

**Management of learners' absenteeism in rural primary schools in the
Kavango region of Namibia**

by

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Education Management and Policy Studies

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DECLARATION

I, Mudumbi Marcelius Katanga, hereby declare that this study entitled: “Management of Learners’ Absenteeism in Rural Primary Schools in the Kavango Region of Namibia” that is being submitted for the degree of Master in the Department of Education Management and Policy Studies at the University of Pretoria has not been submitted by me before for any other degree or examination at any university. It is my own work and information from other sources has been acknowledged by means of appropriate references.

Signed.....

MARCELIUS MUDUMBI KATANGA

OCTOBER 2016

DEDICATION

I dedicate this study to the memory of my late beloved mother, Helena Mudi Munano Katanga, who passed away on 11 February 2003. As “education starts at home” she was an influential, supportive and a loving mother to me and memories of her remain strong among her sons and daughters. She was my counsellor and teacher; she taught me how to behave when I was among people and to respect and value others. Her inspiration and motivation influenced my commitment to study further. She was the breadwinner for the whole family. May her soul rest in eternal peace.

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May the superior and merciful God bless you all!

ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study was to investigate teachers' perceptions and experiences of the management of learner absenteeism in rural primary schools in the Kavango region of Namibia. This study was conducted in the Kavango region of Namibia where absenteeism has been identified as a problem in achieving quality education. A further purpose of the study was to gain some insight into the management challenges faced by teachers and the strategies they use to reduce learner absenteeism in their classes. The main research question was: *How do teachers in rural primary school in the Kavango region of Namibia manage learner absenteeism?* This exploratory study was conducted within an interpretive, qualitative paradigm. The researcher used semi-structured interviews to generate data and the findings of the study showed that learner absenteeism is a problem in the rural primary schools in the Kavango region of Namibia. Factors that contribute to learners absenteeism were identified and categorized as family (domestic work); individual (lack of motivation, especially over-aged learners); environmental (changing seasons, such as cold, rain and harvesting); and socio-economic (hunger).

The study also found that there is little parental participation in dealing with learner absenteeism because of the lack of teacher-parent relationships; a lack of value for education; and a lack of learner support. Furthermore, the study showed that some the classroom management challenges faced by the teachers in terms of learner absenteeism include the need to repeat lessons for absent learners; a lack of learner motivation; and other individual learner problems. Some of the strategies teachers use to reduce learner absenteeism emerged from findings of the study, including providing a school feeding scheme; presenting certificates and awards to learners for regular attendance; and establishing positive relationship strategies. It was also found that teachers apply an ethic of care in terms of modelling, dialogue, practice and confirmation in order to reduce learner absenteeism in the classroom. The ethic of care was evident in initiatives, like teachers making home visits to assess the domestic situations of learners and giving

motivational talks to learners, encouraging them to care for other learners by using prefects to the encourage learners.

ACRONYMS

SMT - School Management Team

SGB - School Governing Body

SACE - South African Council for Educators

IQMS - Integrated Quality Management System

ELRC - Education Labour Relations Council

DoE - Department of Education

HOD - Departmental head

PAM - Personnel Administrative Measures

EEA- Employment of Educators ACT, 76 of 1998

SASA- South African Schools Act, 84 of 1996

EFA- Education for All

EMIS- Education Management Information System

NSPI- National Standard Performance Indicators

MOE_ - Ministry Of Education

PAAI- Plan of Action for Academic Improvement

OVC- Orphans and Venerable Children

SACMEQ- Southern and East African Consortium for Monitoring Education Quality

SDF- School Development Fund

UPE- Universal Primary Education

FE- Free Education

UNESCO- United Nations Education Scientific and Cultural Organisation

UNICEF-United Nations International Children Emergency Fund

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1.1: Four Elements of the Act of Caring (Nodding, 1992).....34

LIST OF TABLES

Table 4.1: Biographical Information of Teachers Involved in the Study50

Table 4.2: Research Questions and Themes50

TABLE OF CONTENT

DECLARATION.....	i
DEDICATION	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT.....	iii
ABSTRACT	v
ACRONYMS.....	vii
LIST OF FIGURES.....	viii
LIST OF TABLES.....	viii
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	ix
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY	
1.1 INTRODUCTION.....	1
1.2 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY	2
1.3 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM.....	5
1.4 PURPOSE AND RATIONALE OF THE STUDY.....	6
1.5. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY	8
1.6 RESEARCH QUESTIONS.....	10
1.7 CREDIBILITY AND TRUSTWORTHINESS	11
1.8 LIMITATIONS AND DELIMITATIONS	11
1.9 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS.....	12
1.10. OUTLINE OF THE STUDY.....	12
1.11. SUMMARY OF THE CHAPTER	13
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK	
2.1. INTRODUCTION	14
2.2 FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO LEARNER ABSENTEEISM.....	14

2.2.1. PERSONAL FACTORS	14
2.2.2. SOCIO-ECONOMIC FACTORS	16
2.2.3. SCHOOL BASED FACTORS.....	19
2.2.4. FAMILY BASED FACTORS	21
2.3. EFFECTS OF ABSENTEEISM	23
2.4. STRATEGIES OF MANAGING LEARNER ABSENTEEISM.....	24
2.5. BENEFITS OF REDUCING ABSENTEEISM IN SCHOOLS.....	28
2.6 PERCEPTIONS OF PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT	28
2.7. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK.....	31
2.8. SUMMARY OF THE CHAPTER	35
CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	
3.1 INTRODUCTION	36
3.2. RESEARCH APPROACH.....	36
3.3. RESEARCH PARADIGM	37
3.4 RESEARCH DESIGN.....	39
3.5 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	40
3.5.1 RESEARCH SITE.....	40
3.5.2. SAMPLING	41
3.5.3. DATA COLLECTION METHODS.....	42
3.5.4. RESEARCH PROCEDURES.....	45
3.5.5. DATA ANALYSIS.....	46
3.6. CREDIBILITY AND TRUSTWORTHINESS	46

3.7. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS	48
3.8. SUMMARY OF THE CHAPTER	48
CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS	
4.1. INTRODUCTION	49
4.2. BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION	50
4.3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND THEMES.....	50
4.4. RESEARCH THEMES	51
4.4.1. THEME 1: THE FACTORS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO LEARNER ABSENTEEISM.....	51
4.4.2. THEME 2: TEACHERS' PERCEPTION OF PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT.....	56
4.4.3. THEME 3: CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT CHALLENGES.....	61
4.4.4. THEME 4: STRATEGIES FOR REDUCING LEARNER ABSENTEEISM.....	62
4.5. SUMMARY OF THE CHAPTER	69
CHAPTER 5: STUDY SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	
5.1. INTRODUCTION	70
5.2. STUDY SUMMARY	70
5.2.1. THE FACTORS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO LEARNER ABSENTEEISM	70
5.2.2. TEACHERS' PERCEPTION OF PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT	72
5.2.3. CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT CHALLENGES	73
5.2.4. STRATEGIES FOR REDUCING LEARNER ABSENTEEISM	73
5.3. CONCLUSION	75
5.4. RECOMMENDATIONS.....	78

5.5. DELIMITATION	80
5.6. LIMITATIONS.....	81
5.7. FUTURE RESEARCH.....	81
5.8. REFERENCES.....	82
5.9. ANNEXURES... ..	94
ANNEXURE A: PERMISSION LETTER FROM KAVANGO REGION.....	94
ANNEXURE B: REQUEST TO DO RESEARCH IN THE KAVANGO REGION OF NAMIBIA.....	95
ANNEXURE C: LETTER OF INFORMED CONSENT.....	97
ANNEXURE D: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL.....	100
ANNEXURE E: INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT.....	102
ANNEXURE F: EXAMPLE OF ANALYSIS	105
ANNEXURE G: PROOF OF LANGUAGE EDITING.....	116

