments mentioned above for each of the six schools. I then indexed and sorted the data per school using a coded index system (see Appendix H) and analysed the data using an inductive method. Patton (1997), states that inductive designs begin with specific observations and build towards general patterns. Categories or dimensions of analysis emerge from open-ended observations as the researcher comes to understand patterns that exist in the empirical world under study.

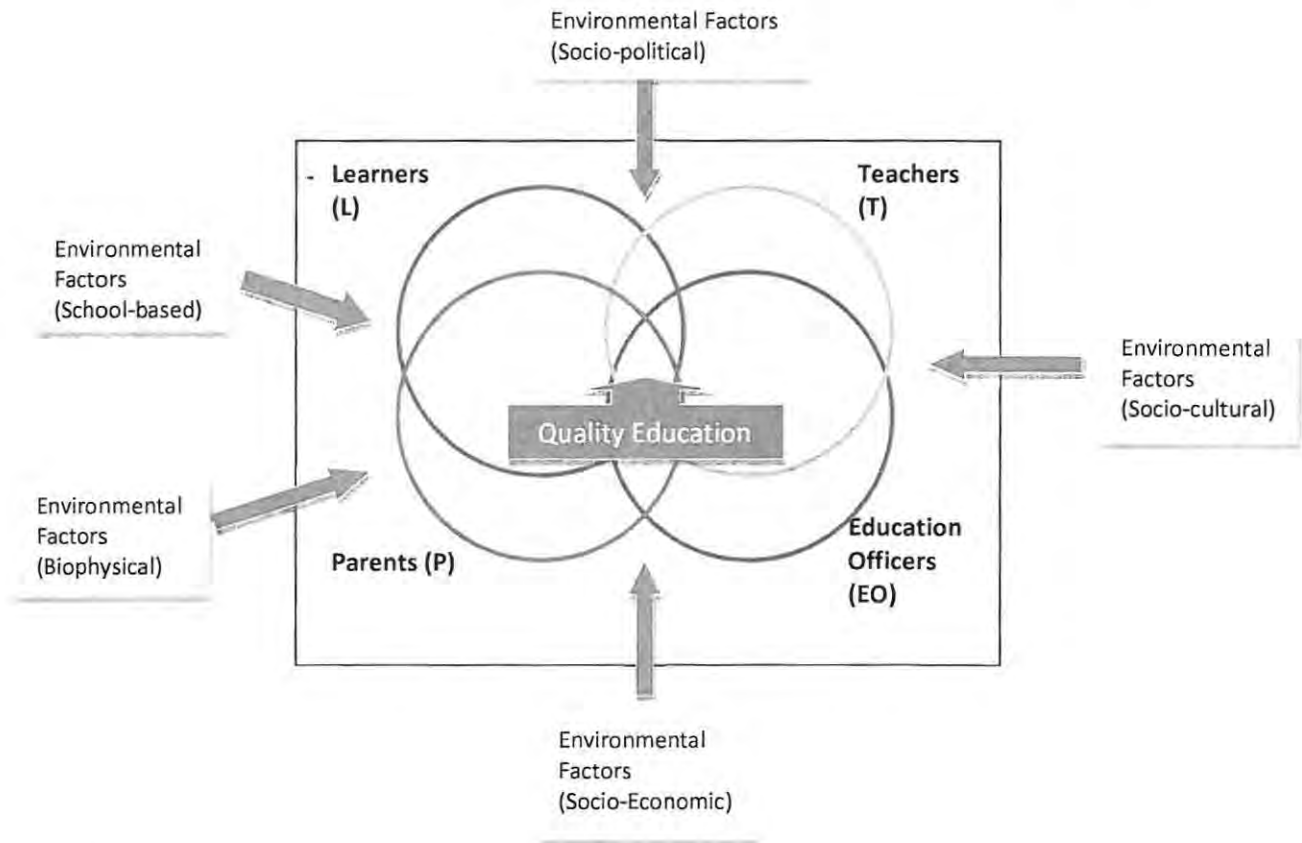
Using this inductive approach, I developed four categories that allowed me to describe:

- **Status of learner absenteeism** in the schools concerned by use of learners' attendance register (calculated rates of absenteeism).
- **Environmental factors influencing learner absenteeism** and this was obtainable from focus group interviews, questionnaires and interviews of class teachers, school managers and school boards.
- **Roles of different stakeholders** in relation to combating environmental factors responsible for learner absenteeism and was obtained by using the above mentioned tools.
- **Insights on strategies** on how a school could possibly address issues of absenteeism (see Appendix D for an example of an Analytical Memo showing how I undertook this analysis).

These four categories were used to develop a profile of each school's case. I did this using a system of data coding and thick description. Once I had compiled each of the case profiles, I organised a workshop (at each school) to provide feedback on the findings of the research. This was followed by a discussion on how the school system could adapt to and respond to the issues of learner absenteeism and construct solutions to the problems as revealed by the data from the research. This workshop data was captured as Phase 2 data (see Appendix F for a record of summary of Powerpoint handouts of one of the workshops).

After this, I used the data from the workshop to develop a systems model for addressing learner absenteeism in Phase 2 as a way of sharing the data with the stakeholders in the schools, the framework which is provided below in Figure 3.3 The model was, however, subject to revision in the following chapters as more ideas started emerging through a more refined analysis during the writing up of the research report (see Chapters 4 and 5). The model shows that the school system may be considered from the perspective of roles of Teachers (T), Learners (L), Parents (P) and Education Officers (EO) and these are interrelated components of a social organisation system having a

relationship with the environment. The roles in a school human activity system and its relationship to the environment could be displayed in a systems thinking model (outlined below in Figure 3.3)



**Figure 3.3** School and its relationship with the environment in a systems thinking model

Figure 3.3 shows the roles in a school as a human activity system and the relationship with environmental factors influencing the socio-ecological context. Togo's (2009) study showed how a university had such a relationship with the environment. As indicated above, construction of the model involved triangulation of research data.

Each of the workshops involved the following process in which I presented about 30 slides for about 30 minutes in a Powerpoint presentation showing:

- The research question
- The context of the research
- Methods used
- Findings, which contained a short summary of the following:

- Rates of absenteeism for each school and for six schools and their average.
  - Environmental factors influencing learner absenteeism.
  - Top five most influential environmental factors for a particular school, as well as for all the six schools.
  - Roles of different stakeholders in reducing learner absenteeism.
  - Different strategies proposed to combat poverty as an environmental factor influencing learner absenteeism.
- Challenges faced by the researcher in the whole process of the research.

The slide presentation was followed by a discussion of the findings and this was a process of collecting additional data and providing clarifications on certain issues, with an emphasis on clarifying potential roles and solutions. Due to interest shown by most schools, discussions were prolonged for nearly 30 minutes or more, making most of the workshops longer than an hour. Data from the workshops was valuable in refining the model (see Chapter 5).

As the study produced a considerable amount of data, I needed to develop strategies to manage data processing and reduction. To do this I developed a set of Analytic Memos (see Appendix I for an example of an Analytic Memo) which provide a way of processing raw data according to key themes or elements of the study that are significant. The following are the analytical memos developed:

- **Analytic Memo 1 (AM-1):** Reasons for absenteeism - a summary of the top five of the six schools.
- **Analytic Memo 2 (AM-2):** The table of the top five environmental factors categorised as economic, political, culture, social, biophysical, personal and school factors.
- **Analytic Memo 3 (AM-3):** Categories of environmental factors and the respondents.
- **Analytic Memo 4 (AM-4):** Roles and strategies that can be used to combat poverty as an environmental factor.
- **Analytic Memo 5 (AM-5):** A summary of document analysis.
- **Analytic Memo 6 (AM-6):** A summary of follow-up questions after document analysis.

To provide final interpretations of the data in relation to the research questions and goals, I used a system of Analytical Statements (Bassey, 1995). Bassey recommends use of this approach because it allows for synthesis of the data, but also for further interpretation of the data based on the research

question and main findings of the study. I used these to guide interpretation and discussion of the data in Chapter 5. The Analytical Statements were:

**Analytical Statement 1:** The six schools have different absenteeism rates. These are not as high as indicated in general statements about absenteeism in the north of Namibia, but there are some patterns of similarity, particularly related to absenteeism of boys.

**Analytical Statement 2:** Poverty is viewed as the most significant environmental factor influencing learner absenteeism in the six schools; however, the effect of poverty is interrelated with other environmental factors such as sickness, household work, alcohol abuse, inadequate opportunities for sustainable livelihoods etc.

**Analytical Statement 3:** There are school-based environmental factors that are not necessarily linked to poverty that are influencing learner absenteeism, that can be addressed through improved professional practice in schools.

**Analytical Statement 4:** All stakeholders have a role to play in addressing environmental factors influencing learner absenteeism within a systems approach. These roles differ, but are inter-related.

**Analytical Statement 5:** A systems approach and systems thinking is applicable in a school as a complete human system in order to address environmental factors influencing learner absenteeism.

### 3.4 RESEARCH ACCESS AND ETHICS

Ethics is concerned with what is right or wrong, proper conduct versus misconduct. I undertook to conduct the research with ethical consideration of the respect for persons, democratic values and quality of education research (Bassegy, 1995). This was done by acknowledging with respect the contributions of participants, and their time spent on participation. In all cases, I also undertook to accept, appreciate and respect the culture of every school and community.

To begin with, I obtained written permission to conduct the research from the Ministry Authority (see Appendix I). After the permission was granted, I made appointments with schools telephonically and negotiated dates for the first visit.

During the first day of visit, the purpose of the research was clearly outlined including how the schools and the ministry would benefit from the outcome of the results. Each individual participant who was requested to participate in the research was made to understand that he or she had the right to

withdraw at any time. I signed a soft contract with the participants, indicating their willingness to participate and showing their names and contact numbers (see Appendix J). The contract also indicated their different roles in the research process and type of tools applicable to different respondents depending on the nature of information and its context. For example, I had to indicate why a focus group interview was the most suitable tool for learners and not necessarily among school teachers, managers and parents. I undertook to protect the identity of the schools and participants in the final write-up of the study, and have used codes/ pseudonyms throughout the study report.

I also clearly indicated that there were two phases involved: Phase 1 involved initial collection of information and Phase 2 focused on providing feedback to make sure that the information collected was shared to obtain participants' additional input before being documented.

### 3.5 VALIDITY AND TRUSTWORTHINESS

According to Lather (1986), validity refers to being believable and trustworthy. Validity through an interpretivist lens refers to being true to the meaning which people make of their reality. To achieve this, I paired schools in a similar environment or vicinity, for example, two schools within San community areas, two hostel schools in an urban area and two schools in semi-urban area to strengthen interpretation.

Although I was not seeking to generalise, the study also had an interest in understanding the diverse range of environmental factors influencing learner absenteeism. The validity sought in this study is not to generalise the findings to all 325 schools, but rather to provide some perspective on the phenomena, based on in-depth understandings of what was happening in the six schools. This is congruent with the interpretive case study design of the study. The different environmental contexts provided a diversity of insights enough to give an understanding of environmental factors influencing learner absenteeism in the six schools and in diverse environmental conditions in the Kavango area. As indicated above, the study also used triangulation of data sources (Cohen et al., 2000) since it compared insights gained from different sources generated from different research techniques. Cohen et al. (ibid.) also refer to triangulation as a method to enhance validity or trustworthiness of research.

Through the feedback workshops I was able to member check interpretations of Phase I data with that of Phase 2. The similarity of emerging information from the two phases was noted, and was seen as an important strategy to ensure that the data was trustworthy. I also used thick descriptions where relevant to show the full meanings shared in the research process. The data is reported on in Chapter 4, which I turn to next.

# CHAPTER 4: ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS INFLUENCING LEARNER ABSENTEEISM IN SIX SCHOOLS IN THE KAVANGO DISTRICT

## 4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the main findings on how environmental factors influence learner absenteeism in six schools in the Kavango region in Namibia. As mentioned in Chapter 3, the research was undertaken in six schools located in different areas in the region covering the west, east, central and south of the Kavango region. One of the schools is located in the centre of the provincial town (Rundu) and the other on the outskirts of the town, referred to as an informal settlement. The remaining four schools are located in rural areas.

According to the latest Education Management Information System (EMIS) data of the Ministry of Education, Namibia (2008a), the Kavango region has more than 70 392 learners enrolled from pre-primary to Grade 12. It has about 2 472 teachers, with the majority of teachers being males in both promotional and non-promotional posts in schools. The region has an average teacher-learner ratio of 1:30.4 in primary and 1:23.3 in secondary schools. The approximate average ratio for the region is 1:28.5. This shows a decrease since 2005 due to more teachers having been employed than learners enrolled. The learners and teachers mentioned above all operate under one Directorate of Education. As indicated in Chapter 1 and in Figure 1.1, the region is located in the north of Namibia bordering Angola.

In this chapter I present firstly a general view of learner absenteeism in the Kavango Region (drawing on national statistics) (see Section 4.2). I then discuss environmental factors influencing learner absenteeism as found in each of the six schools. I discuss each school separately to provide an in-depth perspective (see Sections 4.3 to 4.9). Following this, I provide a view across the data sets and show the most prominent environmental factor influencing learner absenteeism as found in all six schools (see Section 4.10). I then discuss roles of key stakeholders in the school system, and what they thought could be done, within the systems model framework, to address the environmental factors influencing school absenteeism (see Figure 3.4; Section 4.11).

## 4.2 STATUS OF LEARNER ABSENTEEISM IN THE KAVANGO REGION (GENERAL PERSPECTIVES)

Studies were conducted by the southern and East African Consortium for Monitoring Education Quality (SACMEQ) to determine the quality of education in Namibia in 2005. These studies revealed that absenteeism was as high as 50% among the Grade 6 learners (SACMEQ, 2005). These were schools where learner absenteeism was considered to be a 'huge problem'. However in the same report it was indicated that learner absenteeism was not as huge as teacher absenteeism, as mentioned in Chapters 1 and 2.

It is reported that the marginalised communities are largely responsible for high absenteeism. As mentioned in Chapter 1, according to the 2001 National Population and Housing Census, the participation of 6-24 year olds in schooling in the San community settlement (Tsumkwe) was only 62.7% (Namibia ME, 2001a). This low participation among the school-going age could have a negative impact on learner school attendance.

EMIS uses the term 'school leaving' to indicate both dropouts and learners leaving school due to having failed to pass an external examination like Grade 10. According to the latest EMIS statistics of 2008, school leaving increases from Grade 1 to 11 with the highest recorded in Grade 10 being 38.2% (see Table 1.1). However school leaving between Grade 1 and 9 including Grade 11 (non-external examination classes) is referred to as 'dropout', which results from continued absenteeism and ranges from the lowest 0.0% for Grade 1 to 7.2% for Grade 9. EMIS does not put an emphasis on dropout and absenteeism.

According to the standards set by the Directorate of Planning and Quality Assurance, schools should strive to achieve at least a 97% attendance rate or rather not more than a 3% rate of absenteeism, as mentioned in Section 2.6 (Namibia, ME, 2008c).

## 4.3 STATUS OF ABSENTEEISM IN SCHOOL 1 (SCHOOL SMA)

### 4.3.1 SCHOOL PROFILE AND LOCATION

The profile is detailed and discussed in Chapter 3 (Section 3.2.2).

### 4.3.2 RATES OF ABSENTEEISM

As mentioned in Chapter 2, absenteeism refers to the percentage of learners absent over a specific period. As mentioned in Chapter 3, the period of observation was 45 school days. Figures used to

determine the rates of absenteeism were obtained from learners' school attendance registers for all classes which are controlled and marked daily. Table 4.1 shows the rates of school absenteeism of the whole of School 1(SMa) from pre-primary to Grade 10 for the above mentioned period.

**Table 4.1** Average rates of absenteeism for School 1(SMa) in percentages

PHASE	BOYS	GIRLS	AVERAGE
Pre-primary	8.3	12.8	10.6
Junior primary	4.3	3.8	4.1
Senior primary	2.7	3.0	2.9
Junior secondary	3.2	5.5	4.4
<b>AVERAGE</b>	<b>4.6</b>	<b>6.3</b>	<b>5.5</b>

From the table 4.1 above, it can be seen that only pre-primary had high rates of absenteeism for both boys (8.3%) and girls (12.8%) with the overall average of 10.6% quite high while the senior primary phase rates were the lowest with an average of 2.9%. The school in general showed a higher rate of absenteeism as compared to other schools discussed below. This school was the only one where girls' absenteeism was higher than that of boys and reasons given for this were as follows:

- Sickness caused by malaria
- Sickness related to symptoms of pregnancy and later the cause certified to be pregnancy. Poor hygienic conditions of toilets also made female learners stay away from school during periods of menstruation (SRFGI & SSQM1).

The school had a higher rate of absenteeism (an average of 5.5%) than the desired standard of not more than 3%, as mentioned in Section 4.2 above.

#### 4.3.3 ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS INFLUENCING LEARNER ABSENTEEISM

The following factors (shown in Table 4.2) were listed as influencing learners' absenteeism. The factors were derived from the responses in questionnaires A to D. Table 4.2 below shows the respondents are learners, teachers, school managers and school boards. The order in which the factors are listed is not necessarily the order of ranking of the extent to which the environmental factors impact on learner absenteeism.