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

1.1 Introduction

Before 1990 the Namibian education system experienced high socio-economic inequality between ethnic, race and language groups which was a direct result of the unjust policies of the Apartheid system. After independence the government of Namibia establish mandatory schooling for everyone which included children of 7 to 14 years of age (UNICEF, 2003, UNESCO, 2004a). By 1995 there was still an enrolment breach of 7% of school-aged children whose right to education was infringed upon. They were vulnerable children, such as street children and the children of farm workers (UNICEF, 2003, UNESCO, 2004a). Due to inadequate access to education by these children, the Ministry of Education proclaimed the Education Act of 2001 to accommodate educationally marginalized children and to ensure their right to education (UNICEF, 2003, UNESCO, 2004). Furthermore, in an initiative to improve school attendance the Ministry of Education introduced the Namibian National Standard and Performance Indicators (NSPI) which prescribed that “a school should establish learner attendance patterns of 97% or better and reduce absenteeism to 3% or less.” A school feeding programme and a mobile school for Ovahimba children (Namibia ME, 2008c) were also introduced. Despite the NSIP and other initiatives, rural primary schools continue to experience particular challenges in terms of learner absenteeism that are often not experienced by township or urban schools. Although the NSIP was intended to improve access and attendance patterns in the education of learners, there is a looming problem of learner absenteeism in the classroom (SACMEQ, 2005). As the researcher, I believe that it is essential to discover the reason for learner absenteeism in the classroom in order to establish realistic strategies for reducing learner absenteeism.

Absenteeism is a concept that is often defined in different ways and with different meanings. A significant distinction is made between authorized and unauthorized absenteeism. Unauthorized absenteeism refers to absences from school with a motive which is, usually, not known to the school or the parents, while authorized absenteeism refers to absences that are allowed and accepted by the school - either before or after they have taken place (Community Agency for Social Enquiry and Joint Education Trust, 2007). A further distinction is made between partial and full absenteeism. Partial absenteeism refers to the absence of a learner from school for a part of the school day, while full absenteeism is when a learner is absent for the whole day (Community Agency for Social Enquiry and Joint Education Trust, 2007). Some researchers (Cunningham, 2005) use the concept, truancy, which refers to the absence of learners from school without the knowledge or consent of their parents. These learners leave their homes with the intention of going to school, but become distracted by out-of-school activities. Some learners refuse to attend school - even when disciplinary measures by parents and the school are strictly implemented. This behaviour is referred to as school refusal (Australia, 2004; Bond, 2004). School withdrawal is when children are absent from school as their parents keep them away from school on a regular basis because of their own needs and prudence (Australia, 2004; Bond, 2004). Based on the different concepts and definitions of learner absenteeism, this study adopted a definition of absenteeism as a situation where a learner is not at school for the whole day (Teasley, 2004). This definition does not make a distinction between the different categories of absenteeism.

1.2 Background of the Study

A literature review on learner absenteeism connects the truancy of youth in an urban background, where poverty and aggression may cause family tension, disturbance and loss and mental health problems that cause truancy (DeSocio *et al.*, 2007; Zhang, 2003; Burke & Burke, 2004). Learners may be withdrawn from school by their parents to boost the family income by involving them in cheap labour at an early age (Teasley, 2004).

Zhang (2003) is of the opinion that learners' poor school attendance is associated with poverty and that learners tend to show first warning signs in the primary school phase of their education (Zhang, 2003). Therefore, early interventions are needed at primary school level as without any intervention of non-attendance it may become a routine pattern that increases over a period of time (Zhang, 2003). Once absenteeism is entrenched it will be difficult for learners to attend school regularly - even if the parents' poverty levels are alleviated by addressing the factors that contribute to the state of poverty (Zhang, 2003:1). Researchers have identified the factors that contribute to learner absenteeism and truancy and they have categorised them as follows: personal, school, community and neighbourhood, family and parental factors, economic, developmental factors and ethnic minority factors (Kearney, 2008; Chang and Romero, 2008; Teasley, 2004). The factors contributing to learner absenteeism from school are many and schools need to find ways of dealing with the problem (Reid, 2003).

Regular school attendance gives learners an opportunity to work with their teachers and their peers; networking is important and it contributes to learner achievement (Kearney, 2008). Kearney (2008) further states that students who are motivated or praised improve their academic achievement and attendance which, in turn, boosts their self-esteem, school commitment and self-confidence. Parental participation may be through attending meetings, checking homework and monitoring their children's school attendance (Kearney, 2008). The partnership relationship between the home and the school puts a pressure on the urgency for the necessary training of staff members, especially those in leadership position in schools to deal with monitoring and managing learner absenteeism in the classroom (Reid, 2003). A collaborative relationship between principals, head teachers and school board members (community) is necessary to help reduce the problem of learner absenteeism which is common in Namibia.

The international literature (Teasley; Raisback; Kearney, 2004; Reid, 2003) cites some of the best interventions for absenteeism and truancy, including individual intervention;

school-based intervention; family intervention; ethnic minority student intervention; and neighbourhood and community intervention. The main challenge is that children have the right to basic education and the important right to food and clean water. A question needs to be asked: What will happen if children have to forgo the right to education and to secure food and water? Not herding cattle may take away their livelihood as cattle are an important and valuable resource in most African societies, especially in rural areas; education does not fill the stomach and children require food to eat for them to be healthy enough to attend school. Developing countries need to find solutions that work best in an African context. Only when this has been done can strategies from the first world be introduced - but not at this point in time. The use of motivation rewards contributes to the reduction of learner absenteeism which is a serious problem - even in more multi-faceted regions of the world where well-functioning schooling systems are in place. These schooling systems approve funds to record, track, observe and control learner absenteeism (Community Agency for Social Enquiry & Joint Education Trust, 2007). Countries, such as the United Kingdom (UK) and the United States (US), use an attendance document to control and monitor learner absenteeism.

Namibia uses the class register as an official document for monitoring student attendance and absenteeism (Community Agency for Social Enquiry & Joint Education Trust, 2007). However, there are only a few studies on learner absenteeism in less developed countries, like Namibia (Sanzila, 2011), compared to developed countries, like the UK and the US. In terms of physical area, this study was undertaken in rural primary schools in the Kavango region of Namibia. The interventions used in urban and city schools to monitor school attendance may not be relevant in a rural primary school context where learners are absent due to circumstances beyond their control. This implies that rural schools in Namibia may need to find an intervention which best suits their school context in order to manage learner absenteeism in their classrooms. There are a limited number of studies on the classroom management of learner

absenteeism in the Namibian context and a current study on environmental factors influencing learner absenteeism focuses mainly on secondary schools in the Kavango region (Sanzila, 2011) while this study focuses on the management of classrooms by teachers in rural primary schools.

The study by Sanzila (2011) indicates that the learner absenteeism average rate is 4.1% in the six participating schools in the Kavango region which is close to the Namibian National Standards of a “good attendance mould of not less than 97%.” This shows that absenteeism is not a huge problem in secondary schools in the Kavango region of Namibia (Sanzila, 2011). Although, numerous strategies are in place to provide access to education for children, such as the mobile school programme, many children do not progress from primary to secondary school. Moreover, many secondary school learners stay in hostels to improve their school attendance which is not the case with primary school learners. In undertaking this study, I hoped to gain a greater understanding of, and insight into, the classroom management challenges faced by teachers and the strategies they use to reduce absenteeism in adverse environmental conditions.