**Table 4.2** Environmental factors influencing learner absenteeism at School 1 (SMA)

	REASON	LEARNERS	TEACHERS	SCHOOL MANAGERS	SCHOOL BOARD
1	Poverty (hunger, uniform, school fees, walking long distance etc.)	✓	T1, T2	M1, M2	✓
2	Alcohol abuse	✓	T1 T2	M1, M2	
3	Sickness	✓	T1, T2	M2	
4	Accumulated credits from peers	✓			
5	Teachers' negative comments, bad attitude, and insults towards learners	✓		M1	
6	Lack of motivation from both parents and teachers		T1		✓
7	Bullying and teasing among learners	✓			
8	Child abuse by caretakers	✓			
9	Domestic work	✓			
10	Stay with boyfriends and early marriage	✓	T1	M1, M2	
11	Peer pressure	✓	T1, T2	M1	
12	Teacher / learner sexual relationship (sexual abuse)	✓			
13	Over protection by parents		T1	M1, M2	
14	Lack of parental involvement and poor communication		T1, T2	M1, M2	✓
15	Afraid of punishment due to homework not done		T1		
16	Poor school/ class management		T1	M1	
17	Frequent latecoming		T1		
18	Fear of tests			M1, M2	
19	Undermining school authority as a result late arrivals after weekends			M1	✓

Table 4.2 above identifies 19 different factors that influence learner absenteeism. They include economic issues (e.g. poverty); social issues (e.g. teachers' attitudes); school-based issues (poor classroom management), and; health issues (sickness). Some factors were identified by all respondent groups (e.g. poverty), and some were identified by only one group (e.g. sexual abuse by teachers, identified by learners only).

#### 4.3.4 THE TOP FIVE ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS INFLUENCING LEARNER ABSENTEEISM

The data in Table 4.2 was used to rank the school's environmental factors into the top five. First, the factors were categorised into economic, political, social, biophysical, school /policy and personal factors; then I identified the frequency of response for particular factors, and through this identified the factor most frequently cited, to obtain a ranking of the factors (see Table 4.3 below).

**Table 4.3** Top five environmental factors of School 1 (SMa)

RANK	ENVIRONMENTAL FACTOR	CATEGORY OF ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS					
		ECONOMIC	POLITICAL	SOCIAL	BIOPHYSICAL	SCHOOL / POLICY	PERSONAL
1	Poverty	X	X	X			
2	Alcohol abuse			X		X	X
3	Lack of parental involvement	X		X		X	
4	Sickness	X			X		X
5	Stay with boyfriends/ early marriage	X		X			

From the above, it can be seen that many of the environmental factors influencing learner absenteeism in this school are socio-economic. What is significant for this research is to note the way in which many of the environmental factors are *inter-related*. There were various explanations given which provide further insight into these factors, and the *inter-related nature of the factors* which are discussed below.

#### 4.3.5 EXPLANATIONS FOR THE CATEGORISED ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS

As shown in the ranking above, poverty issues were highlighted as *the key factor* influencing learner absenteeism. However, analysis of the data showed that almost all of the other issues mentioned, were *related to* this issue. Poverty issues mentioned were related to economic and social factors, but were also linked to past policies of discrimination in Namibia, which gives them a political aspect; and to biophysical aspects such as lack of access to clean water. Respondents provided various perspectives on the issues, which explain particularly the socio-economic aspects of poverty as an environmental factor influencing learner absenteeism, but which highlight the *inter-related nature of the environmental factors influencing learner absenteeism*. These include for example:

- **Poverty and early marriage:** Because parents are not able to meet the school needs, learners developed sexual relations mostly with adult male lovers who were referred to as 'Sugar Daddies'. The main intention was to have financial support to cater for their school needs and other additional needs. This mostly affected girls because a number of them fell pregnant as a result of sexual relations and abuse. It was also said that "When girls fall pregnant there are more chances that some may completely drop out" (SMaQM1). Early marriage was also said to sometimes result

from the influence of social life within the community. Parents allow early marriages with the intention of passing their school responsibilities to the person marrying their child. This is influenced by the poverty status of the parents as they also wanted some financial benefits from their daughter's new family. This shows how the social factor described above is also directly linked to economic factors (SMaQM1), and how the combination of these factors influences learner absenteeism and dropout rates.

- **Poverty and alcohol abuse:** This was mentioned as a common factor influencing absenteeism, which was also said to be linked to poverty. This issue has economic, social and school factor dimensions, as reflected in data which reported on learners sharing drinking places with adults, said to be common among the learners and parents in the community. It was noted that it was 'a culture' for learners to share popular drinking clubs with adults without the adults reacting or telling the learners to go away from such places. It was also noted that teachers could also be found in the same drinking places with learners without negatively reacting to their presence. Both parents and teachers did not take the responsibility to report such learners to the school authority and as such this was seen as undermining school rules and the authorities (SMaQM1 & SMaQT1). Alcohol abuse was, however, also a school factor, as school rules were said to not be effective, especially in hostel schools, where learners were easily tempted to resort to alcohol drinking over the weekends (SMaIM2). When discipline was being imposed among learners involved in alcohol abuse, neither the school nor the regional office authority had the authority to expel such learners. This made the process of dealing with the problem difficult and as a result learners were said to take advantage of the long process sometimes committing similar offences again (SMaQM1).
- **Poverty and the combination of alcohol and sexual abuse:** According to one respondent (SMaQM1), poverty of the community influenced alcohol and sexual abuse among learners especially those from poor families. Female learners would go to night clubs and drink with the intention of meeting and making friends with whom they would develop sexual relations for financial support. Such relations could lead to being sexually abused for money. Chances of taking protection measures to prevent pregnancy or the spread of sexually transmitted diseases were reduced at such times and hence pregnancies are common. As indicated above, pregnancy could eventually lead to dropout (SMaQM1).

- **Poverty and parents' misconception caused by lack of trust:** Another dimension of this issue is linked to parents' misconceptions of school-based actions to address some of the issues mentioned above. It was noted that sometimes parents are called to attend disciplinary hearings of their children. They would come to school with pre-conceptions that their children were "mistreated because they were hated" (SMaQT2, SMaQT1 & SMaQM1). This showed poor communications between the school and parents, but was also linked to parents not having adequate experience of the role of schools, as many of them were the victims of poverty and had not attended schools themselves (ibid.).
  
- **Poverty and erosion of the African culture:** According to one respondent learners show less respect for their parents and this was an indication of erosion of the African culture. This also reflected on the erosion of social structures which occurred as a result of poverty (SMaQM1).
  
- **Poverty and sickness:** Sickness was discussed as an economic and social factor by the respondents, but it was also linked to biophysical factors. One of the key issues noted was a lack of clean water. This was linked to inefficient policy and poverty related factors as the lack of clean water was as a result of the Ministry of Rural Water Development having insufficient funds to meet the high demand for clean water in schools and communities (SMaQM1). Sickness was also partly a social factor, as there was a lack of systems in the community to create awareness of the preventative measures. It was said that the spread of diseases resulted from a lack of information on measures necessary to prevent the spread of these diseases. Common diseases in the community that were mentioned were malaria, foot infections, bilharzias, tuberculosis and HIV and AIDS. These could be reduced by creating awareness for preventative measures and by better health care facilities (SMaIM1).
  
- **Poverty and lack of parental involvement:** Poverty and parents' own lack of educational experience, led to an ignorance of the importance of education. This in turn had other implications. For example, as a result of the ignorance of the importance of education, the majority of parents did not turn up when called upon for meetings requiring their participation in important decisions that could positively bring about effective learning and teaching, and which could address issues affecting learner absenteeism. This was common among the San community parents. One of the respondents said "some school board members had never showed up for meetings for nearly six months since taking up their new portfolios" (SMaQM1). Another example came from an

experience during the period of research when one school board member was given a questionnaire to complete, and he made the following remark "We are not willing to complete questionnaires because they are meant for teachers" (SMaQM1). Similarly, some parents would quickly react to problems noticed at school by simply stopping their children from going to school and such parents did not see the consequences of having uneducated children at home (SMaQM1).

➤ ***Poverty and negative perception of the contribution of School Board members to the School***

***Development Fund (SDF):*** Related to the issue above, was the issue of poverty and the SDF. Some School Board members had a negative perception of the purpose of contributing to the SDF. Such members made negative comments such as, "meetings meetings, for only School Development Fund" (SMaQM1). Such remarks were meant to influence other parents to stay away from meetings because the common agenda during meetings was all about contributions to the School Development Fund.

***Poverty and parental absenteeism:*** Some parents did not stay with their children during school days. This was because they either stayed on farms as farmers owners involved in small scale farming or were employed on farms as workers. In certain cases parents left their children to stay near a school by themselves during the whole course of the school term. In similar cases they would leave their children to stay with relatives who might exercise very little monitoring of learner activities during school days. Such children would only visit their parents during long weekends or over school holidays. It was reported in the data that parents not living with their children were not able to observe and monitor their school attendance daily as required, and could not attend meetings regularly and would not appear when called upon by the school to discuss their children's school problems (SMaQM1).

➤ ***Poverty and parents not accepting school rules:*** Related to the issues raised above, was the issue that some parents portrayed negative attitudes towards effective implementation of school rules and as such made less effort to motivate their children to attend school. During the interview one respondent said some parents went to the extent of making comments such as "During our time we never used to attend school daily like you, school, school every day is not necessary" (SQMa1P:16). Some parents did not accept school rules because of lack of participation during the process of formulation of school rules, and also because of their own experiences of schooling. It

was also noted repeatedly that such parents did not attend school meetings during which school rules are discussed, changed and new ones formulated (SMaQM1).

#### 4.4 STATUS OF ABSENTEEISM IN SCHOOL 2 (SCHOOL SN)

##### 4.4.1 SCHOOL PROFILE AND LOCATION

School 2 (Coded School SN) has the school profile as detailed and described in Chapter3 Section 3.2.2.

##### 4.4.2 RATES OF ABSENTEEISM IN SCHOOL 2 (SCHOOL SN)

Table 4.4 shows the rates of school absenteeism of the whole of school 2 (SN) from pre-primary to Grade 10 between the periods of observation as mentioned in Section 3.3.1.

**Table 4.4** Average rates of absenteeism of different phases of School 2 (School SN)

GRADE	BOYS	GIRLS	AVERAGE
Junior Primary	7.2	5.6	6.4
Senior Primary	4.7	2.2	3.5
Junior Secondary	1.8	1.8	1.8
<b>AVERAGE %</b>	<b>4.8</b>	<b>3.2</b>	<b>4.0</b>

As indicated in Table 4.4 above, there was a high rate of absenteeism in the junior primary phase (6.4%), escalating to as high as 7.2 % for boys. Generally the absenteeism of boys was higher than that of girls. Boys in the senior primary also had a relatively high absenteeism rate of 4.7%. The reasons given for this are discussed in more detail in Section 5.1 below. Overall the school had a higher than desirable (according to the 3% standard) absenteeism rate, on average 4%.

##### 4.4.3 ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS INFLUENCING ABSENTEEISM AT SCHOOL 2(SCHOOL SN)

The following environmental factors, shown in Table 4.5, were listed as influencing learners' absenteeism. The order in which the factors are listed is not necessarily the order of ranking of the extent to which the environmental factors impact on learner absenteeism. As in Table 4.3, respondents indicating the factors are also indicated. The factors were obtained from forms A-2 and B-2 (see Analytic memos attached).

**Table 4.5 Environmental factors influencing learner absenteeism at School 2 (School SN)**

	REASON	LEARNERS	TEACHERS	SCHOOL MANAGERS	SCHOOL BOARD
1	Poverty (Hunger, uniform, school fees etc)	✓	T1, T2	M1, M2	
2	Sickness	✓	T2		
3	Attending funerals	✓	T2		
4	Latecoming and finding gate closed	✓			
5	Bullying and teasing by fellow learners	✓	T1		
6	Household work	✓		M1, M2	✓
7	Walking long distance between school and home	✓	T1	M1	✓
8	Laziness among learners	✓		M1	✓
9	Domestic violence and broken homes	✓	T1		✓
10	Unequal treatment by teachers who favour performing learners	✓			✓
11	Corporal punishment practised by teachers	✓			
12	Girl mother-child care	✓			
13	OVC- abusive treatment by caregivers at home			M1	
14	Lack of motivation from all stakeholders		T1	M1, M2	✓
15	Accompanying pensioners for pay			M1	
16	Suspension from school			M1	
17	Ignorance of the importance of education		T1	M1	
18	Teachers' bad attitude and as a result learning not interesting		T1	M1	✓
19	Alcohol abuse at night clubs and sleeping late		T1		✓
20	Parents not living with learners		T1		✓
21	Loose school rules				✓
22	Avoiding school rules		T1		
23	Weather- rain		T1		
23	Old age				✓

Table 4.5 identifies 23 different environmental factors influencing learner absenteeism. These range from social issues (e.g. bullying and teasing); economic issues (lack of employment opportunities and poverty); political issues (e.g. avoiding school rules); health issues (e.g. sickness); biophysical issues (e.g. distances and geographical location). Some were identified by all respondent groups (e.g. poverty) while others were only reported by only one respondent group (e.g. teacher discrimination and corporal punishment reported by learners only).

#### 4.4.4 THE TOP FIVE ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS INFLUENCING LEARNER ABSENTEEISM IN SCHOOL 2 (SN)

Table 4.6 below shows the ranking of environmental factors influencing learner absenteeism in School 2 (SN). Ranking was obtained using the same approach as reported on for School 1 above (see Section 4.3.4).

**Table 4.6** Top five environmental factors for School 2 (School SN)

	ENVIRONMENTAL FACTOR	CATEGORY OF ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS					
		ECONOMIC	POLITICAL	SOCIAL	BIOPHYSICAL	SCHOOL / POLICY	PERSONAL
1	Poverty	X	X	X	X	X	
2	Household work	X		X	X		
3	Learning not interesting due to teacher attitude					X	
4	Lack of motivation from all stakeholders	X		X		X	
5	Laziness	X		X			X

From the above, it can be seen that many of the environmental factors influencing learner absenteeism in this school are socio-economic, but that there are also significant school-based factors influencing learner absenteeism, some of which were biophysical (e.g. widely spread, large region without adequate schools). As in School 1 above (see Section 4.3), many of these issues are *inter-related*. There were various explanations given which provide further insight into these factors, and the *inter-related nature of the factors* which are discussed below.

#### 4.4.5 EXPLANATIONS FOR THE CATEGORISED ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS IN SCHOOL 2

As was the case in School 1, poverty emerged as *the most significant* environmental factor influencing learner absenteeism in School 2 (SN). Analysis of the data showed that this issue was *inter-related* with other issues mentioned and prioritised, as shown by the discussion below.

- **Poverty and unemployment:** Respondents in School 2 (SN) referred to a lack of small-scale self-sustaining industries in the community that could generate funds leading to community members with unstable incomes. This affected their ability to cater for learners' school needs and learners whose school needs were not met were likely to stay away from school (SNIM1, SNIB & SNIT1). This was linked to high unemployment in the area, and it was said that there were too many people including secondary school graduates who were not employed. It was also mentioned that unemployed people, like anyone else, also had a social responsibility to meet their children's

school needs. As stated above a failure to cater for school needs could result in learners being absent from school (SNIT1 &SNIT2).

- **Poverty and insufficient funds allocated for the School Feeding Programme (SFP):** Another related issue was the capacity of the school itself to meet the learners' needs for food, as they were not adequately catered for at home. It was reported that the food supplied by the School Feeding Programme (SFP) was insufficient in terms of being able to feed the learners for the whole term and if the food was kept for longer than two months, it would go bad due to poor storage facilities. It was said that both the quantity and quality needed to be improved. It was also noticed that when the school meals were no longer being provided in schools due to supplies running out, the attendance automatically decreased (SNIM1, SNIT1 & SNIB). This indicated how the management of the SFP influenced absenteeism.
- **Poverty and few schools, due to geographical aspects and limited funding:** The population in the Kavango Region was widely spaced and hence needed small schools to service isolated areas (SNIT1). It was reported as being difficult for the Government to provide sufficient schools as isolated small schools increased the costs and resulted in a number of incomplete phases (Grade 1-4). Inadequate funding also made it difficult for the Government to establish enough hostels close to bigger schools that could improve learner attendance by providing access to those learners from isolated areas (SNIT1). This meant that there were not enough schools in the area and most of them had no hostels to accommodate learners to reduce the long walking distance to schools. Parents were not able to afford other means of transport for their children. It was reported that "When learners walk long distance on empty stomachs they tend to be absent from school" (SNIT1).
- **Poverty and domestic work:** It was also reported that children are involved in domestic work during school hours and this meant that they could not go to school. Respondent SNIM1 went on to the extent of saying that in some cases it was equivalent to 'child abuse' to keep a child from school on the basis of assisting with domestic work such as looking after animals, drawing water, fetching firewood and so forth (SNIM1). Learners reported on having to do such work, and also related it to poverty (SNFGI). Respondent SNIM1 explained this by stating that "parents feel they own children and as such children are there to help parents and hence children easily become vulnerable to abuse" (SNIM1).

- **Poverty and 'laziness' among community members:** SNMI1 was of the view that 'laziness' was evident among community members as they spent some of their time drinking alcohol (SNIM1). Most respondents said the community did not value education because unemployment was quite high, despite the fact that children had been educated. This meant that parents were not motivated to support children with school needs as they saw no future employment opportunities for their children in an environment of high unemployment (SNIM1, SNIM2, SNIT1 and SNIT2).
  
- **Poverty and ineffective school rules:** As noted above, children would stay away from school and assist their parents with domestic work because both the children and the parents feel school rules are not effective (SNFG1). This could also be categorised as a personal factor as the children are making a choice to stay away from school. When the school rules were not effective, the school also made very little effort to follow up on children who were absent, and the reasons for them being absent. The school similarly makes a limited effort to call and talk to parents involved in such cases (SNIM1).
  
- **Poverty and lack of motivation from all stake holders:** As noted above, the value of education was not visible due to unemployment. Learners were influenced to believe that there were other sources of earning a living other than getting educated for employment (SNIM1 & SNIT2). With this belief learners became less interested in schooling and being absent from school was seen as a minor issue. The issue also has political dimensions, as government was seen to be failing to create enough jobs and therefore a learner's future was not certain. The need to go to school became a "pleasure or just passing time", (SNIT2). As a result temptations for absenteeism were more likely to occur. This was also a school-based factor, and it was said that schools have no vision/ goals. As one respondent stated: "When a school has no vision the value of its purpose becomes less. Children similarly lose focus and direction because they are not sure of what they could achieve at school and hence they stay away from school" (SNQT1). This lack of motivation extended to the school, where loose school rules were said to be the order of the day. It was noted that when school rules were loose, learners took advantage of the system and truancy could become evident (SNQB & SNQT1). This issue of lack of motivation was also evident amongst teachers and it was noted that teachers do not speak to learners with the purpose motivating them and indicating the importance of education (SNIM2). Teachers were seen to be very influential over learners, particularly in poverty conditions where parents were not always present, and hence their motivation could influence learners towards improved school attendance.

- ***School-based factors reflecting indifference, and inadequate commitment to learning and educational success.*** A number of school-based factors, not necessarily directly, but potentially indirectly linked to poverty, were identified as influencing learner absenteeism. It was said that teachers' teaching methods were boring and as a result learners were not motivated to go to school and chose to stay away. A related problem was that teachers failed to report excessive absenteeism and as such learners do not see being absent without permission as a serious offence (SNQB, SNIT1 & SNQT1). Learners also reported feelings of discrimination based on ethnic divisions and levels of capability. One of the respondents indicated that ethnic divisions were visible at School 2, and learners reported feeling discriminated against according to their ethnic groups (their language speaking). The respondent also noted that in some cases performance awards were given with favours (SNQB). Similarly teachers were reported to be treating learners unfairly as better performing learners were favoured (SNFGI & SNIT1). The practice of corporal punishment was also noted as a factor influencing learner absenteeism. One respondent indicated that teachers did not understand reasons for learners' absenteeism and as such showed less sympathy to those with serious problems (SNQT1). Most learners were being punished for being absent and corporal punishment was practised at this school. Learners were punished by making them kneel down on a cement floor for a long time (SNFGI). Teachers were also reported to be making negative comments about learners. Learners indicated that there was a tendency of making bad remarks to the extent of insulting them and showing no sign of human dignity towards them. Teachers also exhibited an attitude of 'showing off' by making comments such as "I am richer than your father, you stay in farms and do not know anything and you are more stupid than me" (SMaFGI). It was said that the above mentioned teaching practices were demoralising learners, and that these increased the chances of absenteeism.
  
- ***Lack of confidence amongst learners, and at school-based levels:*** There was also a reported lack of confidence amongst learners, particularly when it came to tests and examinations. Fear of tests was cited as being common amongst the learners in School 2, especially amongst those who failed tests or who were not performing well. It was said that such learners would stay away from a test due to lack of confidence (SNQB). This factor could be related to the teaching practices of the teachers, and a lack of adequate support for learners' success. This lack of confidence was not only at the personal level, however amongst the learners, but there appeared to be a broader lack of confidence in the schools' performance amongst parents, learners and even the school management and teachers themselves. It was said that "If a school is always at the bottom of the

list of performing schools, both learners and other stakeholders lose confidence in the performance of the school" (SNQT2). The respondent further stated that poor performance was an indication that teaching and learning was not effective at that particular school. As a result learners could choose to stay away as they had developed the understanding that there was nothing to benefit by attending school regularly (SNQT2). These school-based factors, which were not *necessarily* associated with poverty (i.e. there are cases of high performing schools in poverty stricken communities), had the effect of exacerbating the other factors which were poverty related in influencing learner absenteeism at the school.

#### 4.5 STATUS OF ABSENTEEISM IN SCHOOL 3 (SCHOOL SO)

##### 4.5.1 SCHOOL PROFILE AND LOCATION

The school profile of School 3 (Coded School SO) is detailed and described in Section 3.2.2.

##### 4.5.2 RATES OF ABSENTEEISM IN SCHOOL 3 (SCHOOL SO)

As in the other two cases above, this refers to the percentage of learners who were absent over the observation period, as described in Section 3.3.1.

**Table 4.7** Average rates of absenteeism in School 3 (School SO) in percentages

GRADE	BOYS	GIRLS	AVERAGE
Junior Primary	10.0	7.5	8.7
Senior Primary	6.0	6.3	6.2
Junior Secondary	9.7	2.8	6.3
<b>AVERAGE %</b>	<b>8.6</b>	<b>5.5</b>	<b>7.1</b>

Table 4.7 above shows that boys showed a higher average rate of absenteeism (8.6%) than girls (5.5%). Generally, boys' average rates were between 6.0% and 10% while that of girls was between 2.8 % and 7.5%. Boys in the Junior Primary (10%) and Junior Secondary (9.7%) had higher absenteeism rates than boys in the Senior Primary Phase (6.0%). Conversely, girls in the Junior Secondary phase had the lowest (2.8%) absenteeism rate of all. The reasons for the boys' absenteeism are explained in Section 5.1 below. The junior primary phase showed the highest rates of absenteeism with an average of 8.7% as compared to 6.2% and 6.3% for the senior and junior secondary phase respectively. Overall the school has a high average rate of absenteeism (7.1%), much higher than the expected average standard of 3%.

### 4.5.3 ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS INFLUENCING LEARNER ABSENTEEISM AT SCHOOL 3(SO)

Table 4.8 below shows the different environmental factors influencing learner absenteeism as provided by different respondents in School 3, and as captured in a variety of data sources including Analytical memo forms A-2 and B-2. The order in which the factors are listed is not necessarily the order of ranking of the extent to which the environmental factors impact on learner absenteeism.

**Table 4.8** Environmental factors influencing learner absenteeism at School 3 (SO)

	REASON	LEARNERS	TEACHERS	SCHOOL MANAGERS	SCHOOL BOARD
1	Poverty / hunger	✓	T1, T2	M1, M2	✓
2	Alcohol abuse	✓			
3	Early marriage	✓			
4	Sexual abuse (Including teachers)	✓			
5	Sickness	✓		M2	
6	Transport: Walking long distance (poverty)	✓	T1	M2	
7	Teenage pregnancy	✓			
8	Household work	✓	T1		✓
9	Bullying and teasing	✓	T2		
10	Girls' periods of menstruation	✓			
11	Teachers' attitudes: boring, discriminating and aggressive	✓	T1, T2		✓
12	Attending funerals/ visiting sick relatives and family members	✓		M2	
13	Learners' ignorance of the importance of education	✓	T1		
14	Weather	✓			
15	Lack of commitment of learners	✓	T1, T2	M1, M2	
16	Lack of job opportunity				✓
17	Lack of discipline			M2	✓
18	Domestic problems like divorce, and violence		T2		
19	Peer pressure		T1, T2	M2	
20	Laziness		T2		
21	Old age		T2		
22	Fear of test		T2		
23	Early marriage		T2		
23	Lack of school fees and fund		T2		
24	Lack of parental involvement		T1	M1	
25	Strict school rules/ fear of punishment		T1	M2	
26	Lack of motivation from teachers		T1		
27	Culture of community - nomadic life			M1	
28	Poor hostel accommodation			M1	

As shown in Table 4.8, there was a range of factors (28) influencing learner absenteeism. These included social issues (e.g. peer pressure); school-based issues (e.g. lack of motivation amongst

teachers); cultural issues (e.g. nomadic lifestyles); biophysical issues (e.g. weather patterns); economic issues (e.g. poverty; lack of employment opportunities); and gender issues (e.g. girls' menstruation); and political issues (e.g. neglect and discrimination). Some factors were identified by all respondent groups, while others (e.g. sexual abuse by teachers) were only identified by one respondent group (learners).

#### 4.5.4 TOP FIVE ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS INFLUENCING LEARNER ABSENTEEISM IN SCHOOL 3 (SO)

As in the previous two cases, the information in the table above was used to rank the frequency of environmental factors mentioned by all respondents, captured in Table 4.9 below.

**Table 4.9** Top five environmental factors influencing learner absenteeism in School 3 (SO)

	ENVIRONMENTAL FACTOR	CATEGORY OF ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS					
		ECONOMIC	POLITICAL	SOCIAL	BIOPHYSICAL	SCHOOL / POLICY	PERSONAL
1	Poverty	X	X	X	X		
2	Lack of commitment of learners	X		X			X
3	Alcohol/ drug abuse	X		X		X	X
4	Teacher attitude		X	X		X	
5	Peer pressure	X		X			X

As in the other two cases reported on above (School 1 and 2), poverty was identified as being the most significant environmental factor influencing learner absenteeism in School 3. The same pattern of inter-related dynamics characterised this influencing factor, as is shown in the discussion below.

#### 4.5.5 EXPLANATIONS OF THE CATEGORISED ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS IN SCHOOL 3 (SO)

- **Poverty and lack of opportunity:** Many of the same dynamics of poverty, mentioned in the stories of the two schools above, also prevail in School 3. Lack of opportunity, linked to a lack of small-scale, sustaining industries, and the influence that this has over parents' income stability and hence their capacity to provide for their children's schooling needs was mentioned in School 3 (SO) (SOIM1 and SOIT2). This, in the case of School 2, was linked to poor skills in the community. It was reported that the community lacked skills that could enable them to effectively embark on productive farming projects to generate income (SOIM1). This has similarly been mentioned by SNIT1 & SNIT2 in the case of School 2. In the case of School 3, many of the parents were dependent on food handouts that were mainly supplied by the Government and non-governmental

organisations. This was further exacerbated by biophysical factors, which makes agricultural production difficult throughout the year, as the region was dry. This also influenced the nomadic lifestyles of the people in the area.

- **Poverty, unequal distribution of resources:** The San community members and the Barakwena felt they were a marginalised community and as such were neglected in the sense that development was not visible in their area. Similarly resource distribution by the Education Regional Office remained unequal. Discussing this issue, one respondent gave an example of the boys' school hostel that was in extremely poor condition and nothing was being done to upgrade or replace it. Such a hostel could discourage learners from going to school and as result this could lead to absenteeism (SOIT1).
  
- **Poverty and domestic work at home:** As discussed in the case of School 2, children in School 3 were also frequently required to do domestic work for many of the same reasons and consequences, as discussed in the case of School 2. In the case of School 3, children were being used in various income generating activities during school hours, and this was also seen as a form of child abuse by one of the teachers (SOIT2).
  
- **Poverty and nomadic lifestyles:** Initially Omega, where the school is located, was a settlement for the San community, specifically the Barakwena community members (a section of the San community). This means the San community members form a good proportion of Omega residents (SOIT2). Their continued nomadic life has resulted in a very unstable source of income that could not sustain school fees and funds. This is an economic and political factor (SOIM2 & SOIT1), as it was said that government has ignored the plight of the San community. Respondent SOIM2 indicated that the plight, culture and needs of the community had been ignored with the coming of Namibian independence since 1990 and the installation of the new government. Employment opportunities have not been created. This was compared to the former colonial/ apartheid government that employed the San community in the South African Defense Force, as the region lies on the Namibian/ Angolan border, the site of a long war between the liberation forces and the South African government, who occupied Namibia and governed it under apartheid policies under the name of South West Africa after the Second World War. The fact that this section of the community felt left out after independence, meant that they were not motivated enough to participate in school programmes as required by the school. Lack of parental participation has led

to learners being less motivated and in due course has resulted in increased absenteeism, according to one respondent, a school manager (SOIM2).

- **Poverty, lack of commitment of learners, and learners above average age:** Similar patterns of lack of commitment to school and education were found in School 3, to those in School 2 (see Section 4.4.5). However, this school also housed learners who were far above the average age of the class, and it was said that these 'average' learners normally did not show commitment to school. The phenomenon of over-age learners was linked to poverty and parents' inability to provide for stable livelihoods. It was said that learners who started school at a late age, had a 'record' of having dropped out at particular phases or have been repeating various phases for different reasons. As a teacher respondent explained "Such a category of learner tends to be less motivated and could easily stay away from school since school is not interesting any more to them" (SOIT2).
  
- **Teaching and school practices that show lack of commitment to learners' success:** As in the case of School 2, in School 3 the phenomenon of teachers lacking commitment to motivate learners was also mentioned. It was said that teachers needed to constantly motivate learners and emphasise the importance of school (SOQM1, SOQT1 & SOQT2). Failure to do so could lead to learners becoming deviants and staying away from school. The phenomenon of boring or uninteresting lessons was also noted in the case of this school. It was said that if lessons were not interesting for various reasons, learners lost interest. Loss of interest had a direct impact on commitment (SOQT2). In the focus group discussion, learners indicated that some of the attitudes of teachers at School 3 were quite negative as they showed little concern or care for the learners and as a result learners were not motivated by their teachers (SOFG1; SOQM2). The learners also indicated that they were not treated equally as some of them were discriminated against by their teachers (SOFG1).
  
- **Sexual abuse:** In this school the issue of sexual abuse was reported by the learners. It was noted that when they were sexually abused by their fellow learners and teachers, they lost interest and eventually became less committed, and could even choose to stay away from school because of this (SOFG1). In the focus group discussion with learners, they reported that teachers also sexually abused them (SOFGI). This is a school-based factor that is not *necessarily* associated with poverty. It appears to be associated with a lack of commitment to the educational success of learners,

which is linked to the previous point discussed above, but can also be linked to poverty, as learners in poverty-stricken environments may be more vulnerable to such forms of abuse, and may lack mechanisms for addressing them.

- **Poverty and alcohol/ drug abuse:** As in the case of Schools 1 and 2, the issue of alcohol abuse and its links to poverty and lack of adequate responses in the community, also emerged in the case of School 3. The same phenomenon of learners sharing drinking places with teachers and community members was reported. It was said that learners tend to be absent from school if they take alcohol (SMaQM1). This was also discussed in relation to the social factor of peer pressure, and it was said that "Peer pressure could lead to taking decisions that could result in taking alcohol especially during weekends ... This has led to most Barakwena learners dropping out of school before completing Grade 10" (SOIT1 & SOIT2). This is also, however, linked to the lack of teachers being responsible role models, and learners, in the focus group discussion, felt that teachers sharing drinking places with learners were not good role models. They noted too that such teachers would in most cases place little emphasis on the effect of alcohol and drug abuse on learner performance (SOFGI). Added to this is the phenomenon that schools did not report serious cases of alcohol and drug abuse (as would seem to be the case with sexual abuse, noted above). Learners in the focus group discussion and teachers also said that while most senior secondary schools were faced with serious cases of alcohol and drug abuse in the region, it was not reported to the law enforcement agents. As a result alcohol and drug abuse continued to escalate and such schools have records of high numbers of truants (SOFGI). One of the teacher respondents noted that the issue of alcohol abuse was also linked to a lack of effective school programmes, and said "When schools do not have effective programmes to keep learners busy especially over the weekends, learners tend to go outside the school residence and as a result could be tempted take alcohol" (SOQT2).

## 4.6 STATUS OF ABSENTEEISM IN SCHOOL 4 (SCHOOL SR)

### 4.6.1 SCHOOL PROFILE AND LOCATION

School 4 (coded School SR) has been described in detail in Section 3.2.2.

### 4.6.2 RATES OF ABSENTEEISM IN SCHOOL 4 (SR)

As in the previous three cases, rates of absenteeism were constructed from data collected during the observation period as mentioned in Section 3.1.3. Figures in the table below show the percentage of learners absent over the specific period.

**Table 4.10** Average rates of learner absenteeism at School 4 (SR) in percentages

PHASE	BOYS	GIRLS	AVERAGE
Junior secondary	3.5	2.9	3.2
Senior secondary	3.0	2.7	2.9
<b>AVERAGE %</b>	<b>3.3</b>	<b>2.8</b>	<b>3.1</b>

Shown in Table 4.10 above, the average rates of absenteeism (3.2%) for the junior secondary phase was higher than 3% by a very small percentage (0.2%), while the senior secondary phase showed a percentage lower than 3% for both boys and girls. As in most schools, boys' absenteeism (3.3%) was higher than that of girls (2.8%) and a similar case is shown for both the junior and senior phases. With the average (3.1%), the school had a relatively low rate of absenteeism very close to 3% (schools are expected to achieve 97% or better patterns of attendance).

#### 4.6.3 ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS INFLUENCING LEARNER ABSENTEEISM AT SCHOOL 4 (SR)

Table 4.11 shows the range of environmental factors influencing learner absenteeism at School 4 according to all respondents (indicated in the Table). These were extracted from data sources such as forms A-2 and B-2 (see attached Analytical Memo) below. The order in which the factors are listed is not necessarily the order of ranking of the extent to which the environmental factors impact on learner absenteeism.

**Table 4.11** Environmental factors influencing learner absenteeism at School 4 (SR)

	REASON	LEARNER	TEACHER	SCHOOL MANAGER	SCHOOL BOARD
1	Poverty, hunger	✓	T1, T2	M1, M2	
2	Lack of motivation from all stakeholders	✓	T1, T2	M2	
3	Domestic violence	✓	T1		
4	Sickness	✓		M1	
5	Walking long distance – transport	✓	T2	M1	
6	Alcohol / drug abuse	✓	T1	M1	
7	Teacher learner relationship	✓			
8	OVC caregivers – domestic violence	✓	T1	M1M2	
9	Teenage pregnancy and early marriage	✓	T2	M1	
10	Peer pressure	✓			
11	Child abuse by parents	✓			✓
12	Use of abusive language by teachers	✓			
13	Bullying – teasing	✓			

14	Poor lighting during studies and poor hostel facilities	✓			
15	Poor toilet hygienic conditions				
16	Lack of parental involvement			M1,M2	
17	Lenient punishment – learners enjoy being punished			M2	
18	Old age		T1		
19	Fear of tests		T2		
20	Visits to Home Affairs for documents		T2		
21	Fear of incomplete homework / no homework done		T2		

As in the other three cases, a range of factors influencing learner absenteeism were identified. Table 4.11 shows 21 different factors, which reflect a similar range as those in Tables 4.2, 4.5 and 4.8. As in the other cases, some factors were identified by all respondent groups, while others were identified by one respondent group only (e.g. poor toilet hygienic conditions identified by learners only).