1.3 Statement of the Problem

A study done in Namibia by Southern and East African Consortium for Monitoring Education Quality to determine the quality of education suggests that absenteeism among Grade 6 learners was as high as 50% (SACMEQ, 2005). In addition, another report by the Ministry of Education indicates a learner absenteeism rate of 40% at national level (Namibia Ministry of Education, 2007). Hoaes (2010) maintains that about “109 students from the total of 519 students at Oshikoto School in that region in Namibia were not in the classroom at the beginning of the second school term” (New Era, Namibia, 2010). These reports show a general concern for poor school attendance in Namibia which may have a detrimental consequence for future generations. The international literature (Gracia-Gracia, 2008 ; McCluskey, Bynum & Patchin, 2004; Nicholes, 2003) indicates that learner absenteeism in some elementary schools in the

United States (US) contributes to poor academic performance; school high dropout levels; and an increase in juvenile delinquency court cases. Kearney (2008) also asserts that learner absenteeism is a main predictor of school dropout rates and that it influences the social, economic and health status of learners in later life. As the researcher, I became interested in learner absenteeism because of the high rate of non-school attendance indicated in the reports and the consequences of irregular school attendance. A further motivation for the study was the limited research in Namibia on how learner absenteeism is managed and the strategies that are being used to reduce absenteeism in the classroom.

1.4 Purpose and Rationale of the study

The purpose of this study was to investigate how teachers manage their classes in order to control learner absenteeism in rural primary schools in the Kavango region of Namibia. The study aimed at gaining some insight into the management challenges faced by the teachers and the strategies they use to reduce absenteeism. In this study the views of the teachers regarding parental involvement in learner school attendance were also explored. The reason for including the parents' role in this study was based on research that maintains that the supportive and influential role of the family, particularly that which parents play in ensuring regular school attendance, is important in terms of learner achievement (Van Wyk & Lemmer, 2009). Furthermore, the partnership relationship between the learners' families, especially between the parents and the school, is crucial in monitoring learner school attendance (Kearney, 2008). The decision to include the perceptions of teachers regarding parental involvement was also informed by Kearney (2008) who found that the absenteeism rate is reduced in schools where there is a positive school-family relationship and a school learner attendance monitoring system.

However, the researcher's interest in the study is embedded in personal experience as an educator and in how teachers in rural nomadic groups face certain unique challenges

as parents rotate children to attend school. While some of the learners do not attend school to assist with family chores, others play truant because of the long distances they have to walk to school (Romero & Lee, 2008; Postiglione, Jiao, & Gyatso, 2006; Teasley, 2004). Many of the forces that cause learners absenteeism cannot be simply turned around. Children need food to eat for energy to attend school regularly and, at times, parents may need a helping hand to provide food for the family. Working from the premise that the problem cannot simply be turned around, the question arises concerning how teachers deal with the management of absenteeism and what factors contribute to the problem in the classroom situation. The occurrence of irregular school attendance attracted the researcher's attention, as I monitor and control class registers at school and summarizes the attendance registers for record keeping purposes. This study is based on the assumption that school managements should be able to identify factors that contribute to learner absenteeism in the classroom in order to improve daily school attendance. The factors that contribute to learner absenteeism, if known, may be used as a starting point for developing programmes that may help to reduce learner absenteeism.

This study is also grounded in the claim that although there is a policy on learner access to education, there should be a system in place for monitoring school attendance in order to control learner absenteeism (Sanzila, 2011). This claim should be understood in terms of rural primary schools in the Kavango region of Namibia. Most learners from these schools are required to walk long distances to school and they endure seasonal factors, such as cold weather and rain, which often makes it difficult for them to attend school regularly. Teachers cannot change weather conditions, so how do they manage the learner's school attendance during rainy season? The management of learner absenteeism is not merely a process of placing a tick next to the names of learners who are present at school but should, indeed, be rooted in a successful monitoring and caring system. Regular school attendance gives learners the opportunity to interact with their teachers and peers and this networking is important in contributing to learner

achievement (Kearney, 2008). Learners who are often absent from school miss out on opportunities to relate to, and interact with, others.

Kearney (2008) believes that parental participation in education, such as attending meetings, checking homework and monitoring a child's school attendance, can be linked to learner behaviour (Kearney, 2008). It is the researcher's view that life takes place in a global world where learners need to have basic competencies, knowledge and skills to prepare them for a competitive job market and good citizenship. However, learner absenteeism in the classroom may make it challenging for learners to achieve the desired basic competencies when they miss some lessons which are part of the teaching and learning process (Reid, 2003). Furthermore, regular attendance may reduce school dropout rates and schools have an important role to play in moulding learner behaviour (Reid, 2003).

In Namibia, even though there is a policy on learner school attendance, there is no system in place to monitor absenteeism in the classroom. Moreover, policy may not change the reality on the ground and, therefore, it is important to discover what is happening in schools before recommendations can be made for ways of improving the situation. In this study, it was intended that classroom management practices and challenges faced by teachers in managing learner absenteeism be explored as well as an investigation into the perceptions of the teachers on the kind of support that parents in the Kavango region give, or should give, to the learners to encourage them to attend school regularly.

1.5. Significance of the study

The significance of any study is usually articulated in terms of its contribution to improve practice, informing policy or enriching the knowledge based on the topic or issue being investigated (Paltridge & Starfield, 2007). The study done in Namibia by Southern & East African Consortium for Monitoring Education Quality to determine the quality of education showed that absenteeism among the grade 6 learners was as

high as 50% , (SACMEQ,2005). In addition another report showed that there is a learner absenteeism rate of 40% at National level (Namibia Ministry of Education, 2007). Moreover, Sanzila, 2011 showed the average of 40% at the six schools studied in Kavango region of Namibia.

These conclusion made to the above studies are in conflict to each other as SACMEQ . 2005 report showed 50% which is high, secondly the Ministry of Education, 2007 report showed 40% which also high but less than the first report while Sanzila, 2011 showed an average of 4.1% in six schools which is less than all the given report on learners absenteeism in Namibia which includes Kavango region as well.

Moreover, as the strategy to improve school attendance the Ministry of Education introduced the Namibia National standard and performance Indicators (NSPI) which prescribed that “ a school should establish learner attendance patterns of 97% or better or reduce absenteeism to 3% or less. However, these is not a case but all the above reports shows a general concerned for poor school attendance in Namibia which may have a detrimental consequences for future generations.

The main issue or controversies that surround the problem is that there is a need to carry out more research in the Kavango region of Namibia on this issue. Similar research should be carried in other regions or indeed throughout Namibia. The research should focus on effective strategies that can be employed to reduce learners’ absenteeism, the reason for poor parental participation in education particularly regarding learners absenteeism.

However the significant gap in previous research or studies in the particular area showed that “why certain increase in absenteeism rates is also visible from grade to grade particularly in rural primary schools in the regions of Namibia and also the strategies to manage learner’s absenteeism were not addressed at all. Moreover, this previous studies are relevant to the proposed study due to the fact that only

concentrated to urban schools and also Secondary and combined schools and did not consider the rural schools to find similar problems in order to do comparisons.

They are also relevant to the Ministry of Education and the Regional Education Office to takes up the task of ensuring the research findings and recommendation made are been attended to and platform are created to review the information during principal meetings , parent meetings or workshops with the view to implement the relevant strategies to remedy learners absenteeism in schools. The Ministry will be able to draft relevant policies to remedy the problem discussed.