#### 4.6.4 THE TOP FIVE ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS FOR SCHOOL 4 (SR)

The same procedure was followed to rank the top five environmental factors for School 4 as in the other three cases reported on above. The ranking is reported in Table 4.12 below. In this case two factors are rated equally at number five.

**Table.4.12** Top five environmental factors for School 4 (SR)

RANK	ENVIRONMENTAL FACTOR	CATEGORY OF ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS					
		ECONOMIC	POLITICAL	SOCIAL	BIOPHYSICAL	SCHOOL / POLICY	PERSONAL
1	Poverty	X	X	X			
2	Alcohol/ drug abuse	X		X		X	X
3	Sickness	X		X			
4	Lack of parental involvement	X		X			X
5	Lack of motivation from all	X		X	X	X	X
5	Household work	X	X				

As indicated in Table 4.12 above, poverty was identified as being *the most significant* environmental factor influencing learner absenteeism. It was, as in the other cases reported above, *inter-related* with other factors, as discussed below.

#### 4.6.5 EXPLANATION OF THE CATEGORISED ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS IN SCHOOL 4 (SR)

As indicated above, most of the factors were related to the main factor identified, namely poverty. However, as in Cases 2 and 3 above, some of the school factors influencing learner absenteeism are not *necessarily* associated with poverty, but have more to do with school management, motivation and commitment to learners' success amongst teachers.

- **Poverty, poor farming skills and lack of opportunity:** As in the other cases above, lack of small-scale sustainable industries, and poor skills in the community were identified as leading to poverty, which in turn influenced parent's abilities to provide for schooling needs and their inability to contribute to school funds (SRQT1). As explained by one school manager: "Poor farming skills and lack of farming implements lead to poor yields. If the yields are poor then the source of income is low and parents' contribution to school fund become difficult. Learners whose parents failed to raise school funds and related school needs usually stay away from school as they feel shy" (SRIM1). This was also linked to lack of job creation (SRIT1), and learners being engaged in household work during school times, as in the other cases mentioned above.
  
- **Poverty, HIV/AIDS and Orphaned and Vulnerable Children (OVC):** In this school it was reported that absenteeism was related to the fact that some learners were caregivers and were looking after their younger siblings during school hours. This was because their guardians could not afford to pay house servants to do similar work (SRIT1, SRQT1 & SRIM2) because they were low income earners (SRIT1). Such a responsibility taken by learners normally resulted in absenteeism. Cases of learner headed households were also reported, where no parents were in place, and learners assumed the responsibilities of their parents by looking after their young siblings (SRIM2, SRQT1 & SRQT2). This was linked not only to HIV/AIDS which is taking its toll on Namibian families, as is the case elsewhere in Southern Africa, but also to migrant labour, where parents have to leave homes to find work.
  
- **Poverty, teenage pregnancy and early marriage:** Similar points about poverty, teenage pregnancy and early marriage as those made in the cases above were reported in this school (SRQT2 & SRIM1). As mentioned above, this was said to affect girls in particular, and may help to explain the sharp increase in learner absenteeism between Grade 11 and 12 (noted above), although longer periods of monitoring would be needed with more correlated analysis to make this causal link.

- **Poverty, alcohol and drug abuse:** The issues associated with alcohol and drug abuse, as described in Schools 1, 2 and 3 were reported on in similar manner in School 4 (SRIM1). However, it was also said that alcohol abuse could be linked to political factors as “Learners tend to abuse their freedom and the right to make choices” (SRIM1). One manager reflected that independence had brought freedom and as result some learners used the idea of freedom to make choices based on this concept to engage in alcohol and drug abuse that later has an effect on their school performance. The same school manager reported that “When alcohol was taken by learners especially over the weekends they tended to be absent from school the following day” (SRIM2). It was also reported that there appeared to be a lack of concern in the community about learners abusing alcohol (SRQM1), as was described in Schools 1, 2 and 3. As described in the other cases above, this issue was also linked to a lack of effective school policies (SRQM2) and school programmes to keep learners occupied during the weekends and in the afternoons. One teacher reflected that “Schools needed to encourage the formation of clubs and active participation of learners in such clubs like, *My Future is My Choice* and *Teenagers against Alcohol and Drug Abuse* [clubs that operate to support young people]. She reported that learners had a lot to learn by participating in such programmes and they were geared towards reducing absenteeism (SRQT1). Learners themselves took alcohol under the influence of peer pressure and ignored parents’ and teachers’ advice. Learners make alcohol choices for various reasons known by them alone.
  
- **Poverty and sickness:** In School 4, sickness was also identified as an environmental factor influencing learner absenteeism. The common diseases mentioned were malaria, tuberculosis, HIV/AIDS, bilharzias and diarrhoea. Explanations for sickness were similar to those mentioned in the cases above, particularly water quality. Learners also reported unhygienic conditions in the school toilets as a health related issue that influenced absenteeism (SRFG1).
  
- **Poverty and lack of motivation from all:** Communication between the school and parents was identified as quite poor in terms of identifying and reporting teenagers who were mothers. Teachers mentioned that the school had a good number of teenage mothers but these were not always known by the school and as a result the school had no counseling programme were not offering them any assistance as required by the Teenage Pregnancy Policy of 2009. One teacher noted that this policy has a provision for prevention and management of teenage pregnancy and teenage mothers, and the implementation of this policy would reduce school absenteeism and improve on access and quality of education. This reflected a lack of pro-active engagement with

learner absenteeism issues by the school (SRQT2). The lack of motivation to support learners was also, however, reported to be present amongst the parents. A manager respondent reported that “most parents felt the school had a bigger role in learner motivation than parents. As such most parents were not fully actively involved in learner motivation. Learners who were not motivated did not see the importance of daily attendance and as such could easily stay away from school” (SRIM2). Children from broken homes and children from single parent households were also reported to lack motivation to attend school. One respondent explained that motivation should be provided by both male and female parents as both are associated with specific roles according to the Namibian culture. A single parent may not play roles of both mother and father easily and as such the child would always lack full satisfaction and as a result remain not fully motivated. She went on to say that lack of motivation had a negative influence over attendance (SRQT1). One possible response to this issue was presented by two of the respondents who stated that schools should frequently call meetings with parents. During these meetings, parents could be asked to identify influential and successful members of the community, who could be involved in talking to learners with the aim of motivating them (SRGT1 & SRQM2). They suggested further that “Learners should learn from and admire members of their community who have put effort into education and who have succeeded in many ways” (SRGT1 & SRQM2). In essence they were proposing that schools should come up with developmental programmes and provide opportunities for the identified community members to talk to learners (ibid.).

- **School-based factors influencing learner’s attendance at school:** There were a number of school-based factors which were not *necessarily* associated with poverty that also affected learners’ absenteeism. Amongst these was the fear of tests and examinations, which was discussed in the case of School 2 and 3 above. In the case of this school, fear of failing a test was also sometimes associated with fear of punishment (SRQT2). Another school-based factor, also discussed in the cases above, is unequal treatment and teacher attitudes. It was stated that some teachers discriminated against learners on the basis of their parents’ social status. Children who seemed to come from socially advantaged families enjoyed better treatment than those from visibly poor families (SRQT1). Learners also reported use of abusive language by teachers as a factor that influenced their attendance at school (SRFG1).

Another school-based factor was that of ‘unpopular’ ministerial policies, as they were referred to by some respondents (SRIM1 and SRIT1). These were policies that teachers did not favour despite implementing them. Policies such as abolishment of corporal punishment and the latest 2009

Teenage Pregnancy policy were being implemented with negative feelings, although they were policies meant to improve access and quality of education (ibid.).

- **Erosion of culture:** It was reported that some learners were not able to take advice from either parents or teachers. This has been discussed under erosion of culture in the other cases mentioned above. For various reasons, such learners who remained unmotivated and who were unable to take advice were likely to be victims of deviancy or truancy (SRQM2 & SRIM1). This was also linked to the phenomenon of 'over-age' learners (SRQB), an issue also mentioned in the case of School 3 above.

## 4.7 STATUS OF ABSENTEEISM IN SCHOOL 5 (SCHOOL MU)

### 4.7.1 SCHOOL PROFILE AND LOCATION

School 5 (coded School Mu) is located about 80km west of Rundu town and details have been provided in Section 3.2.3.

### 4.7.2 RATES OF ABSENTEEISM IN SCHOOL 5 (MU)

Rates of absenteeism reflected in Table 4.13 are obtained in the same manner as Tables 4.1, 4.4, 4.7 and 4.10.

**Table 4.13** Average rates of learner absenteeism at School 5 (Mu)

GRADE	BOYS	GIRLS	AVERAGE
Junior Primary	2.8	2.0	2.4
Senior Primary	4.0	2.6	3.3
Junior Secondary	0.8	1.2	1.0
<b>AVERAGE %</b>	<b>2.5</b>	<b>1.9</b>	<b>2.2</b>

Table 4.13 shows a good record of school attendance as the average rate of absenteeism is below the nationally expected standard of 3%. However, there are some areas of concern, particularly amongst senior primary boys (4%) where absenteeism seemed to be high compared to other figures for absenteeism in the school. As in all the other cases, absenteeism rates for boys remained higher than that for girls in all phases except the junior secondary phase where boys' absenteeism rate was (0.8%). The average rate of absenteeism in this school (2.2%) was the lowest amongst the six schools studied.

### 4.7.3 ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS INFLUENCING ABSENTEEISM IN SCHOOL 5 (MU)

The factors listed in Table 4.14 below were obtained in a similar manner to those obtained in Tables 4.2, 4.5, 4.8 and 4.11 above. As in the other tables mentioned here, the order in which the factors are listed is not necessarily the order of ranking of the extent to which the environmental factors impact on learner absenteeism.

**Table 4.14** Environmental factors influencing learner absenteeism in School 5 (Mu)

	REASON	LEARNER	TEACHER	SCHOOL MANAGER	SCHOOL BOARD
1	Sickness	✓	T1, T2	M1, M2	✓
2	Poverty (hunger)	✓	T1, T2	M2	✓
3	Peer pressure	✓		M1	
4	Lack of commitment/ laziness	✓		M2	✓
5	Teenage pregnancy	✓			
6	Household work	✓	Ti, T2	M1, M2	
7	Fear of punishment	✓		M2	
8	Weather		T1	M1	
9	Attending funerals		T1, T2		
10	Walking long distances		T1		
11	Afraid of failing tests		T2	M1	
12	Poor teaching methods		T1		✓
13	Household work	✓	T1, T2	M1, M2	
14	Teachers not giving feedback		T1		
15	Teachers being aggressive and using abusive language		T2	M2	
16	Teachers not committed to control absenteeism		T1		
17	Domestic violence			M1	
18	Bullying/ teasing			M1	
19	Parents not committed				✓
20	Poor classroom environment				✓
21	Learner-centred approach being an obstacle to motivation.			M2	
22	Policy on promotion especially transferring of learners			M2	

As in the other cases, a similar range of different factors were listed by the various respondents in the study (22 factors). They also included a range of social, economic, political, biophysical, school-based, and health related factors, which were variously noted by different respondent groups. Again, as in the other cases, factors related to abuse of learners in school were mentioned only by learners.

#### 4.7.4 THE TOP FIVE ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS INFLUENCING LEARNER ABSENTEEISM IN SCHOOL 5 (MU)

Ranking of the environmental factors was achieved using a similar strategy to those mentioned in Sections 4.3.3, 4.4.3, 4.5.3, and 4.6.3 and for School 5, this is reflected in Table 4.15.

**Table 4.15** Top five environmental factors influencing learner absenteeism in School 5 (Mu)

	ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS	CATEGORY OF ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS					
		ECONOMIC	POLITICAL	SOCIAL	BIOPHYSICAL	SCHOOL / POLICY	PERSONAL
1	Sickness	X	X	X	X		X
2	Poverty	X	X	X			
3	Lack of motivation	X		X		X	X
4	Peer pressure	X		X		X	X
5	Teenage pregnancy	X		X		X	

In this case, poverty was not defined as *the most significant factor* influencing learner absenteeism; sickness was given this top ranking. But as can be seen from the discussion below, poverty is also implicated in some aspects of sickness, particularly adequate access to health care. School factors also emerged as being a significant aspect of learner absenteeism.

#### 4.7.5 EXPLANATION OF THE CATEGORISED ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS IN SCHOOL 5 (MU)

➤ **Sickness and its links to poverty and other environmental factors:** Common diseases mentioned by this school were the same as those mentioned by School 4 above, with similar biophysical and social features. However, sickness was also attributed to unhealthy cooking habits, and poor hygiene (SMuQM2). The respondent noted that sometimes food was not properly cooked or cooked under poor hygienic conditions, with unclean water (SMaIM1). Such conditions created more opportunities for illness, particularly sicknesses such as diarrhoea. There were also reports of learners being absent due to sickness that was not really caused by ill health, but by hunger. A respondent reported that “When learners come to school without having taken any breakfast or sometimes could have missed the previous main meal they will always appear weak and hence not active in class” (SMuQM2). The respondent went on to say that when asked for reasons for not being active, the learner would often say it was sickness such as headache. Teachers were most likely to be tempted to send such learners back home. Some learners also choose not to go to school if they had not had food. According to a teacher, such learners send messages to school for

being absent due to sickness (SMuQT2). The sickness issue was also political and biophysical in nature, as the health centres in the area were located far from schools. One respondent reflected on this issue by saying “If a health centre is located far from school, when learners fall sick within the school premises the centre may be difficult to access due to distance. This could lead to learners being sent home when sick instead of being directly referred to the health centre. This results in absenteeism from school” (SMuQM2). Additionally, it was reported that families lacked money to pay hospital/ clinic fees, which sometimes prolongs illness, as learners are not able to visit the nearest health centre because of lack of money to pay for the services. Prolonged sickness could in due course prolong absenteeism from school. This was clearly articulated by both learners and management members who proposed the reduction of hospital fees or creation of a student fee at hospitals (SMuFGI & SSQM1). Due to the proximity to the Kavango River and with malaria commonly mentioned as the main cause of sickness (SMuQT1, SMuQM2 & SMuFGI), sickness was also linked to biophysical factors. Another explanation for sickness was provided by a teacher when she said, “Some learners tend to remove their shoes when walking in rainy water in order to protect the shoes from getting damaged by water. However such learners get infected by the flowing dirty rainy water and as result develop swollen feet or get colds. The affected learners are likely to be absent from school” (SMuIT2).

- **Poverty – lack of regular food supply to learners:** One of the reasons provided for learner absenteeism was inadequate access to food. This made learners from poor families get involved in activities geared towards raising money to contribute to school fees, purchase food and school items. It was said that “If the initiative to raise money fails, the learner may be tempted to be out of school” (SMuIT2). It was also said that some parents sent learners to look for food and in some cases learners even run homes by themselves (child-headed households) (SMuIT2). In addition as it was the case in School 4 above, there was also insufficient food supplied by the school feeding programme at the school. One of the teachers argued that “The supply of food by the school feeding programme was not enough and needed to be increased and extended to cater for secondary school learners instead of the current supply to primary schools only, pointing to the fact that poverty did not end at primary school level” (SMuIT2).
- **Lack of motivation – a school-based factor:** Teachers lacked improved teaching skills. Learners reported boring lessons, and indicated that teachers tended to repeat topics and that made learning uninteresting (SMuFG1; SMuQT1). This was worsened by the fact that teachers did not

provide learners with feedback in time or as regularly as expected. Learners were hence not motivated to go forward with their lessons as their work was not being marked and positive comments were not being given for improvement. This made learning less interesting and resulted in staying away (SMuQT1; SMuFG1). Another respondent added that learners lacked motivational goals, and as a result they did not see the need to attend school regularly (SMUQB).

The following also had negative impact on motivation:

- *Lack of security at school:* It was reflected in a discussion that security was lacking at school, and learners fought each other, while bullying and teasing were daily activities. Outsiders were able to walk into school at any time without being stopped. One respondent noted that "If learners realised that the school was not a safe place to go to they lose motivation and could easily stay away from school" (SMuQB).
- *Unfavourable school policy:* The National Policy on promotion requirements was also mentioned as a school-based factor that influenced learner absenteeism. This policy on promotion indicates that learners who are 16 years of age and above are not expected to repeat any grade in the primary and secondary phase. This means no learner is allowed to repeat the junior or senior primary phase twice. It was reported that there was a situation at School 5 (Mu) where one learner was above 16 years of age in Grade 5A and hence this learner could not be held in any grade despite failing or not having been promoted every end of academic year. In the same class and being a friend, one female learner (No. 21 in attendance register) who was less than 16 years of age failed Grade 5 by a small margin (one subject) and was made to repeat the grade. The learner who was made to repeat Grade 5 decided to stay away from school and later dropped out because she could not understand how the friend who performed poorly by failing nearly all six subjects was automatically promoted to the next upper grade on the grounds of age (SMuIT2).
- *Fear of punishment:* This was another school-based factor that influenced learner absenteeism as reported in this school. Fear of punishment is sometimes associated with poor performance or not doing homework given and as result a learner could be punished (SMuQT2 & SMuQM2). However in one particular case, a learner was accused of having taken the friend's clothes during the sports day. The accused learner decided to stay away from school for nearly the whole week for the fear of punishment when he returned to school (SMuIT2). Fear of tests and examinations were also identified as being factors influencing learner absenteeism, and were discussed along the same lines as in Schools 1 to 4 above.

- **Social relationships and peer pressure:** Another category emerged in this school which was not directly linked to poverty or sickness, but which was more related to social preference and peer relationships. More than three respondents indicated that learners liked to attend funerals during school time because they enjoyed assisting parents with work such as drawing water, fetching firewood and cooking food (SMuQT2, SMuQT2, SMuQM2 & SMuQT1). Peer relationships and peer pressure were also noted as social environmental factors influencing learner absenteeism. It was said that school dropouts and school leavers influence school going peers to get involved in various activities like fishing during school hours and use the money raised from the sale of fish for unproductive activities such as alcohol abuse. Repeated actions could lead to severe absenteeism from school and eventually to drop out from school (SMuT2).
- **Teenage pregnancy** was also identified as a factor influencing learner absenteeism. It was discussed in a similar way as reported by Schools 1 to 4 above.

## 4.8 STATUS OF ABSENTEEISM IN SCHOOL 6 (SCHOOL SS)

### 4.8.1 SCHOOL PROFILE AND LOCATION

School 6 (Coded SS) is located in a semi-urban area called Sauyemwa and is described in detail in Section 3.2.2.

### 4.8.2 RATES OF ABSENTEEISM IN SCHOOL 6 (SS)

Rates of absenteeism were obtained in a similar manner to those described above in Sections 4.2.2, 4.3.2, 4.4.2, 4.5.2, 4.6.2 and 4.7.2, and are reflected in Table 4.16 below.

**Table 4.16** Average rates of learner absenteeism at School 6 (SS)

PHASE	BOYS	GIRLS	AVERAGE
Senior primary	3.0	2.3	2.7
Junior secondary	2.8	2.8	2.8
<b>AVERAGE %</b>	<b>2.9</b>	<b>2.6</b>	<b>2.8</b>

As indicated in Table 4.16, the school has generally low rates of absenteeism in all phases as no phase is above 3%. Similarly, girls show lower rates of absenteeism (by 0.3%) than boys as in most schools.

#### 4.8.3 ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS INFLUENCING LEARNER ABSENTEEISM IN SCHOOL 6 (SS)

Table 4.17 below shows the environmental factors that were said to be influencing learner absenteeism at School 6 (SS). They were determined in a similar manner to those reported above in the other cases, and the order in which the factors are listed is not necessarily the order of ranking of the extent to which the environmental factors impact on learner absenteeism.

**Table 4.17** Environmental factors influencing learner absenteeism at School 6 (SS)

	REASON	LEARNERS	TEACHERS	SCHOOL MANAGERS	SCHOOL BOARD
1	Poverty (hunger, food, water, OVC etc)	✓	T1, T2	M1, M2	✓
2	Afraid of test/ homework	✓		M1	✓
3	Lack of parental involvement	✓	T1	M1, M2	
4	Misconduct , afraid of punishment	✓			
5	Peer pressure	✓		M2	
6	Bullying/ teasing	✓			
7	Afraid of being confronted for borrowed items including money	✓			
8	Alcohol abuse, night clubs and oversleeping	✓		M2	
9	Seasonal sickness	✓	T1, T2	M1, M2	✓
10	Children not staying with their parents		T2	M2	
11	Loss of interest		T2		
12	Household work			M2	✓
13	Late arrival at school and finding gate closed		T2		
14	Attending funerals			M1, M2	✓
15	Seasonal weather		T2		
16	Parents' negative perception about educational benefits			M1, M2	
17	Walking long distances			M2	
18	Overcrowded classrooms			M1	

As shown in Table 4.17 above, a similar range (18) of environmental factors influencing learner absenteeism were identified in School 6. These also varied in type of factor (e.g. economic, social, political, biophysical, school-based etc).

#### 4.8.4 THE TOP FIVE ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS INFLUENCING LEARNER ABSENTEEISM IN SCHOOL 6 (SS)

As was done for all the cases, the top five environmental factors were ranked, using the same approach, and are reflected in Table 4.18 below.

**Table 4.18** Top five environmental factors influencing learner absenteeism in School 6 (SS)

	ENVIRONMENTAL FACTOR	CATEGORY OF ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS					
		ECONOMIC	POLITICAL	SOCIAL	BIOPHYSICAL	SCHOOL / POLICY	PERSONAL
1	Poverty	X	X	X	X		
2	Lack of parental involvement	X		X		X	
3	Sickness	X			X		X
4	Fear of punishment			X		X	X
5	Alcohol abuse	X		X			X

As shown in Table 4.19 above, poverty was seen to be the *most significant environmental factor* affecting absenteeism. It was, as in the other cases, inter-related with the other factors, but some factors were school-based and were not *necessarily* linked to poverty (e.g. fear of punishment).

#### 4.8.5 EXPLANATIONS OF THE ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS INFLUENCING LEARNER ABSENTEEISM IN SCHOOL 6 (SS)

As in the other cases, the environmental factors influencing learner absenteeism were inter-related, as shown by some of the explanations given below.

- **Poverty and work:** In this case similar factors such as lack of opportunities for small-scale sustainable enterprises, and poor community skills were noted as influencing parents' abilities to provide for educational needs, which affected learner absenteeism. However, an additional reason was given, which was political in nature. It was said that "The poverty was worsened by the fact that small-scale businesses were run and dominated by foreigners. The indigenous people were left out and could not manage to challenge the foreigners who were well-resourced and financed" (SSIT2). This could be explained by migration and settlement in informal areas adjacent to cities, which is a regional pattern.
- **Poverty and sickness:** Sickness was also identified as a significant factor affecting learner absenteeism. Similar types of illness were mentioned as in the other cases, but in this case HIV/AIDS was specifically mentioned (SSQT2). The links to poverty were also clear, as one teacher reported that learners and their parents lacked money to pay hospital fees. Similar implications as those mentioned for School 5 above were noted. It was noted that malaria in particular had a big impact on learner absenteeism, particularly in the rainy season (SSIT1).

- **School factors, lack of motivation and fear of punishment:** Similar issues associated with lack of motivation were noted. In this case, fear of punishment was also reported. It was mentioned for example that “Learners involved in various cases of misconduct develop a fear of going to school because they would be punished” (SSQB). To reduce this, the respondent recommended that learners needed to be well motivated so that they could understand the importance of school and the assessment of learning in the school system. The respondent went on to say that “School awards could be an aspiration for motivation” (SSQB).
- **School-based factors:** In addition to other school-based factors which were quite similar to those reported on above in the other case studies, the regional office was not efficient in delivering school materials to schools. One teacher indicated that “Schools receive their textbooks and writing books sometimes late in the middle of the academic year, thus making effective teaching and learning difficult to achieve” (SSQT1). This affects learners’ motivation and their abilities to succeed.
- **Poor communication between parents and school:** Communication issues between parents and the school were similar to those mentioned in the other schools. However, it was also noted that this could be attributed to poor participation of teachers and the school as a whole in social activities such as attending funerals, participation in church programmes, and provision of school facilities to the community for social use like weddings and church services (SSIT2, SSQT2 & SSQM2). Respondents felt that participating in social activities mentioned above could enhance school-community links, which could motivate parents and learners.
- **Parental control and alcohol abuse:** It was reported that learners have access to 24-hour night clubs as the local night clubs sell alcohol both day and night. Learners found easy admission to these clubs as they have no age restrictions or admission requirements. The clubs were said to admit and sell different kinds of alcohol to anyone who had money regardless of age. It was reported that some learners spend 24 hours in night clubs especially over weekends and when workers are paid. The following morning learners are not able to go to school and send messages with other learners that they are sick. This was linked to a lack of parental control over children, as parents do not prevent their children from attending night clubs. A large number of children in Sauyemwa settlement in which the school is located do not stay with their parents as they are employed far away on farms or are involved in small-scale farming (SSIM1).

## 4.9 SUMMARY

This chapter has provided detailed insight into the environmental factors that influence learner absenteeism in the six schools selected for this study from the Kavango district. The findings show interesting convergences (mainly around most significant factors influencing learner absenteeism; and higher rates of absenteeism amongst boys); and divergences (some schools have different environmental factors influencing absenteeism, and also different absenteeism rates). These will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter, where I also discuss the roles for responding to the issues as identified, within a systems-based approach, which I will represent in the form of a systems model, as discussed in Chapter 3.

# CHAPTER 5: SYNTHESIS, INTERPRETATION, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

## 5.1 INTRODUCTION

In Chapter 4, I presented a detailed analysis of environmental factors influencing learner absenteeism in the six schools selected for study in the Kavango region. In this Chapter I synthesise the data, and consider the roles of key stakeholders in relation to the school as a human activity system and propose a systems model for responding to address the interacting factors identified to be influencing learner absenteeism in the six schools. I do this through further use of data, and through use of a number of analytical statements (as presented in Chapter 3) in which I summarise the data presented in Chapter 4 and reflect on it using literature. I make recommendations based on two focus areas: recommendations to address the issues raised within the study, and recommendations for further research.

The chapter provides this synthesis to addressing the research question: *How do environmental factors influence learner absenteeism in schools, conceptualised as human activity systems, in the Kavango region (Namibia)?* (See, Section 1.4). As mentioned in Chapter 1, goals were developed to address the research question. These focused on investigating the environmental factors, and what the relationship is between environmental factors and learner absenteeism (goal 1); and the views of learners, teachers, parents, school managers and education officers on the relationship between these environmental factors and learner absenteeism (goal 2). Goal 3 was to develop a systems model showing the roles in a school human activity system, and their relationship with environmental factors influencing absenteeism and potential responses. Goals 1 and 2 have been addressed in Chapter 4. In this chapter I will provide further perspective on these goals, and more fully address Goal 3.

## 5.2 ABSENTEEISM RATES FOR THE SIX SCHOOLS, COMPARED WITH WIDER STATISTICS ON ABSENTEEISM

**Analytical Statement 1:** The six schools have different absenteeism rates. These are not as high as indicated in general statements about absenteeism in the north of Namibia, but there are some patterns of similarity, particularly related to absenteeism of boys.

Table 5.1 below shows that the six schools investigated have different absenteeism rates. It also shows that the absenteeism rate amongst boys is consistently higher than that of girls, except in School 1

(Ma). Overall, the absenteeism rate amongst boys in the six schools is 4.5% which is higher than the recommended standard of 3%. The average absenteeism rate is also higher than the recommended average, but is lower than the indications in the literature that absenteeism rates in schools could be as high as 50%. There are various reasons for the absenteeism rates in the schools and for the higher absenteeism rates for boys, which I discuss below.

**Table 5.1** Average rates of percentage of learner absenteeism of the six schools

	SCHOOL	BOYS	GIRLS	AVERAGE
1	School 1 (Ma)	4.6	6.3	5.5
2	School 2 (SN)	4.8	3.2	4.0
3	School 3 (SO)	8.6	5.5	7.1
4	School 4 (SR)	3.3	2.8	3.1
5	School 5 (SMu)	2.5	1.9	2.2
6	School 6 (SS)	2.9	2.6	2.8
	<b>AVERAGE %</b>	<b>4.5</b>	<b>3.7</b>	<b>4.1</b>

Table 5.1 shows that School 3 (SO) showed the highest rates of absenteeism (7.1%). Possible reasons for this were:

- This was the school with the highest number of the San community children as about 8% of its learners were from the Barakwena community.
- The hostel for boys was in bad condition. Some parts of the hostel e.g. wooden walls could be seen to be falling apart, and it was reported that during the rainy season water dripped from the roof inside the hostel (SOIM2).

School 1 (SMa) showed the second highest rates of absenteeism (5.5%). Possible reasons for this were:

- School 1 is a day school with 70% of its learners living in informal self-built huts and where learners were self-catering. These learners did not live with their parents but looked after themselves. The percentage of absenteeism from school among these self-catering learners is high (SMaIM1).
- The school is surrounded by farms and most learners were children of farm workers settled on farms where they were employed. The learners walked long distances to farms to collect food from their parents over weekends and as a result were often absent on Mondays (SMaIM1; SMaM2; SMaFGI).

Schools 5 (SMu) and 6 (SS) had the lowest rates of absenteeism being 2.2% and 2.8 % respectively. The best school (School 5) with regard to attendance (97.7%) was a combined day school located in a rural area about 80km from the nearest town Rundu, the second best school (97.3%) was also a combined day school located in an informal settlement about 3km from the centre of Rundu town. School managers were unable to provide reasons for the lower absenteeism and this may indicate that a longer period of observation is needed for a fuller picture of the absenteeism situation in the schools.

As mentioned above, in nearly all cases boys had higher rate of absenteeism than girls. Possible reasons for this could be (as reflected in the data):

- *Over-age learners tended to be boys rather than girls:* One of the teachers in School 3 reported that most of the boys that were absent were over the average age and hence were not proud and not motivated (SOIT1).
- *Fear of punishment and teasing:* The over-aged boys tended to tease younger ones and when reported, such boys would stay away from school for the fear of being punished while at the same time the teased boys also stayed away for fear of being teased (SSIT2).
- *Serious misconduct cases:* Boys were commonly involved in serious cases of misconduct at school that needed disciplinary action to be taken (SNIT2), as was indicated in the example of the boy who took his friend's clothes not returning to school for fear of being punished (see Section 4.7.5).
- *Serious criminal cases:* Sometimes boys were involved in very serious criminal issues like fighting and stealing other people's property in communities. Such cases required the police to pick them up and lock them in cells over the weekends or during the course of the week (SRIT2). This resulted in higher absenteeism among boys.
- *Lack of participation in the School Feeding Programme (SFP):* Most of the over-aged boys did not participate in getting free meals provided by the School Feeding Programme (SFP) as they felt shy to eat with younger boys (SOIT1).
- *Prolonged weekends:* Boys tend to overstay over weekends due to too many activities (including alcohol abuse as mentioned in Chapter 4). They would consequently be absent on Mondays and they frequently would leave early on Fridays (by break time) to prolong the weekends (SNIT2).
- *Lack of respect for punishment:* Boys would always take punishment as a joke or a game. An example was evident at school-SR where boys who were punished to sweep the corridor took their punishment while singing and dancing (SRIT2).
- *Boys take high risks:* Boys are more influenced by their peers taking higher risks than girls (SMaIT2).

As indicated above, the absenteeism rates in the six schools, while on average higher than the recommended standard of 3%, were not as high as the generalised statement that the rates of absenteeism in Northern Namibia could be as high as 50%. As mentioned in Chapter 2 (see Section 2), absenteeism rates in developed countries normally range between 6% and 8%, and Kearney (2006) stated that absenteeism rates in the USA tended to be higher amongst adolescents (6,6%) and lower amongst primary school children (4.9%). Given these figures, the observed absenteeism rates (for the period under study in the six schools) compare well with these. It may, however, be necessary to continue the observation period for a much longer time to get more accurate, longer term figures. In Chapter 2, I also reported that in Africa, absenteeism is sometimes as high as 50%, while absenteeism in South African schools was said to be between 5% and 15% (section 2.6). SAQMEC studies in Namibia indicated that absenteeism was as high as 50% in Grade 6. While I found many factors influencing absenteeism, I did not find data that could confirm this high level of absenteeism. In the school with the highest level of absenteeism, figures varied between 2.8% and 10.0% among different phases and boys had an average of 8.6% while girls had 5.5%. While these fluctuations would probably require longer periods of observation to get a fuller picture, there is some indication (in the averages of

absenteeism rates), that it is not impossible for the six schools in the Kavango Region to establish and sustain absenteeism rates in the region of 3% which is the recommended standard. This would be more possible if the environmental factors influencing learner absenteeism could be identified, clearly understood and addressed within the school system.

### 5.3 UNDERSTANDING THE ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS INFLUENCING LEARNER ABSENTEEISM AS INTER-RELATED

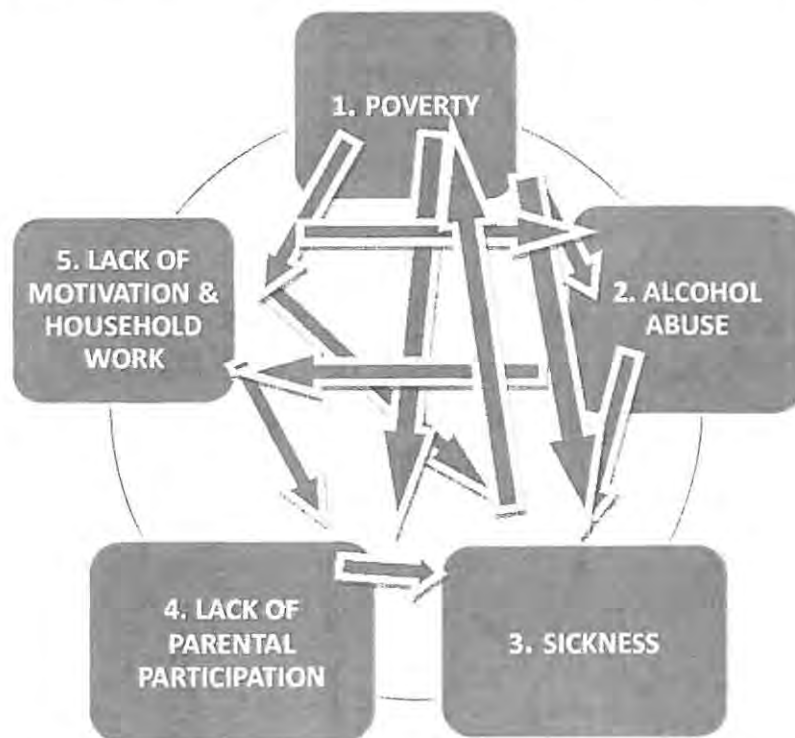
**Analytical Statement 2:** Poverty is viewed as the most significant environmental factor influencing learner absenteeism in the six schools; however, the effect of poverty is interrelated with other environmental factors such as sickness, household work, alcohol abuse, inadequate opportunities for sustainable livelihoods etc.