Finally the proposed study may provide some insight into the application of the ethic of care at schools in the Kavango region of Namibia. This study could also serve as the basis for a framework and guidelines to other stakeholders who are entrusted with the responsibility of managing learner's absenteeism in schools. Lastly, the study may encourage further research on the topic in other educational regions of Namibia and elsewhere.

1.6. Research Questions

Main research question

The main research question is: *How do teachers in rural primary schools in the Kavango region of Namibia manage learner school attendance?*

Sub-Questions

The sub-questions that clarify the main question are the following:

1. *What are the factors that contribute to learner absenteeism in rural primary schools in the Kavango region of Namibia?*
2. *How do teachers perceive parental participation in learner absenteeism in rural primary schools in the Kavango region of Namibia?*

3. *What are the classroom management challenges faced by teachers in terms of learner absenteeism?*
4. *What strategies are used to reduce learner absenteeism?*

1.7 Credibility and Trustworthiness

According to Creswell (2009), qualitative research demands the use of various approaches with the intention to increase trustworthiness. Credibility can be defined as the assurance that conclusions stem from the data. Individual interviews were conducted with teachers to provide a thick description of the phenomena under investigation as it reflected the reality and ideas of the participants. A tape recorder was used during the interview for the accurate capturing the data which was, then, transcribed *verbatim*. In addition, multiple participants were used to triangulate the findings. Member-checking added value and credibility of the data when transcripts and fieldwork notes were given to the participants to confirm the findings and to comment further, where necessary. During the interviews, the participants were asked to verify the data gather from previous interviews to ensure the accurate interpretation of what they had shared. In the process of data analysis, the data was coded and the researcher involved his supervisor in double-checking the coding of the interview transcripts. The sampling of teachers from various rural primary schools facilitated the crystallization of responses about the strategies they used to curb learner absenteeism. The data from the different participants was cross-checked (Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2011) and an audit trail and reflective journal was kept on the process of the data collection and data analysis.

1.8. Limitations and Delimitations

The study focused on rural primary schools in the Kavango region of Namibia. Since it involved only rural primary schools in one circuit office, the socio-economic background of these schools may not be the same as that of other schools and the findings cannot be generalized to all rural primary schools in the whole Kavango

region. The focal point of the study was on how teachers from the selected schools manage their classrooms in order to curb learner absenteeism and as each school and each teacher may do this differently, the study compared the various strategies used to identify common trends which could inform other schools in a similar context that were experiencing similar challenges. The interpretation of data was guided by Nodding's (1984) ethic of care theory.

1.9. Ethical Considerations

Ethics concerns moral principles and in undertaking research it is the researcher's principled duty to safeguard the human rights and well-being of the participants (McMillan & Schumacher 2006). In order to adhere to the moral requirements for the study, I applied to the Department of Education in the Kavango region Namibia for permission to visit schools and conduct research among its teachers. Furthermore, I also applied to the University of Pretoria ethical committee for ethical clearance. I obtained permission from the schools to collect data for my research. The participants were told about the nature of the study to be conducted and an informed consent was attained from them by requesting them to sign a consent letter. Participants were also assured of confidentiality, anonymity and the intended use of the collected data. I reassured the participants that their participation in the study was voluntary and that they had the right to withdraw from the study at any time and I established a rapport with the participants to gain their trust before starting to collect data. A trusting relationship is important as it encourages dialogue. I used codes, like "Teacher 1", to represent the participants and to conceal their identities (Israel & Hay, 2006). I, further, requested the participant's permission to record the interviews for accuracy in data collection.

1.10. Outline of the study

Chapter 1: set out the introduction and background of the study, statement of problem, purpose and rationale of the study, significance, research question, credibility & trustworthiness, limitation and delimitation, ethical consideration and outline of the

study. In Chapter 2 the relevant literature review & theoretical framework on learners absenteeism and the role of parents in reducing the absenteeism was examined. Chapter 3 detailed the research approach, design and methodology. The reason for choosing qualitative study design was presented. In Chapter 4 the findings from the data collected by means of semi-structured interviews with teachers from rural primary schools in the Kavango region of Namibia were discussed. The discussion was against a background of the related literature on learner's absenteeism and the theoretical framework of the ethic of care. Chapter 5 this chapter gives a summary of the research findings discussed in chapter 4, draw conclusion, look at limitation of the study, makes recommendations and suggest related relevant topics for further research.

1.11 Summary of the chapter

In this chapter, the introduction and background, purpose and rationale for the study were outlined and the problem statement, significance research questions and methodology were discussed. Credibility and trustworthiness, as well as limitation and delimitation of this study is briefly discussed in this chapter. In the next chapter 2, a literature review on learner absenteeism is presented.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Introduction

Chapter 1 provided the background and overview to the study. In this chapter the relevant literature on learner absenteeism is reviewed and related to the topic. The main focus of the chapter is to explore the causes of, and the factors contributing to, learner absenteeism - as reported in the literature; the consequences of not attending school regularly; and the challenges and strategies used by teachers in reducing learner absenteeism. The role of parents in managing and supporting learners to attend school is also discussed.

2.2 Factors Contributing to Learner Absenteeism

The reasons for learner absenteeism cited in the literature are diverse but, generally, they fall into three broad categories, namely: personal/individual factors, socio-economic factors and family and school factors.

2.2.1 *Personal factors*

The personal characteristics of individuals, particularly the mental ones, influence their personal lives (Moseki, 2004). All learners go to school with a different set of personal characteristics, including ability, experience, interest, goals and expectations. Based on their individual qualities and characteristics, learners may be more or less susceptible to absenteeism. According to Reid (2005), individual learners with inadequate social skills, cognitive skills, emotional problems, low self-concept and low self-esteem are more likely not to attend school regularly. It seems that the characteristics and qualities of individuals may determine the rate at which they attend school and strive to succeed (Risi, Gerhardstein & Kistner, 2003).

Apart from personal characteristics, learner ill-health has been reported in literature as a main reason of school absenteeism (Budlender, 2006). Learners may sometimes fake

illness in order to be absent from school. DeSocio *et al.* (2007) note that some learners do not attend school even when they have only a mild illness that should not prevent them from attending school or class. Significantly, learners with special needs and health and mental problems are at greater risk of being habitually absent from school. According to Bulter *et al.* (2005), students with severe health problems experience frequent interruptions throughout the school day; they may be too ill to attend school and they may spend a great deal of time seeking medical help. As for chronically ill learners, their absenteeism from school could be the result of being taken to receive, and recover from, treatment (Kaffenberger, 2006).

Kearney (2008) suggests that age is another factor that contributes to school absence. Evidence from research shows that age is inversely connected with absenteeism (Malcolm *et al.*, 2003). In a study done in secondary schools in Australia, Moseki (2004) found that older learners are more likely to be absent from school than younger ones. Apart from illness and the age of learners, personality factors, such as a lack of recognition of attending school regularly, discourage learners who would not, normally, be absent from school (Kearney, 2008). Learners need some recognition and acknowledgement of their regular school attendance and when this is not forthcoming they down play the importance of school attendance. Some learners do not attend school because peer pressure forces them to join gangs and be involved in the activities of the group which take place during school hours (Reid, 2005). It becomes a problem when learners at school are involved in gang activities which are undesirable and anti-social (Kearney, 2008).

When learners are victims of bullying in the classroom or on the school playgrounds, they may become nervousness and feel too insecure to attend school. These learners find excuses not to attend school; they lack any interest in school work; and they may become truants (Thambirajah *et al.*, 2008). According to Reid (2003), learners who are bullied at school will not inform teachers and parents that they are being bullied because they fear further consequent actions from the bullies; they may stay away from

school to avoid bullies. Other factors, such as a fear of failure associated with the lack of self-confidence; poor parenting that result in negligence; and nervousness in interacting with fellow learners, may have negative impact on learners' school attendance (Thambirajah *et al.*, 2008).