As described in detail in Chapter 4, poverty emerged as *the most significant environmental factor* influencing learner absenteeism, followed by alcohol abuse, sickness, lack of parental involvement, lack of motivation and household work (analysis of the top five factors across the six schools). As discussed in Chapter 4, poverty is inter-related with a number of other environmental factors such as biophysical factors (lack of clean water or proximity to water); social factors (peer pressure and changes in culture and societal structures); economic factors (such as high levels of unemployment and inadequate income generation opportunities); political factors (discrimination of certain groups); personal factors (e.g. lack of motivation); and school-based factors. These were all reviewed in Chapter 2 (see Sections 2.4.2. to 2.4.5), but the *inter-relatedness* of the factors with poverty did not come through as clearly in the literature review as it did in Chapter 4's data analysis. In Chapter 4 data, school-based factors also appeared to be influential in learner absenteeism (e.g. boring lessons, lack of security, motivation, fear of examinations, abuse by teachers and other learners etc.). These also did not emerge as being *so significant* in the literature review in Chapter 2. As reported in Section 2.4.2, Porteus et al. (2000) however, identified causes of absenteeism among a group of marginalised urban children between the ages of 7-15 years in South Africa. Her ranking was poverty first, followed by personal factors, residential mobility, family stability and support, school-based related factors, and community violence factors. These were also shown to be present in the six schools studied, as reported in Chapter 4. As shown in all of the cases, it would seem that marginalised children, most affected by poverty are also the ones that tend to be absent more. This indicates the link between poverty and absenteeism.

In a similar study, Zhang (2003) investigated the relationship between poverty and school absenteeism in the area of London over a three-year period between 1997 and 2000. The study found that learner

absenteeism was strongly associated with child poverty. Zhang stated that learners in primary schools were more likely to be affected than learners in high schools. This indicates that the environmental factors identified in the Kavango region schools do not occur in isolation, but are also present elsewhere where conditions of poverty prevail.

Figure 5.1 below represents the interacting environmental factors influencing learner absenteeism, as identified in this study. As described in Chapter 4, the environmental factors in all situations were inter-related, and do not occur in isolation. These inter-relationships between the factors occur in different ways (e.g. sickness is related to poverty, but also to biophysical features; or alcohol abuse is related to poverty and to lack of parental participation; while lack of motivation and household work are also related to poverty and lack of parental participation etc.). This implies that, in Kavango region, if poverty levels are reduced, then parental involvement, motivation, sickness and household work can be reduced because one factor relates to another factor, and one factor can influence others, and can ultimately help to address learner absenteeism, as was the case when the school feeding programmes were functioning optimally. What is most important, however, is that educators and educational managers need to understand these as inter-related issues, and develop systems-based responses. Dealing with only one issue in isolation from the others is not likely to address the problem fully.



**Figure 5.1** Interrelatedness of environmental factors influencing learner absenteeism (as observed in the six schools in the Kavango region)

### 5.3 SCHOOL-BASED FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE LEARNER ABSENTEEISM ARE NOT NECESSARILY LINKED TO POVERTY

**Analytical Statement 3:** There are school-based environmental factors that are not necessarily linked to poverty that are influencing learner absenteeism, that can be addressed through improved professional practice in schools.

As described in detail in Chapter 4, there are a set of school-based factors that were reported to influence learner absenteeism. These included pedagogical school-based factors (e.g. teaching styles); attitudinal school-based factors (e.g. teachers not caring about the learners, or teachers being dismissive of certain learners; discriminatory practices); violence and abuse related factors (e.g. corporal punishment, bullying and teasing, and sexual abuse of learners); and structural/ management related factors (e.g. inadequate security in the schools; untimely delivery of textbooks). Many of these factors are not necessarily associated with poverty i.e. there are examples of schools in poverty-stricken areas where such practices are not found. Many of these factors can be addressed by more ethical and responsible educational and professional practices, and they should not simply be categorised as 'poverty related' factors.

### 5.4 ROLES AND STRATEGIES TO ADDRESS ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS INFLUENCING LEARNER ABSENTEEISM WITHIN A SYSTEMS APPROACH

**Analytical Statement 4:** All stakeholders have a role to play in addressing environmental factors influencing learner absenteeism within a systems approach. These roles differ, but are inter-related.

Through the Phase 1 data (as reported on in Chapter 4) and through the constructivist deliberations with stakeholder groups at the schools in Phase 2 of the research, the following roles and possible strategies were proposed as possible actions that could be employed to address the environmental factors influencing learner absenteeism.

#### 5.4.1 TEACHERS' ROLE AND RELATED STRATEGIES

The main role identified for teachers was to identify the poverty affected learners (SMAQM1), and to put certain strategies in place that would pro-actively reduce the likelihood of learner absenteeism (SSQM1, SSQB, EO1 & SNQM2). Suggested strategies (based on the data) included:

- *Improved communication:* especially with parents and learners (SMaQM1; SRQT2 & SSQM1).

- *Record keeping and monitoring:* noting specific reasons for absenteeism (SSQM1) and proposing possible solutions (SSFGL).
- *Refer learners to appropriate support:* such as school counselors who are expected to effectively play their roles (SMaQM1, SMaQT2 & SMuQM1)
- *Motivate learners to value education:* through encouraging them to understand education as a way out of poverty(SOQM1, SRQT1, SMaQM1 & M2, SMuQM1)
- *Respect and treat all learners equally:* avoid abusive behavior and abuse of learners should not be tolerated (SOQT1, SNQT1 & SRQT1).
- *Provide gender specific advice and support:* male teachers advise boys and female teachers advise girls and discuss various ways of assistance (SMuFGL, SMaQM1 & SMaQT2).
- *Improve image amongst learners, and practice more professionally:* to gain the trust and respect of learners (i.e. not use abusive language or discriminate against certain learners etc.).
- *Work against the influence of peer pressure:* by encouraging learners to choose good friends (SmaQM1).
- *Change attitudes and do not tolerate abuse and discrimination:* by avoiding abusive language, and insulting learners. Such attitudes conflict with learners' desire to seek assistance from teachers (SMaFGL).
- *Maintain the African culture:* by encouraging interdependence and extended family. This culture is essential to be maintained in the high current status of Orphans and Vulnerable Children.
- *Assist learners get piece work:* and help learners to develop entrepreneurial skills (SMUFGI).

Similarly (and as discussed in Chapter 2), Teasley (2004) mentions teacher/ social worker involvement in the determination of the individual casualty of truancy and also places emphasis on the need to improve communication and for teachers to change their attitudes of favouritism among learners.

#### 5.4.2 LEARNERS' ROLES AND RELATED STRATEGIES

The main role identified for learners, was for learners to commit themselves to study seriously despite obstacles. A range of strategies were identified for learners:

- *Develop visions* that are goal oriented (SNQM2) with clear ideas about what they want to achieve, how and when they could achieve this (SMuFGL; SNQT1; SNQB; SOQT1).
- *Participate in programmes* geared towards alleviating poverty and improving the quality of their activities and their lives at school (SSQT2 & SSFGL).
- *Seek out piece work* and work for payment rather than asking for money (SMuFGL & SNQM1).

- *Communicate openly* with those who show care, sympathy and trust (EO, EO2, SRQT1 & SNQM2) and be honest about their own home environment, registering true problems as soon as possible with teachers that they can trust (SMuQM1 & SRQT2).
- *Take advice* - take school counseling seriously with commitment (SNQB & SRQT1). Take advice from parents and teachers with respect (SMaQM1), and take good peer advice seriously (SMaQT2 & SSFGI).
- *Choose good friends* with whom they can share experiences and who can encourage one another (SMuQM1 & SMaQM1) and influence others by being good examples (SMuQB & SSQT2).
- *Be aware of bad peer pressure* and develop a sense of responsibility for decisions (SRQT1, SMuQT2 & SMuQB); try to avoid bad influences at all times (SRQT1).

In discussing truancy, Teasley (2004) recommends individual intervention involving peer tutoring by making use of older students and giving them a voice or creating spaces for them to speak openly. A similar approach is taken by the Nelson Mandela Foundation Research recommendations and in the work of Porteus et al. (2000). This complements the suggestions made by the stakeholders in the six Kavango region schools.

#### 5.4.3 PARENTS' ROLES AND STRATEGIES

The main role identified for parents was to show commitment to their parental responsibility, and to be good role models. Strategies suggested include:

- *Develop open communication* - visit school regularly and inform the school about their home environment (SRQT2). Attend and participate in parents' meetings so as to be well informed (SMaQM1; SSQM1).
- *Show intense commitment* and make efforts to acquire resources for school needs (SOQM1, SNQM2, SNQB, & SSQM2). Prepare reasonable meals for learners in the morning and after school (SMuQM1 & SMuQT2).
- *Use available resources and time efficiently* and seek assistance from others (SSQM2). Do work at school for payments of any kind without shame (SRQT1). Apply gardening strategies along the Kavango River where the soil is fertile and water is abundant (SMuFGI).
- *Understand the value of education* and be aware of the consequences of high learner failures rates to the family, community and the nation (SMaFGI & SMaQM1).
- *Reduce criticism without providing alternatives* - unconstructive criticisms discourage others from active participation.

- *Motivate learners* to participate fully in schooling (SOQM2, SMuQB & SSQT2). Although motivation cannot reduce poverty directly, it can improve attendance and access to school.
- *Preserve African culture* in order to support OVC. Value interdependence and extended family (EO1).
- *Use of received OVC social grants for the benefit of OVCs* and avoid alcohol abuse (SSQB).

Both the literature (Nelson Mandela Foundation, 2005 and Porteus et al., 2000) and the research findings reported here address the issue of the need to improve communication as an effective means and strategy to stimulate parental involvement. Bell et al. (1994) and Klein (1994) also place emphasis on the need to establish good communication among learners, parents and the school.

#### 5.4.4 ROLE OF SCHOOL AND ASSOCIATED STRATEGIES

The main role identified for schools was to play a pro-active role in addressing issues of poverty and implementation of related policies. Suggested strategies include:

- *Teach Life Skills as a subject effectively* as prescribed by the curriculum (EO2). Effective teaching of Life Skills could be a useful tool to use in poverty reduction (SNQM1).
- *Keep effective statistics of OVCs and poverty related factors* from classroom level, to the administration office of school managers, so that timely decisions can be made to respond to the effects of poverty (SSQB).
- *Keep records of learners walking long distances* and seek alternative means of getting learners to school (SMuQT1; SNQM2 & SMuQT1) or implement other measures such as later starting times, to accommodate learners walking long distances.
- *Strengthen the role of school counselors* and their interactions with all stakeholders to give them information on strategies to reduce poverty and address socio-economic issues (SMaQM1 & SMQT2, EO2; SSQM2 & SSQM2).
- *Assist parents with the process of obtaining grants for OVC* and help parents understand policies and strategies to obtain grants for OVC (SOQM1; SNQT1 & EO1) as well as exemptions from SDF contributions (SRQT1).
- *Counsel communities* on the consequences of mismanagement of grants by guardians; and strengthen community-based monitoring of such incidences (SSQB).
- *Introduce different OVC programmes* such as OVC basket, donations and OVC day to provide focused assistance to OVC (SRQT2, SOQM2, SRQT1 & SMaQM1).

- *Improve communication by holding regular meetings* involving affected individual parents for information and providing of guidelines to parents (SSQM1, SMaQT1; SMaQM1 & SSQ2).
- *Develop an open door policy* to allow parents to come to school any time; and to improve communication and parental participation in education and improve attendance (SRQM1).
- *Place emphasis on hard work and provide guidance* and develop a 'spirit of work for it if you need it' among learners (SMUQT2). Develop model programmes especially during the school holidays so that learners can participate in these programmes and in return get something in kind (SRQT1).
- *Encourage learners to talk to their parents* and teach them how to do it (SMaQM2).
- *Make effective use of the existing School Feeding Programme (SFP)* and use the food provided to feed children most in need (in primary schools) (SMuQM1). School principals should inform the school community on how to maximise this benefit (SMuQM1), and request extension and improved delivery of SFP, as well as extension to secondary schools where needed (SMuQT2). Learners should be encouraged to use the SFP without being shy of their age (SSQB).
- *Develop alternatives to corporal punishment* and implement the policy effectively as it reduces learners' absenteeism by creating an environment that is conducive to learning. Create positive programmes of affirmation (SRQT2; SOQT1 & SOQM2)
- *Teach learners strategies to overcome peer pressure* and to avoid destructive behaviour such as alcohol abuse (SMaQM1 & SMuQM2).

The research findings reported above indicate that the school's role is quite broad and that it should be able to regulate its own activities, and that the school should take a pro-active approach to dealing with absenteeism issues, which was not found to be the case in the six schools, as reported on in Chapter 4. Epstein and Sheldon (2002) suggest the use of 'school-based interventions', involving a comprehensive approach to attendance with activities that involve students, families and communities and similarly using more positive involvement than punishing activities. The need to find an alternative to corporal punishment was a strong point made in all of the school workshops.

#### 5.5.5 ROLE OF THE REGIONAL OFFICE AND ASSOCIATED STRATEGIES

The main role identified for the regional office is to monitor the effective implementation of policies related to poverty reduction through reduction of absenteeism, improving access and quality of education. Strategies suggested include:

- *Explain and interpret policy clearly* particularly policies on exemption from contributing SDF and examination fees, how grants can be obtained, and how to deal with teenage pregnancy (SMuFGI).

- *Support effective implementation of school rules* and provide school managers with support to do so; effectively support and monitor the implementation of school rules (SNQT2, SNQB & SMuQT1).
- *Transfer abused learners to other schools* and take action to create an environment of non-tolerance of abuse of learners in schools, especially by teachers (SMaFGI; SOFGI). Learners should have ways of reporting abuse to the regional office.
- *Ensure that education officers monitor the effective teaching of Life Skills* particularly because it is a non-promotional subject and should train teachers on the importance of the subject so that they see it as a priority (SMaQM1).
- *Assist schools to map out strategies to reduce absenteeism* and develop tools that can assist schools to understand how to assist poverty affected learners (SMaQM1 & SMaQT1).
- *Visit schools regularly and attend parents' meetings in schools* to motivate schools and the communities around schools to participate in school affairs, and to support them to find solutions to their problems (SMaQM1 & SMuFGI).
- *Improve on communication and the process of feedback* by improving the information flow between the Regional Office and schools, and improve delivery of materials to schools (SMaQM1).
- *Organize Regional Education conferences* to provide teachers with new inputs and to motivate teachers and parents to become more professional in their approaches to teaching (EO1).
- *Address equity of resource distributions* through making sure that all schools benefit properly from the national educational resources (SMaQM1 & SOQM2).
- *Use the Regional Office powers* to mediate the expulsion of learners, and facilitate the discharge of teachers involved in serious cases of misconduct, so that these cases don't take too long (SMaIM1).

#### 5.5.6 MINISTRY OF EDUCATION (ME) ROLE AND ASSOCIATED STRATEGIES

The main role identified for the Ministry of Education (ME) was to formulate and properly resource policies related to poverty reduction with the view of reducing absenteeism, improving access and quality of education. Strategies suggested include:

- *Exempt learners from paying hospital fees* so that they can get access to health care as soon as they fall sick to reduce absenteeism (SSQM1).
- *Speed up delivery of maize bags for the School Feeding Programme* (SMuQM1) and improve on the quality and quantity of the products (SSQM2 & EO2). Extend the range of participants to involve secondary school learners as well (SMaQIT2 & SMuQT2). Ensure that schools are fully supported with their additional needs like water and cooking facilities (SNIM1).

- *Run workshops on how to handle poverty affected learners* that provide insights which could reduce absenteeism (SSQM2).
- *Handle serious misconduct cases as soon as possible* especially for sexual abuse as this leads to teenage pregnancy and drop out. When the culprits are teachers, they should be suspended from service immediately, while awaiting the Ministry to make the final decision on the outcome of the misconduct charges (SSQM2).
- *Actively participate in combating alcohol and drug abuse* through campaigns, and through reporting mechanisms that enable such cases to be reported and dealt with (SOFGI).
- *Encourage parental participation through various means*, including meetings with parents, and media messages that inform parents of the value of participating in their children's education (SMaQM1).
- *Build schools closer to health centres* through co-operation with the Ministry of Health and Social Services as this will facilitate immediate care for learners, and also reduce transport costs, while improving access to health centres. This could reduce sickness due to absenteeism (SMuQM2).
- *Improve communication between the Ministry Head Office and Regional Offices* to facilitate information flow, and management decisions, especially on matters related to delivery of teaching materials and on effective teaching approaches (SMaQM1 & SOQM2).
- *Ensure fair distribution of resources* to service all learners equitably. Prioritise the provision of hostels to remote and marginalised communities and previously disadvantaged regions (SNQT1).
- *Avoid abuse of privileges* and encourage contributions from parents (SMaQM1 & SOQM2).
- *Initiate School Board training on learner absenteeism* to empower the parenting community to make decisions on how to address learner absenteeism and related factors (SMaQT2 & SSQM2).
- *Establish clear attendance policies* and hold schools, teachers and communities accountable for their implementation. Provide clear guidance on how to implement the policies (EO1).
- *Appoint education officers to deal with attendance policies* so that the matter can be properly governed. Such officers should regularly monitor school registers, and associated information on learner absenteeism, and should support schools to address their specific learner absenteeism issues (EO1).
- *Provision of hostels should be a priority in the National Budget* as hostels can reduce absenteeism and improve attendance, particularly in remote areas where learners have to walk long distances to schools (SMuQM1, SMuQT1 & SSQT2). Ensure regular maintenance to keep facilities in good condition.

- *Pay water and electricity bills in time* so that school's water and electricity supply are not disconnected by the suppliers (SSFGL).
- *Provide scholarships to the poor* particularly for places in universities to motivate learners to succeed in schools (SSFGL).

As shown in the sections above, the Regional Office is expected to support and monitor implementation of the policies that the Ministry formulates. To achieve effective policy implementation, and efficient resource use, both institutions need to improve on communication and the process of feedback. The respondents from one of the schools clearly stated that “the flow of information between schools and Regional office was slow and required constant feedback” (see Chapter 4). On a similar note, Banathy (1992) indicates that feedback is an important source of information from the environment for any open system like a school. A school in this case needs both internal and external feedback as both could indicate the inadequacy of the output both externally and internally. This is the case in this research, which revealed inadequacies both internal to the school, as well as in the external environment, for the achievement of equilibrium in the system (as explained by Abercrombie et al. (2006) (see Section 1.5).

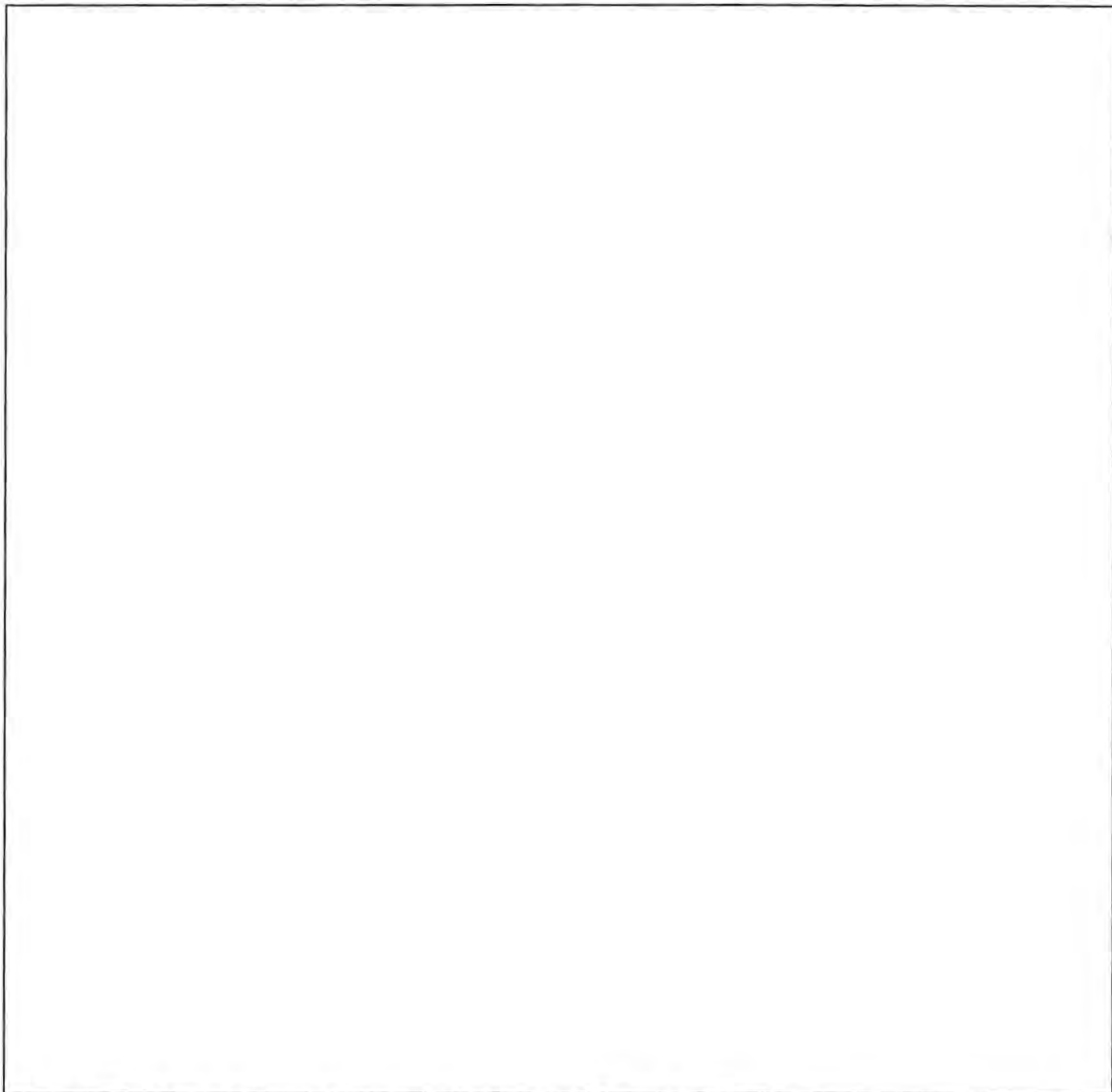
#### 5.5.7 THE APPROACH REQUIRED TO REDUCE ABSENTEEISM

Reflecting on all the roles and strategies suggested in this study, and in the literature, it is clear that for each one to perform his/ her role effectively and efficiently, each one should be clear about his/ her own role, and they also need to be clear about how their roles affects the whole system. Participants need to carry out their roles individually as well as collectively for a common goal. In the case of this study, and its research interest, and as discussed in Chapters 2 and 4 and in this chapter, these roles are related and are geared towards a common goal of quality, access and retention in democratic environment, with the ultimate goal of providing learners with an education that can help them to move out of poverty. When the roles are interrelated the underpinning strategies will also be interrelated.

In analysis of, and in discussion about the specific roles of all partners, it has also become clear that communication is vital throughout for any strategy to work effectively and reduce learner absenteeism. The roles and strategies mentioned by respondents in this research, and the types of inter-related strategies, are very similar and related to those mentioned by the authors who write about these issues, as reflected in Chapter 2 (Section 2.6). It is evident that for learner absenteeism to be reduced the school would need to apply a systems approach.

## 5.6 A SYSTEMS MODEL FOR ADDRESSING ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS INFLUENCING LEARNER ABSENTEEISM

**Analytical Statement 5:** A systems approach and systems thinking is applicable in a school as a complete human system in order to address environmental factors influencing learner absenteeism. Figure 5.2 below depicts that a systems approach and systems thinking are applicable in a school as a complete human activity system in which both roles and strategies of different participants are related and all are targeted towards common goals of quality education, access and retention. It also shows the relationship with the environmental factors influencing learner absenteeism.



*Figure 5.2 Model showing the interacting elements of the school system*

The model in Figure 5.2 depicts a school human activity system showing the roles of parents, teachers, learners, school and ministry in an effort to reduce absenteeism caused by the indicated environmental factors associated with poverty, identified as the main influencing environmental factor. However, other environmental factors such as sickness, lack of motivation, alcohol abuse and lack of parental involvement are also shown beside poverty, as these are similarly interacting with each other. As mentioned in Section 5.3 above, the emphasis on factors related to poverty should not overshadow the factors that relate to school-based professionalism and teacher's ethical practice.

In order for each participant to carry out a specific role effectively a school as a human activity system, needs to adopt a systems approach as interpreted by systems theory as outlined by French and Bell (1973). Banathy (1992) has emphasised the importance of feedback, and has indicated too that negative feedback provides indications as to whether the output is within the purpose and goals, while positive feedback reflects whether the goals and purpose are correlating.

Abercrombie et al. (2006) explain (as discussed in Section 1.5) that all systems have four sub-systems that correspond to functional imperatives, namely, a) adaptation, b) goal attainment, c) integration, and d) pattern maintenance. Data in this study shows that in order for schools to attain the objective of quality education, access and retention, as required by the Namibian education policy (see Section 2.2), there is currently a need for schools to adapt their practices associated with ensuring that all learners stay in school and that learners are not absent for reasons that can be avoided. This is necessary for the schools to achieve their goals. For this to occur there is a need for integration of different roles, and for better communication that will allow this to occur, and for the schools to see themselves as an open human system. New practices need to be put in place to establish new patterns that do not let children drop out of school, or lose time in school due to factors that can be addressed through improved professional and other strategic practices on the part of all stakeholders in the system. As mentioned in Chapter 1, one of the potential problems with systems thinking is an assumption that there will be enough consensus or 'equilibrium' within a system to enable such adaptation or goal attainment, and that a system is able to manage its own process of adaptation. As is evident in the data (particularly from Phase 2 workshop discussions), there seems to be a consensus that these issues need to be addressed within a systems perspective, and an assumption that the system (schools working with the regional office and the ministry) has the potential to address some of the issues raised by this study. It has, therefore been useful to focus on the meanings that people construct, to develop some insight into this aspect of the systems model.

## 5.7 ADDRESSING EMERGING CRITICAL ISSUES

As indicated in the data reported on above and in Chapter 4, there are, however, a number of emerging critical issues that will need to be addressed if equilibrium is to be reached and if some element of systems independence is to be achieved. These include:

- ***Teacher-learner sexual relationships, and poor teacher-learner relationships:*** It emerged that in two of the six schools that sexual relationships were common between teachers and learners. This was one of the environmental factors listed as responsible for learners' absenteeism. Male teachers sexually abuse female learners to extent of exchanging food, cell phones and clothing for sex. Male teachers were using their financial positions and abusing their positions by establishing such relations with learners. In some cases such relationships ended up with girls getting pregnant. However, no female teachers were mentioned to be involved in such relationships with male learners.

Despite having policies in place with heavy penalties (those found guilty lose their jobs), this problem persists. This gives a bad image of the teaching profession to the outside world. This is linked to a set of other abusive practices by teachers, such as discrimination, and use of bad language. Interestingly, it was the learners who expressed these issues in almost in some of the focus group discussions. They were not mentioned by any of the other stakeholders.

This is despite the fact that current information from the Regional Office via the media indicates that even school managers (principals) are taking an unacceptable lead in establishing relationships with learners. One principal of senior secondary school was discharged in August 2010 for such an offence (Namibia MIB, 2010). Currently several teachers and school principals are still under investigation for having established sexual relationships with learners. The process of completion of such cases is long (usually over three months). The systems deliberations should acknowledge this issue, and speak out about it, and through interaction amongst different stakeholders, establish an environment of zero-tolerance for abuse of learners. This will be necessary for the rest of the systems-based activities to be located on a foundation of trust and a will to work together.

- ***Policies on attendance:*** Although the Education Act 16 of 2001 has steps to follow when a learner is absent, it emerged that the information provided was not enough. Most teachers did not know the prescribed time for marking a register and when the learner should be declared to have dropped out. While some guidelines are provided by the old attendance registers, these do not

agree with what is prescribed by the National Standards. The Ministry needs to establish straightforward policies, and ensure that they are well communicated. If this is not properly stipulated then the definition of learner absenteeism remains contestable, and the system's goal-directed activities will be unnecessarily ambivalent.

- **Marking of attendance register:** While the instructions and guidelines stipulate that the learner attendance register should be marked daily, teachers are not adhering to these instructions. During the research, there was a specific case where all learners were marked present for the period of 45 days. When I went to that particular class to find out whether all learners were present as indicated by the register on that particular day and all days from the first day of the opening of the school, it turned out that three learners were absent on that day. I then asked whether some learners were absent the day before and two learners confessed to having been absent and one other learner who was absent on that day still continued to be absent. The class provided three names of learners who were always absent and confirmed that the information provided by the class teacher was not a true reflection. However, the teacher responsible for the register could not be reached as he too was absent from school on that particular day. During the feedback the school management and other teachers also confirmed the unreliability of the information provided by teacher in the register. This became evident that the register indicating that no learner was absent for period of 45 days was incorrect and reflected false information. This distorted rates of absenteeism for that particular class and school and affected the average rate of the six schools that was indicated as 4.1% (See table 5.1).. There may be other similar practices that are inflating learner attendance figures. This also confirms the need for a longer, more substantive monitoring study on the learner absenteeism data obtained for this study.
  
- **Corporal punishment:** The concept and policies associated with corporal punishment were not clear among the teachers. It turned out at two schools that learners were punished by being made to kneel down on the floor. When teachers were asked whether this nature of punishment was corporal punishment or not, some said it was not corporal punishment. The understanding of the concept of corporal punishment hence needs to be reviewed by the ministry concerned, and the concept needs to be discussed in great depth with teachers, along with alternative forms of practice. Some schools were still failing to develop alternatives to corporal punishment.

- **Use of Summary Register:** Every school has a Summary Register that is controlled by one of the management members. By use of the formula provided, weekly rates of absenteeism per grade are calculated and entered in the summary register. However, most of the management members did not know that the information in the Summary Register was about rates of absenteeism and hence did not know how to use the information contained in the Summary Register. The Regional Office and the Ministry also do not make use of the information contained in it and hence the Summary Register seemed to have no use to most schools and the Regional Office. If the booklet has no use then it should be done away with and other more effective systems of regular monitoring of learner absenteeism should be put in place.
  
- **Poor communication:** Communication among all the stakeholders remains a challenge and needs to be improved as this can in turn improve parental involvement and motivation of both stakeholders and learners as discussed on the issue of interrelationship and interrelatedness between and among the environmental factors noted above and in Chapter 4.
  
- **Poor parental participation:** Lack of parental participation was ranked fourth among the top five environmental factors influencing learner absenteeism in the six schools. It was also evident among school board members that participation was low as only four of the expected six responded to the research questionnaire. This represented 66% participation, but even then, those who participated made principals run around trying to get questionnaires back. At one of the schools negative comments accompanied the questionnaires when sent back. At another school the questionnaire had to be completed by a school board member who was actually a teacher instead of one of the parents who was a member of the school board. The research outcome indicates that if parental participation could be improved it would automatically affect motivation of both learners, teachers and other stakeholders and similarly this would have a positive influence on reducing the number of learners who would stay away from school due to household work.

## 5.8 RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations are discussed under two headings namely a) Recommendations for the improvements off attendance patterns (see Section 5.8.1) and b) Recommendations for future research (see Section 5.8.2). These complement and extend the need to address the critical emerging issues noted above in Section 5.7. The recommendations are based on the findings of the six cases,

and can be more widely verified for wider relevance through ongoing consultation. They are not meant to be generalised, but rather indicative of what could be done to address the issues emerging in the six schools, and may have relevance for a wider range of schools in the region. As many of the issues are systemic in nature (i.e. affect more than one school), it would seem that this is a justifiable assumption, or what Bassey (1995) would call a 'fuzzy generalisation'.

### 5.8.1 IMPROVEMENT OF ATTENDANCE PATTERNS

The following recommendations are based on the findings in the six cases, and would seem to be relevant to improve attendance patterns:

- **Improve the School Feeding Programme (SFP):** The current SFP is available to primary schools only. Research findings indicated that the availability of the SFP improved attendance at schools. Schools have indicated that when the supply finishes, the learner attendance also becomes low. It was also noted that lack of access to the SFP for older learners, and older boys affected their attendance at school. It is recommended that the SFP be delivered in time, that there is an increase in quantity supplied and that this be extended to secondary schools as poverty levels have no boundaries in schools.
- **Find effective strategies to combat alcohol and drug abuse:** Alcohol abuse was ranked the second among the top five environmental factors. This is a concern because alcohol abuse is linked to sexual abuse among learners, and lack of parental involvement. It is recommended that the Ministry, the Regional Office and schools put strategies in place to reduce alcohol abuse among learners. Effective school internal policies should be developed and implementation remains the task of the all the stakeholders in a systems approach, as proposed in Section 5.7 above.
- **The teaching of non-promotion subjects should be taken seriously:** In the focus group discussions, learners clearly indicated that the teaching of non-promotion subjects especially Life Skills was not done effectively. Teachers use the periods and time allocated to non-promotion subjects for teaching promotion subjects. Learners graduate in secondary schools without the necessary Life Skills required. Effective teaching of Life Skills could have a positive impact on poverty reduction and learner motivation at school.
- **Effective implementation of the latest Teenage Pregnancy Policy of 2009:** The current preventative and management teenage policy, if effectively implemented according to the way it is written, could be a great tool for improving quality, increasing access and retaining learners. It should be carefully studied and implemented.

- ***Develop strategies to support over-age learners to feel more integrated into the school system, especially boys.*** As shown in this study, boys tended to be more absent than girls. This was attributed to various issues, amongst them boys' experiences as over-age learners in school. Productive and pro-active strategies should be developed for them to feel 'at home' in schools, even if they are over-age.
- ***Develop training for schools to understand learner absenteeism from an environmental factors and systems responsive perspective,*** as shown in the model presented in Section 5.6 above and drawing on the factors influencing learner absenteeism identified in this study, as well as the ranking process, and the deliberation on inter-related factors, and role identification. These can provide useful tools for such a training programme.

### 5.8.2 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

As indicated in Chapter 1, this study is a half-thesis Masters degree. Given the time and scope constraints, I was only able to develop a study that worked with six schools in the Kavango district. The study showed, however, that such research is useful to develop a deeper understanding of the environmental factors influencing learner absenteeism (e.g. more continuous monitoring of registers and how they are being completed). There are a number of areas that can be usefully further researched:

- ***More research on learner absenteeism and the environmental factors that influence learner absenteeism:*** The current research has been based in Kavango region, in only six schools. There is a need to carry out more research in the Kavango region on this issue, and similar research in other regions and indeed throughout Namibia. The research needs to be done in detail with a strong focus on effective strategies that can be employed to reduce learner absenteeism. The research can also consider some of the points made by Abercrombie et al. (2006) about system adaptation. Research can be undertaken to test the systems model that has been developed in this study for this purpose. Research can also be undertaken over a longer time period to develop longitudinal perspectives on the issues raised here and such research can be monitoring type research and/or interventionist research that could apply some of the proposed strategies within a systems approach.

- **Research on critical issues:** As indicated in Section 5.8.1 above, there are a number of critical issues that need to be addressed, and more carefully understood if effective responses to learner absenteeism are to be found. Key amongst these are teacher- learner relationships (including abusive teacher- learner relationships), and reasons for poor parental participation in education. There is a need to develop a deeper understanding of the actual reasons for poor parental participation. As shown in this study, this is a critical factor that is pivotal to the improvement of communication between parents and the school; this in turn is critical for the inter-related elements of the system to work and reach goal attainment and (new) pattern maintenance as suggested by Abercrombie et al. (2006).
- **Sharing the research findings:** These research findings need to be shared among schools and the participants. If schools are given feedback then there is an opportunity that they can work on recommendations. The simple feedback workshops held in Phase 2 of this research were only a first phase of feedback. Now that the study is complete further feedback can be provided to the schools. It is proposed that the Ministry and the Regional Office takes up the task of ensuring research findings and recommendations are attended to and platforms are created to review the information during meetings or workshops, with a view to implementing the recommendations and the systems approach proposed through this research.