Student engagement at, and attitude to, school contributes to absenteeism. Henry and Huizigana (2007) believe that students who receive a higher grade score, like A, are more likely to attend school and learners who often obtain lower grades, like D and below, are less likely to attend school regularly. Poor performance of learners could be a demotivating factor which snowballs to further low achievement. Some learners experience great anxiety and panic about attending school and that excessive anxiety results in absenteeism. Researchers have called this condition school phobia or school refusal behaviour (Fremont, 2003; Kearney, 2007). School phobia is associated with a number of mental health conditions, including anxiety, mood, and disruptive behaviour and learning disorders (Fremont, 2003). According to Kearney (2007), school refusal behaviour is a child-motivated refusal to attend school or a child-motivated issue about remaining in school for an entire day.

Absenteeism is also associated with sexual promiscuity, alcohol and drug usage which, eventually, leads to dropping out of school (Teasley, 2004). When learners become involved with alcohol and drugs they could end up addicted and have health problems later in life (Teasley, 2004). The use of drugs and alcohol can lead to sexual promiscuity and unprotected sex which exposes the learners to the risk of teenage pregnancy and contracting HIV/AIDS and other diseases (DeSocio *et al.*, 2007).

2.2.2 Socio-economic factors

Both local and international researchers are of the opinion that family circumstances, such as the socio-economic status, increase learner truancy (Moseki, 2004; Malcom, 2003; David & Kirk, 2003; Sanzila, 2011). Many studies, including those by Case, Paxson and Ableidinger (2004) and Ainsworth and Filmer (2002), indicate that there is a strong

link between poverty and absenteeism. Poverty is a concept that is hard to define and measure. The meaning of the term is relative to different times, places and social contexts (Zhang, 2003). In the UK poverty refers to elements of deprivation, such as low income; a neighbourhood's high rate of unemployment; poor housing conditions; crime; and pupil underachievement (Zhang, 2003). In other countries, like Zambia, apart from unemployment there are orphans heading families who have to work for a living during school hours (Robson & Kanyanta, 2007). In families affected by HIV/AIDS children attend school irregularly because they are required to stay at home to care for siblings or sick parents (Weideman *et. al.*, 2007).

Other socio-economic reasons for learner absenteeism are: teenage pregnancy; domestic chores; transport problems; child labour in rural areas which may include farm work, herding cattle, fetching water and fire wood; neighbourhoods marked by violence; child abuse; and where both parents need to work or wish to pursue a career (Sutphen, Ford & Flaherty, 2010; Weideman *et. al.*, 2007; Reid, 2008). Learners from a disadvantaged background are more vulnerable to chronic absenteeism than other learners and care should be given to such learners (Spradlin *et. al.*, 2012). Some learners are from child-headed families and may depend on the community and the school to provide for their needs (Robson & Kanyanta, 2007).

In Namibia in 2005 the number of vulnerable children (VC) were estimated to be 140 000 - about 28% of the learners. It was predicted that the number would rise to 180 000 by 2010 which would be about 30% of learners. With the intention to reduce absenteeism, policy requires schools to provide an accessible, safe and conducive environment, free of stigma and financial obstacles (Namibia ME, 2008). Moreover, access to school is compromised by the cost of school fees, uniforms, transport and clinic visits (Nelson Mandela foundation, 2005). Although there is a policy on free primary education, parents and learners are not aware of their constitutional rights to benefit from this policy. The Namibian Education Act 16 of 2001 states that school attendance is compulsory for every child up to the age of 16 and that in state schools

learners should not be sent away from school because of non-payment of school fees (Namibia ME, 2001).

Studies found that another widespread reason for learner absenteeism, mainly in rural areas, is the issue of child labour where families make their children work to subsidize the family's income or require them to take over extensive domestic duties while their parents work in the fields or factories (Zahaf *et al.*, 2005; Budlender, 2006). Many learners in rural areas devote a certain amount of time before or after school each day to family and agricultural chores, such as herding cattle and fetching firewood or water (Zahaf *et al.*, 2005; Budlender, 2006). While girls do domestic chores, such as cooking, fetching water and firewood, the boys may stay at home to care for the livestock (Nelson Mandela Foundation Research Report, 2005). The same report also states that girls are frequently kept at home to care for the sick, especially in the case of HIV/AIDS infected parents; to do household work; and to produce food (UNAIDS, 2006; Nelson Mandela Foundation Research Report, 2005).

In different school contexts learners may be expected to work and spend part of their day cleaning classrooms and repairing classroom floors by smearing them with a mixture of soil and cow dung (Wittenberg, 2005). The Nelson Mandela Foundation Research Report (2005) suggests that in rural areas in South Africa learners are frequently absent from school because their parents need them to produce meals at home. This report also found that learner absenteeism is often higher in rural areas but decreases when learners move from commercial farming areas to homelands and from homelands to urban informal areas. Another common problem that causes learner absenteeism in rural areas is the long distances that the learners have to walk to school and where there is no proper transport infrastructure (UNESCO, 2009). In rural areas there are limited hostel facilities and, at times, learners are unable to attend school due to bad weather - mainly rain, cold or excessive heat. The research cites incidents of intimidation of girls by boys and outsiders a factor contributing to learner absenteeism (Nelson Mandela Foundation, 2005).

Another factor contributing to learner absenteeism is that some learners come to school hungry, without having had any breakfast or having, previously, missed a meal; they appear to be weak and do not participate in class. It has been reported that in South Africa 14% of children in rural areas go to school having had only a cup of tea or nothing at all, while 75% have had tea, bread or porridge (Nelson Mandela Foundation, 2005). A study conducted in Limpopo Province in South Africa showed that 22% of the children had nothing except tea for breakfast. Inadequate nutrition results in learners becoming sick at school; they show signs of exhaustion; they are unable to concentrate; and they perform poorly (Nelson Mandela Foundation, 2007). However, school feeding programmes in most schools encourage learners to attend school, especially in rural and high poverty areas (UNESCO, 2009). It appears that school feeding programmes serve as motivating factors in encouraging school performance. According to a study concerning links between absenteeism and child poverty, absenteeism is strongly connected to learner poverty (Zhang, 2003). The study further found that pupils at primary school are more affected by an area's low economic status and unemployment than their counterparts at secondary schools (Zhang, 2003). In some instances learners might be distracted by factors, such as alcohol and drugs that keep them away from school (Bezuidenhout & Joubert, 2008).

2.2.3 School-based factors

Hallinan (2008) maintains that teachers play a major role in shaping student attachment to, and engagement at, school. Teachers who support their students by caring show them respect; praise them and meet their needs; this encourages learners to attend school more regularly (Hallinan, 2008), whereas learners who feel that their teachers do not support or respect them and do not pay attention to their diverse needs have more attendance problems at school (Lindstadt, 2005). Overall, learners who have a positive relationship with their teachers are more likely to have a good attendance record and succeed academically (Hallinan, 2008; Leyba & Massat, 2009). Alternatively, when learners realize that their teachers do not care about their absenteeism, they may begin

to believe that there is no need for them to attend school regularly. This may have an impact on the attendance of learners where they stay at home for no specific reason and believe that they have made a good decision.

Subject matter and boredom with the school programme have also been suggested as contributing factors to absenteeism (Malcolm *et al.*, 2003). Survey findings in different cities in the UK affirm that Mathematics and Science lessons are frequently avoided by learners at school (Moseki, 2004) as they get bored if they do not find the subject content interesting and may lead to absenteeism. Learners who dislike coming to school may experience the following: difficulty learning; poor social skills; safety problems; low self-esteem; unacceptable school cultures; poor teacher-learner relationships; curriculum issues; cyber bullying; alcohol abuse; and gangsterism (Reid, 2008). A poor relationship between learners and their teachers may also force certain learners to stay at home instead of attending school (Kearney, 2008). Reid (2005) is of the opinion that if learners have a poor or conflicting relationship with their teachers they will stop going to school in order to avoid them. Factors, such as insults and humiliating remarks by teachers, also contribute to the absenteeism of learners at school (Moseki, 2004).

In other school contexts an unsafe environment may influence learner behaviour and result in absenteeism (Heilbrunn, 2004). Some safety issues could be caused by ineffective discipline policies that allow bullying at school. Victims of bullying often feel hopeless or defenseless and choose to miss school rather than face their bullies and the social stigma associated with being the victim of bullying (Juvoven, Graham, & Schuster, 2003). The sexual abuse of learners by their peers or by teachers discourages some learners from attending school. This practice is still, apparently, common in most schools in Southern Africa (Nelson Mandela Foundation, 2005). During a public hearing carried out by the South African Human Rights Commission it was proved that male teachers sexually abuse female learner's in exchange for "food for sex" (South Africa DoE, 2007).

Strict disciplinary measures also lead to learner absenteeism. The extreme exercise of corporal punishment by teachers may, possibly, be violent and this could result in learner absence from school. Kearney (2008) maintains that when teachers punish learners without considering the consequences, it may further de-motivate them in terms of attending school for fear of punishment.

Factors, including too much homework, can also contribute to learner absenteeism which may result from a fear of school assessment tests. Learners who are repeating a grade tend to be absent from school due to their lack of motivation (Kearney, 2008). It was noted in the study by UNESCO (2009) that higher levels of repetition at school lead to a lack of learner retention. If students do not feel that they will succeed, they may lack the desire to attend school (Teasley, 2004). This reason for absenteeism could also be a result of bad teaching practice by the teachers and their inadequate support of the learners. Incompetence of teachers has a harmful effect on teaching and learning in schools (UNESCO, 2004, 2009b) in that learners in some schools tend to stay away from school because, in their opinion, they are not benefiting from the incompetence of their teachers and from attending school regularly. In the Southern African context, a lack of parental support with homework forces learners to complete tasks with little assistance and this contributes to their truancy (UNESCO, 2004a, 2009a).

An inability to pay school fees is another reason for non-school attendance (Zafar *et al.*, 2005; Railsback, 2004). Zafar *et al.* (2005) and Railsback (2004) add that other costs, such as those of uniforms and books, are among the barriers that prevent learners from attending school. Schools vary in their average annual school fees and this contributes to learners staying away from school.

2.2.4 Family-based factors

Some studies have reported a positive correlation between parental/caregiver involvement in learner education and attendance (Railsback, 2004; Wittenberg, 2005; Moseki, 2004). A failure to introduce useful methods to control learner absenteeism in

the home and at school could lead to an increase in absenteeism (Kearney, 2008). Moreover, it has been noted that the positive mind-set of learners, teachers and parents to school cultures and philosophy is essential in fighting absenteeism and truancy (Reid, 2003). When school rules are not effectively implemented and little effort is exerted in following up on learners who attend school irregularly, a culture of non-commitment to school attendance is created.

Another factor that contributes to learner absenteeism is school authority poor communication with parents where there is lack of team work between the two parties - the teachers and the parents. Learners tend to take advantage of poor relationships between parents and teachers and skip school regularly (Nelson Mandela Foundation, 2005). The poor relationship between the teachers and parents could also negatively affect the quality of teaching and learning as parents are reluctant to monitor learner and teacher activities (UNESCO, 2004a, 2009b). It has been noted that parental involvement is a significant factor influencing excellence in education as well as learner involvement (UNESCO, 2004a, 2009b).

There is no common explanation for what parental involvement means, but the US National Education Association describes activities associated with parental support as: reading to a child; attending school gatherings; monitoring homework; restricting the hours for watching television; and checking on a child's school attendance (Kearney, 2007). In Namibia, the Education Act of 2001 allows for the establishment of a body, the School Board, to ensure the democratic participation of parents in the management of school activities. Railsback (2004) and Kearney (2007) are of the opinion that there is a positive association between parental involvement in education and attendance and that learner performance is connected to parents' involvement in their children's education and progress.

Absenteeism is associated with sexual promiscuity, alcohol and drug usage which, eventually, leads to dropping out of school (Teasley, 2004). When learners become

involved with alcohol and drugs they could end up addicted and have health problems later in life (Teasley, 2004). The use of drugs and alcohol can lead to sexual promiscuity and unprotected sex which exposes the learners to the risk of teenage pregnancy and contracting HIV/AIDS and other diseases (DeSocio *et al.*, 2007).

Children learn from the modelling behaviour and social interaction they observe in their parents (Hartnett, 2008). It can, therefore, be said that parents have the ability to motivate their children; children's motivation levels are affected by the level of motivation they see their parents exhibit (Bertrand & Deslandes, 2005). If the parents have been negatively affected by education experiences or they have negative attitudes to schooling they are less likely to be fully committed to, and involved in, their children's education. Learners whose parents suffer economic hardships tend to have a poor school attendance record (Drummond & Stipek, 2004; Heilbrunn, 2004; Henry, 2007; Chang, 2003) and children who live in single-parent households are at risk of being absent from school (Kronholz, 2011). Moreover, children of unemployed mothers appear to miss more days of schooling than those whose mothers have job. Henry (2007) found that students who live alone or with just one parent tend to have a high rate of absenteeism. Parents are responsible for sending their children to school and if they are unable to make time to ensure that their children attend school, non-school attendance may be high. Family intervention seems to play an important role in increasing student attendance at school.

2.3 Effects of Absenteeism

When learners are absent from the classroom they are unable to complete and submit the assignments given to the others on specific days. This may result in learner underachievement or poor performance in different subjects (Reid, 2005). Furthermore, when learners are not at school their absence prevents them from obtaining the knowledge from the lessons which are presented (Reid, 2005). DeSocio *et al.* (2007) maintain that children may face serious academic difficulties and fall behind in their school work if they do not attend school regularly. When learners are not in the

classroom they may end up with fewer friends and, as a result, poor social skills (Reid, 2005). The effects of absenteeism on learners include the relatively small possibility of them passing to the next grade and the risk of dropping out of school is very high (DeSocio *et al.*, 2007). When constant absenteeism is widespread, it influences those learners who attend school regularly. If a large number of learners in a class miss school regularly, teaching in that particular class is disrupted as the teacher may be forced to repeat some lessons or slow down for the absent learners to catch up with those who attend school regularly (Chang & Jordan, 2010; Education Commission of States, 2009; Balfanz *et al.*, 2008; Nauer *et al.*, 2008; Sunduis & Fameth, 2008).

Researchers have found that the long-term effects of irregular school attendance and truancy are: higher school dropout rates; high unemployment rate among the dropouts; higher cost of social programmes; and higher funding costs of prisons as there is an increased likelihood of dropouts being imprisoned for criminal activities and behaviour (Alarid; Smith & Ruiz, 2011; Maynard Tyson-McCrea; Piggott & Kelly, 2011). Studies have found that truant learners are more expensive to educate; need more counselling support before and after school programmes; and other services that learners who regularly attend school do not need (Smith & Heilbrunn, 2005). Learners who are constantly absent from school face a higher possibility of a future without a job compared to those who attend school and obtain a qualification (Braodhurst, Patton & May-Chahal, 2005; Kane, 2006).