## 5.9 CONCLUSION

While reduction of poverty and the achievement of educational quality (through inter alia better learner retention) remain a complex issue, there is a need to apply all possible proposed strategies to alleviate poverty and improve the quality of education. As indicated in this study, giving attention to environmental factors influencing learner achievement and ways of addressing these issues can help to support learners who are subjected to conditions of poverty that affect their school experience and abilities to attend school negatively. The study has also shown that not all factors affecting learner absenteeism are related to poverty (e.g. teacher behaviours and lack of professionalism), but that many factors (e.g. sickness) are exacerbated by poverty, with negative consequences for learner attendance at school.

It appeared (from the data generated through the observation period in this study) that learner absenteeism rates in the northern part of Namibia were not as bad as other studies had indicated. However, as has been mentioned above, the statistics are not necessarily entirely valid, and longer

periods of monitoring data are needed to develop a more accurate figure for learner absenteeism in the region. The data in this study can only be proxy data for the six schools, and indicative at best. The data did, however, show interesting patterns associated with learner absenteeism, which would require further investigation (e.g. why certain increases in absenteeism rates are so visible from grade to grade etc.). Indications are that there is room for improvement of learner attendance in the Northern regions particularly the Kavango region although the rates of absenteeism are not as high as over 50% as described by some institutions. The average of 4.1% in the six schools studied in Kavango region is close to the Namibian National standards that prescribes that "good attendance patterns should be not less than 97%" (i.e. less than 3% absenteeism).

Of significance in this study was the clear picture of the *inter-related* nature of environmental factors influencing learner absenteeism, and that a systems-based response is possible as a response strategy. Critical issues, as mentioned above, need to be attended to in such a process.

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APPENDIX A: QUESTIONNAIRE - FORM A

4.1 Number: 1  
Roles:

(a) Teachers:

Advise parents on government programmes to assist etc.

(b) Learners:

Work for the school during holidays to get extra money

(c) Parents:

Apply for assistance from government

(d) School managers:

Give exemptions from some of the payments at school.

(e) Schools:

Prepare meals for the affected children make provision for the learners to be in the hostel.

(c) Regional Offices:

Provide school feeding meals on time.

(g) Ministry:

Pay for the fees on behalf of the parents



4.2 Number: 2  
Roles:

- (a) Teachers:  
Visit parents and explain  
Ministerial policies to them.
- (b) Learners:  
Explain the value of class  
assistance to their parents.
- (c) Parents:  
Send the child to school  
and <sup>make</sup> alternative arrangements  
for assistance.
- (d) School managers:  
Talk to parents regarding  
compulsory attendance.
- (e) School:  
Address absenteeism  
during school events e.g.  
Parent meetings.
- (f) Regional Office:  
Support the school in implementing  
compulsory attendance through  
meetings & media.
- (g) Ministry:  
Expand the capacity of  
the hostel to accommodate  
more learners.



QUESTIONNAIRE Form A to be completed by two teachers, two management members, one school board member and two Education officers.

Research topic: *An Investigation on how environmental factors influence learner absenteeism in Kavango Region (Namibia)*

Institution: NDAYONA C.S Date 02/03/2010

Designation: PRINCIPAL (M1)

\* You may ask for clarification where you need

1. List and indicate in the table below reasons why you think learners are absent from school

No.	Reasons	Impact			Priority / Ranking
		Low	Moderate	High	
1	HUNGER (POVERTY)			✓	1
2	LACK OF MOTIVATION			✓	
3	ASSIST PARENTS AT HOME			✓	2
4	TAKE CARE OF THE ILL-SIBLINGS (ORPHANS)			✓	
5	LONG DISTANCE FROM SCHOOL			✓	
6	ILLNESS			✓	
7					
8					
9	STAY WITH PARENTS WHEN THEY GET THEIR PENSION		✓		
10	LOOK AFTER LATILE		✓		
11	SUSPENSIONS (DUE TO DISCIPLINE PROBLEMS)		✓		
12					
13					
14					

(Note: you may complete the whole table if you have enough reasons and you may attach additional copy.)

2. Indicate by a tick the extent of their impact on learner absenteeism

3. Prioritise / rank any two reasons listed above according to their strength by numbering them 1-2 in the column of the table indicated priority / rank.

4. For each of the above prioritised / ranked reasons indicate the important role (s) of each of the people or institution in reducing absenteeism of learners and beside each role indicate by a tick where you feel the role is fulfilled.

(Key: L = Learner, A-t = teacher, A-m = management, A-Sch = school board and A-EO = Education officer)



APPENDIX B: Focus group interview - Form B

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PGE

FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW : learner FORM – B

Research topic: An investigation on how environmental factors influence learner absenteeism in Kavango Region (Namibia).

Institution: OMEGA C.S.

Date: 12-04-10

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Class group: GRADE 8-10

1. Provide various reasons why you think learners are absent from school.

No.	Reasons	Impact			Priority / Ranking
		Low	Moderate	High	
1	C.V.S - POVERTY		✓	✓	3+1
2	PHYSICAL ABUSE & BULLY		✓	✓✓	1
3	EARLY MARRIAGE			✓✓	
4	SEXUAL ABUSE - INCLUDING TEACHER		✓	✓✓	2
5	SICKNESS (MALARIA, MEASLES, & ALZHEIM)		✓✓	✓	3
6	BOUCHING, HIV AND AIDS				
7	TRANSPORT		✓	✓✓	5
8	TEENAGE PREGNANCY	✓✓			
9	HOUSEHOLD WORK	✓	✓	✓	5
10	BULLYING		✓	✓	
11	PERIOD OF MENSTRUATION GAINS			✓✓	
12	PELIL DISEASES		✓		
13	DIRTY CLOTHING WASHED			✓	
14	TOUGH ATTITUDE			✓	

(Note: you may complete the whole table if you have enough reasons and you may attach additional copy.)

- Indicate by a tick the extent of their impact on learner absenteeism.
- Prioritise / rank any two reasons listed above according to their strength by numbering them 1-2 in the column of the table indicated priority / rank.
- For each of the above prioritised / ranked reasons indicate the important role (s) of each of the people or institution in reducing absenteeism of learners and beside each role indicate by a tick where you feel the role is fulfilled.

APPENDIX C: DOCUMENT ANALYSIS - FORM C

DOCUMENT ANALYSIS: FORM –C (Analysis of learner attendance using attendance Registers)

Research topic: *An investigation on how environmental factors influence learner absenteeism in Kavango Region (Namibia).*

Institution: KADYOND C.S.

Date: 13-04-10

Class group: 10C

Period: From 11/03 2010 to 12/04 2010

2. Table of attendance

	15- BOYS	12- GIRLS	AV
Number of days present	641	512	
Number of days absent	4	0	
Possible total number of days	645	512	
% of absenteeism	0.6	0.0	0.3

DOCUMENT ANALYSIS – FORM D and follow up request for class teacher who has completed form A

Research topic: *An investigation on how environmental factors influence learner absenteeism in Kavango Region (Namibia).*

Institution: KADYOND C.S.

Date: 13-04-10

Class group: 9A

Period: From 11/03 2010 to 12/03 2010

3. Table of attendance

	19- BOYS	63- GIRLS	AV
Number of days present	797	979	
Number of days absent	20	10	
Possible total number of days	817	989	
% of absenteeism	2.4	1.0	1.7

APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW - FORM D

SOTI

SOTI  
11

INTERVIEW: FORM D (Interview done as a follow up after analysis of attendance Registers of learners)

Research topic: *An investigation on how environmental factors influence learner absenteeism in Kavango Region (Namibia).*

Institution: C.M.S.E.A.C.S. Date: 12/03/10

Class group: 8. (12 PUPILS)

Period: From 1/01/2010 to 12/03/2010

1. Data analysis of learner attendance register as to determine whether absenteeism due environmental factors does exist and the rates at which it occurs for each class group at school.

Table of attendance

	15 - BOYS	10 GIRLS	AVERAGE
Number of days present	482	790	
Number of days absent	58	3	
Possible total number of days	540	363	
% of absenteeism	10.7	0.4	5.4

2. Follow up questions for the Class teacher (interview):

- a) Could you give possible reasons why the % of absenteeism of boys/girls is higher than that of boys/girls?
- V 1) C22R AGE - PERFORMANCE DOES NOT MOTIVATION
  - E 2) FACTOR IN SCHOOL PROGRAMME - KEEP THEM SELECT
- b) Why is the attendance register showing more number of days absent for the period between 11-01-2010 and 12-03-10?
- V (CHILDREN FOLLOW COURSE IN LATE CITY - C22R AGE AND INVERTY)
  - E CHILDREN ALSO SCHEDULED DURING TIME OF (C22R AGE)
  - E SOME OF HEADMAN ABSENT DURING PERIOD (C22R AGE) WAS TIRE AND THERE IS NOTHING HE CAN DO
  - V (CHILDREN AGE (DURING IN 10-11))

# APPENDIX E: OBSERVATION SCHEDULE - FORM E

OBSERVATION SCHEDULE FORM E and follow up questions for principal who has completed form A

Research topic: *An investigation on how environmental factors influence learner absenteeism in Kavango Region (Namibia).*

Institution: School name

Date: 17-03-10

1100 - W2

Observation: to be done early in the morning and at break time.

No.	Aspect	Time	Number of persons or other information
1	Late arrivals of in morning	11:30	150 learners
2	Late arrivals after break	12:30	150 learners
3	Indications of control of class attendances for that day.	Grade:	None required on that day
		Grade:	120 learners
4	Control of register for that day	Grade:	120 learners
		Grade:	120 learners
5	Control of arrivals of learners	11:30 - 12:30	150 learners

Follow up questions for the for Principal (interview)

1. What specific measures does the school have in place:

a) To control late arrivals?

Some time in the morning we have a morning assembly at school

b) To control learner absenteeism?

By using class registers, and also checking the attendance of learners - late roll book for learners to be present in the school - for more information

2. Is there any means by which the school does obtain information on rates of absenteeism?

From the report that the school principal has

# APPENDIX F: WORKSHOP DATA

Mangetti CS.  
RS: Findings- Learner Absenteeism.

07-06-10

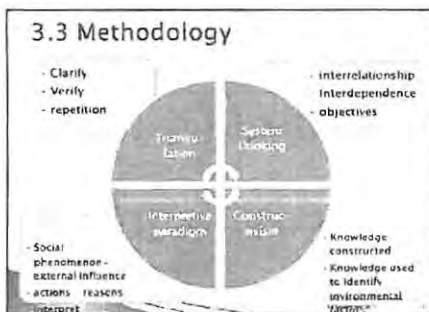
**SUMMARY OF FEED BACK WORKSHOP (REH PHASE 2 SCHOOLS) (C S)**

- 1 Introduction
- 2 Context of study:
  - 1 Major Goals of Education
  - 2 Learner absenteeism as an obstacle to achievements of the major Goals of ED
  - 3 Concept of Environmental factors as responsible factors
  - 4 Studies done on learner absenteeism in SA, Namibia and world
- 3 Additional academic information
  - 1 Methods
  - 2 Methodology
  - 3 Participants
  - 4 Research ethics
- 4 Findings
  - 1 Rates
  - 2 Reasons of absenteeism
  - 3 Strategies to control absenteeism

## 2. CONTEXT

### 2.1 Major Goals of Education

- Access
- Equity
- Quality &
- Democracy



Mangetti CS - school average

Grade	Boys	Girls	Average
Pre-primary	6.3	5.2	5.6
1	2.4	5.1	3.8
2	6.2	5.7	5.0
3	4.2	3.8	4.1
4	2.4	2.7	2.6
5	4.5	4.0	4.3
6	2.6	3.4	3.0
7	3.1	4.7	3.9
8	2.0	2.3	2.2
9	4.2	3.0	3.6
10	5.4	5.3	5.4
<b>Average</b>	<b>3.9</b>	<b>4.9</b>	<b>4.4</b>

Mangetti CS - Reasons for absenteeism - I

N	Reason	Learner	Teacher	Management	School	Isd
1	Poverty Hunger transport water Not attending school	✓	T1 T2	M1 M2		✓
2	Alcohol abuse	✓	T1 T2	M1 M2		
3	Sickness	✓	T1 T2	M2		
4	Accumulated	✓				
5	Teacher's negative attitude/insults	✓		M1		
6	Lack of motivation from both Pa - T		T1			✓

The School's top five

Reasons	ENVIRONMENTAL FACTOR				
	BOYS	BOYS	BOYS	BOYS	BOYS
1 Poverty	✓	✓			
2 Alcohol abuse	✓				
3 Lack of parental involvement				✓	
4 Sickness	✓	✓			
5 Lack of motivation Teacher's negative relationship	✓	✓			

Sanzila KM - I / E.

AGREEMENT OF PARTICIPATION

Research topic: *An investigation on how environmental factors influence learner absenteeism in Kavango Region (Namibia).*

SCHOOL: MANKETT

DATE: 24-02-10

REGION: KAVANGO

CIRCUIT: NYUSYANI

NAME	DESIGNATION	ATTACHED TASK	ACTIVITY	CELL NO	DATE	SIGNATURE
<i>Mankett</i>	Principal	Motivation	Complete questionnaire provided & be interviewed on return	<i>081 215 6309</i> <i>EE</i>	<i>24/02/2010</i>	<i>[Signature]</i>
<i>Mankett</i>	HOD	Distribution & collection of questionnaires	Complete questionnaire provided	<i>0813555050</i>	<i>24/02/2010</i>	<i>[Signature]</i>
<i>Mankett</i>	Class Teacher 1 (female)	Identify & inform 3 female learners	Complete questionnaire provided & be interviewed on return.	<i>0813555050</i>	<i>24/02/2010</i>	<i>[Signature]</i>
<i>Mankett</i>	Class Teacher 1 (Male)	Identify & inform 3 male learners	Complete questionnaire provided & be interviewed on return.	<i>0812/85051</i>	<i>24/02/2010</i>	<i>[Signature]</i>
	School Board	Ensure participates	Complete questionnaire Provided.			

*Mankett*

## APPENDIX H: TRANSCRIPTS AND CODES

	TRANSCRIPTION	CODE	MANAGEMENT 1 OR MANAGEMENT 2	TEACHER 1 or TEACHER 2	SCHOOL BOARD	LEARNERS IN FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW	SCHOOL DATA ANALYSIS	
							RATES	REASONS
1	Mangetti Combined School	SMa	SMaM1 or SMaM2	SMaT1 or SMaT2	SMaB	SMaFGI	SMaD Ra	SMaDRe
2	Musese Combined School	SMu	SMuM1 or SMuM2	SMuT1 or SMuT2	SMuB	SMuFGI	SMuD Ra	SMuDRe
3	Ndiyona Combined School	SN	SNM1 or SNM2	SNT1 or SNT2	SNB	SNFGI	SNDRa	SNDRe
4	Omega Combined School	SO	OM1 or SOM2	SOT1 or SOT2	SOB	SOFGI	SODRa	SODRe
5	Rundu Secondary School	SR	SRM1 or SRM2	SRT1 or SRT2	SRB	SRFGI	SRDRa	SRDRe
6	Sauyemwa Combined School	SS	SSM1 or SSM2	SST1 or SST2	SSB	SSFGI	SSDRa	SSDRe
7	Education Officer	EO						
8	School observation	SOB						

APPENDIX I: ANALYTICAL MEMO No. 1 REASONS FOR ABSENTEEISM: A SUMMARY OF THE TOP 5 OF ALL SIX SCHOOLS

	ENVIRONMENTAL FACTOR	SCHOOL'S RANKING						SCORES	RANKING
		O	N	Ma	R	S	Mu		
1	Poverty (Distance, Hunger, OVR, Clothing)	1	1	1	1	1	1	30	1
2	Alcohol / drug abuse	3		2	3	4		12	2
3	Lack of commitment by learners	2						4	
4	Teacher attitude	4						2	
5	Teenage pregnancy				3			3	
6	Laziness		5				4	3	
7	Peer pressure	5						1	
8	House hold work		2				3	7	5
9	Lack of motivation from all		3		2			7	5
10	Lack of interest of learners / bad teacher attitude		3					3	
11	Lack of parental involvement			3	5	2		8	4
12	Sickness ( Malaria, Headache, T.B, HIV & AIDS, Diarrhoea)			4		3	1	10	3
13	Teacher - Learner sexual relationship (sexual abuse)			5				1	
14	OVC as care takers								
15	Afraid of punishment						4	2	
16	Afraid of test					4		2	

1=5 scores, 2 = 4 scores, 3= 3 scores, 4 = 2 scores and 5 = 1 score

APPENDIX J: WRITTEN PERMISSION FROM THE REGIONAL DIRECTOR TO CONDUCT THE RESEARCH  
IN THE SIX SCHOOLS



**KAVANGO REGIONAL COUNCIL**

**DIRECTORATE OF EDUCATION**

PRIVATE BAG 2134, RUNDU, NAMIBIA

Enquiries : F. Kapapero Telephone No. : +264-66-258 9111  
Email : Fax No : +264-66-258 9213/258 9320  
Ref No :

19 February 2010

TO: Inspectors of Education  
Education Officers  
Principals, HOD's Teachers & School Boards

**SUBJECT: EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH IN ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION**

1. This is to inform you that Mr. Sanzila K.M. will be conducting a research in Environmental Education about learner absenteeism and the Environmental factors and how the interaction between the two affect the quality of education in Kavango region
2. The information generated through the research will be essential to all schools in Kavango Region, the Regional Office and the Ministry of Education
3. The six identified schools in which the research would take place within the first trimester are
  - (a) Rundu Circuit Sauyerwa CS and Rundu Secondary School
  - (b) Ndiyona Circuit Ndiyona CS
  - (c) Ncamagoro Circuit Mangeti CS
  - (d) Nzinze Circuit Musese CS
  - (e) Mwakwe CS Mwakwe CS
4. Your cooperation in this regard will be expected and appreciated

  
KAPAPERO F  
REGIONAL EDUCATION OFFICER

All official correspondence must be addressed to the Chief Regional Officer