2.4 Strategies for Managing Learner Absenteeism

Kearney (2008) divides the approaches to learner absenteeism in three broad themes, namely: psychological, social/criminal and educational. The psychological approach concentrates on the child, school phobia, separation, anxiety, school refusal interventions and different types of therapy and medication. The social/criminal approach concentrates on rule-breaking behaviour and other factors, like homelessness, poverty, teenage pregnancy, family problems and delinquent peer groups. Interventions include early education, family and health services, police and legal

strategies, community services and court referrals. The educational approach deals with school-based factors which include school violence, victimization, school climate, parental involvement and bullying where educators use multiple strategies, such as legal and counselling approaches; conflict resolution; skill training groups for aggression and for victimized children; extracurricular activities to reduce racial tension; expulsion of violent children; outreach to the community; increased school safety; and the police. Although McCluskey (2004) and Kearney (2008) suggest a multidisciplinary model for managing learner absenteeism, Reid (2004) found that head teachers are concerned about the lack of sharing between the different sectors in managing learners' absenteeism and recommends that multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary measures should be implemented.

Weideman (2007) maintains that the strategies most schools in South Africa use in reducing learner absenteeism are: sport and other extracurricular activities; merits/demerits; awarding and recognizing good school attendance; and an improved relationship between the school and the community. The Primary School Nutritional Programme has contributed to improved school attendance. In Tanzania, a study on the characteristics associated with primary school attendance amongst the most vulnerable children indicates that providing school fees, food assistance and holding support meetings improves learners' school attendance (Ng'ondi, 2010).

An approach to control absenteeism should be developed in a holistic way, taking into account the extensive problems that add to absenteeism. According to information obtained by the Community Agency for Social Enquiry (CASE) and the Joint Education Trust (JET), there is a collection of good practice strategies that focuses on learners, including the individual tutoring of learners with complex problems at school and home visits and counselling for learners with particular needs. Peer tutoring has also become an intervention at schools in which older learners are trained to work with younger learners who have attendance problems (Teasley, 2004). Another approach is the teacher/mentor one which deals with learners with attendance problems where

mentors offer learners the chance of “pro-social identification” (DeSocio *et al.*, 2007). The teachers provide support in stimulating self-growth and imparting knowledge that encourages learners to achieve educational goals (DeSocio *et al.*, 2007). In terms of the mentoring programme learners have a regular check-in and check-out type process (Teasley, 2007); before the start of school the learners check-in with their mentors and at the end of the day they check-out with their mentors and this provides the mentors with an easy way to identify whether learners are in school and if they stay at school for the entire day (Teasley, 2004). Mentors are also able to check the learners’ school work and see how their academic performance improves (DeSocio *et al.*, 2007). This intervention expects schools to change their organization; develop excellence pathways; and strengthen individual connections between learners and teachers to prevent and correct attendance problems (Epstein & Sheldon, 2003; Teasley, 2004).

An intervention, suggested by Teasley (2004), is that the family and the school should work as a single unit where schools support parents to become more vigorously involved in ensuring that their children attend school. Furthermore, in this intervention the school, actually, supports family-school teamwork; the school encourages families to make decisions regarding discipline for low attendance (Teasley, 2004). The involvement of parents in the monitoring of absenteeism is significant as they need to be aware of the day-to-day progress of their children (Community Agency for Social Enquiry and Joint Education Trust, 2007). The assumption underpinning this strategy is that school attendance can be improved if the schools create a good parent-school relationship by involving parents in the decision-making process and in monitoring absenteeism at school on a daily basis. In terms of this teamwork strategy schools are continually in contact with the families concerning learner attendance (Teasley, 2004). The proposed model for family intervention focuses on factors, such as family values; attitudes to discipline and schooling; underprivileged parents; parental information of their children’s intellectual achievements; parental punishing of children; parent and child truancy regulation; and excellence in contact between families (Teasley, 2004).

Some of the intervention strategies suggested goes beyond school and home boundaries. Teasley (2004) believes that community organizations and getting learners involved outside their home within their community have produced successful results in monitoring learner absenteeism. After school, community organizations are accessible to learners to support them with their schoolwork and give them a strong feeling of achievement. A weekend agenda helps learners identify their ambitions and formulate procedures to assist them to feel that they are in control of their school attendance (Teasley, 2004). Having a community around the learners' homes that assists with the needs of the learners plays an important role in encouraging regular school attendance. Motivation is also significant in reducing absenteeism (Community Agency for Social Enquiry and Joint education trust, 2007); learners are encouraged by means of rewards or acknowledging their attendance at school on a regular basis. In more developed countries, like the UK and the US, attendance guidelines are a preliminary point of departure for monitoring learner school absenteeism, using attendance register figure as a first step to curb absenteeism.

A study by Sanzila (2011), which included six cases studies in the Kavango region of Namibia, reports on a School Feeding Programme that was introduced to improve learner school attendance. In order to improve the attendance of boys at school they need to encourage those who feel too shy to eat with younger learners to accept free meals. The study recommends that schools should introduce effective internal policies to reduce alcohol abuse and sexual activity among learners. The policies should include all the stake-holders in education, such as parents, teachers, learners, delegates from regional offices and the ministry in order to improve the attendance of learners at school. It was noted that non-promotional subjects, like life skills, are not taught in schools. Therefore, to improve school attendance teachers should also teach non-promotional subjects - as prescribed by the curriculum - which should be compulsory as they may have a positive impact on learner motivation and school attendance (Sanzila, 2011). A subject like life skills covers life-orientation activities which will

enable learners to become better and more responsible citizens of the country. It will equip them with the skills and knowledge needed to uplift the country to a different level; improve their behaviour at school; and motivate them to attend school regularly.

2.5 Benefits of Reducing Absenteeism in Schools.

The effective management of learner school attendance has a positive effect on teaching and learning in the classroom (Reid, 2003). Teachers progress well in covering the curriculum and learners benefit more by attending the class continuously. Regular attendance has a direct effect on the school's level of literacy, numeracy and performance in the external examination and, thus, improves the image of the school from an 'underachieving' one to an improving and rising school (Reid, 2003). Reducing absenteeism in school improves discipline and, generally, makes the school environment more conducive for learning to take place as the levels of bullying are significantly reduced (Reid, 2003).

In the Southern African context, reducing absenteeism has the benefit of uplifting learners from a deprived socio-economic status and advancing their health, welfare and excellence potential, especially the girls. Improved schooling also adds to cost-effectiveness and a reduction in poverty (UNESCO, 2004c; 2009b). The advantages are, generally, social-economic and, consequently, they are important for a developing nation in terms of preparing a future workforce to meet the demands of the workplace.

2.6 Perceptions of Parental Involvement

According to the literature, parental participation is perceived as a way to improve the quality of education (Singh, Mbokodi & Msila, 2004). In order for school to educate children effectively, parents and families should become fully involved in the process of educating learners (Rothstein, 2005). Research has shown that with an increase in parental participation in their children's education, learner success rates increase. In the US studies have shown that in schools where parents are involved in the education of their children, the performance of the learners is more likely to be improved than in

schools with low parental involvement - irrespective of the socio-economic status of the learners' families (Department of Education, 2004).

Research has provided ample evidence that parental involvement affects attainment in core subjects, such as Reading, Mathematics and Science; in the behaviour of learners; their school attendance; and their attitude and adjustment to school life (Sheldon, 2009; Sanders & Sheldon, 2009). Parents lack educational experience which has resulted in their ignorance of the importance of education. Many researchers recognize the important role a strong positive bond between the home and the school plays in the development and education of children (Sanders & Sheldon, 2009; Richardson, 2009; Sheldon, 2009). Numerous studies show that good cooperation between the school, home and the community can lead to improved academic achievement for learners as well as some reform in education. It seems that successful students have strong academic support from involved parents (Sheldon, 2009). Positive parental involvement appears to relate closely to their children's success at school, whereas poor parental involvement obviously does not (Bridgeland *et al.*, 2006; Orfield, 2004).

A school is successful when there is a strong and positive relationship among learners, parents, teachers, and the community (Sanders & Sheldon, 2009). Learners are more likely to experience academic success if their home environment is a supportive one (Sander & Sheldon, 2009). The benefits for learners of a strong relationship between the school and the home lie in the development of trust between parents and teachers. This trusting relationship occurs when teachers and parents respect one another and believe in the ability of other people and their willingness to fulfil their responsibilities (Muscott *et al.*, 2008). Sander and Seldon (2009) maintain that it is important for schools to improve school attendance and even though schools may not have systematically and consciously worked in partnership with families to reduce absenteeism, cooperation and affiliation with families is known to be an important factor in increasing student attendance (Sheldon, 2009). The findings in the research have identified certain aspects where parents may contribute to reducing levels of truancy

among students (Sander & Sheldon, 2009; Sheldon, 2009), including the following: monitoring their children's whereabouts; discussions with children about school; volunteering at their children's school; and being members of a parent-teacher association. In order to improve school attendance, it has also been shown to be helpful if the school informs parents of their children's absenteeism (Sanders & Sheldon, 2009). This gives parents a chance to monitor and supervise their children's attendance more carefully. Empirical data is needed concerning the causes of poor parent involvement. However, several authors have identified key culpable factors, such as language barriers; cultural differences between families and school officials; lax family attitudes and mistrust; family resistance to acculturation; teacher absenteeism; and school-based racism and discrimination (Brand and O' Connor, 2004; Martines *et al.*, 2004; Teasley, 2004). Similarly, strategies to boost parental involvement include improved parent-teacher communication; the use of translators; home visits; a reduction in obstacles, such as childcare and transportation problems; parental participation in classroom activities; and matching the diversity of school personnel to the surrounding community (Broussard, 2003).

This review of the relevant literature has cited studies done on learner absenteeism and strategies that are being, generally, implemented to reduce absenteeism. The reasons or causes for learner absenteeism stem, mostly, from the context of developed countries - apart from studies undertaken in South Africa and the study by Sanzila (2011) in the Kavango region of Namibia. This study will further explore learner absenteeism in the Kavango region, but it focuses on the rural context and the strategies used to reduce learner absenteeism in terms of the ethic of care. The researcher intends to explore how a caring approach to learner behaviour can be used as a strategy to encourage regular school attendance, especially in a rural school context.

2.7 Theoretical Framework

The ethic of care theory which provides a framework for the study and that focuses on caring relationship was developed by Nodding (1984) and Gilligan (1982). The ethic of care is about acts of love and establishing relationships that empower others (Gilligan, 1982). The ethic of care is a principle that examines the quality of relationships or the interaction between individuals which promotes human dignity and a duty to care (Nodding, 1988). It has relevance for educational leaders and this study set out to explore the extent to which the participant principals practice caring relationships and the type of care they give. In terms of this framework, Nodding (1992) argues that as human beings, we are all capable of “caring for” and “caring about” others. It is the act of caring that enables interpersonal relationships between individuals to grow and develop. The role of the person who provides care is known as a “care giver” and the one who benefits from that care is the “care receiver”. The relationship between the two should be a caring one where patience and commitment are key factors that enable the care giver to assist the “care receiver” to realize his/her full potential (Nodding, 1992).

While Nodding perceives the ethic of care as a non-gendered concept, Gilligan argues that although both men and women are capable of giving care, there is a difference in the way they experience the reality of attachment and separation (Gilligan, 1982). Her view of the ethic of care is grounded in feminine theory and suggests that women are more capable of establishing relationships that are interwoven with the ethic of care than men. As a researcher, my view in this study on caring for learners is in line with both Nodding and Gilligan’s concept of the ethic of care. The approach utilised to understand strategies that teachers use in managing learner school absenteeism is not based on gender but on the way in which both male and female teachers manage learner behaviour to reduce absenteeism.

Noddings (1998) regards developing others as an element of a caring relationship. Teachers who recognise the potential of learners and empower them tend to build

trusting relationships with them (Moye *et al.*, 2004). Nodding (1998) believes that a caring relationship in education is based on modelling, dialogue, practice and confirmation. This means that, as role models, teachers need to demonstrate caring for others; have a dialogue in their relationship with others; practice caring; and encourage others to develop. In analysing the finding of this study Chapter 4 explores how the experiences of teachers with learners who are often absent from school fits into the framework.

I used Nodding's ethic of care theory (1984) to guide the study and analyse my data. Ethics can be defined as the principles and guidelines that help us uphold what we believe, while caring refers to kindness and sympathetic gestures. According to the framework of ethic of care, teachers are expected to create an affiliation with their students to enhance a helpful and conducive classroom environment to assist in the acquisition of knowledge. An ethic of care begins from the premises that teachers are in control of learners academic achievements and once the learners realizes that the teacher cares about them, they will be more actively involved in the classroom and they will want to attend school. Furthermore, this theory stresses that to improve unity in the classroom learners need to know, and be at ease with, their peers and with their teachers. The essence of Nodding's ethic of care is mutual association which involves the helpers, the teachers, and those being helped - the learners; in the learning environment the teachers are the caring ones while the learners are those being cared for. A strong bond is created in this caring relationship. Nodding (1992) clearly maintains that teachers who exercise an ethic of care are accountable to their learners. When teachers are concerned and dedicated, they work hard, using their experience and carrying out individual tasks by means of modelling, dialogue, practice and confirmation. Nodding (1992) is of the opinion that by offering help to their learners the teachers gain experience and become motivated to care for their learners. For instance, at the school level the teachers show an ethic of care in their lessons and become better acquainted with their learners. An ethic of care supports teachers in competently

considering attitudes and discussing and delivering activities in the best interests of their students (Nodding: 1992).

The act of caring has four elements: modelling, dialogue, practice and confirmation (Nodding, 1992). Modelling gives teachers the opportunity to care through their individual association with their learners; they do not inform students of their care, but rather demonstrate care by forming helpful relationships with them. The dialogue element of caring relates to the increase and preservation of affiliation between the helpful individual and the person being cared for. Dialogue is discussion and paying attention to the person receiving care. It provides the chance for sympathetic responses, approval and enables teachers and learners to talk about their problems and find solutions. In using dialogue caring teachers become facilitators and analysts, changing the focal point of the contact as learners' desires occur (Nodding, 1992).

Caring teachers show learners how to care for others. Nodding (1992) suggests that when teachers give learners an opportunity to care for others they, in turn, will become the ones who care for others. Confirmation is an act of establishing and promoting the most excellent traits in teachers in order to increase helpful connections with their learners. According to Nodding (1992), for one-caring teachers, confirmation of learners emerges when creating a relationship based on trust. Cared-for learner openness and reaction of one-caring teachers will enable an increased belief in the ethic of care. Nodding (1992) argues that in complex conditions one-caring teachers have the ability to think about the best way to care for the learners. In this study, I explored how teachers manage learner absenteeism using the components of ethic of care, namely: modelling, dialogue, practice and confirmation within a school context that is characterized by several factors, such as high levels of poverty; a nomadic lifestyle; the lack of school transport; a lack of parental support; and overcrowded classrooms. The following figure illustrates the theoretical framework of this study.

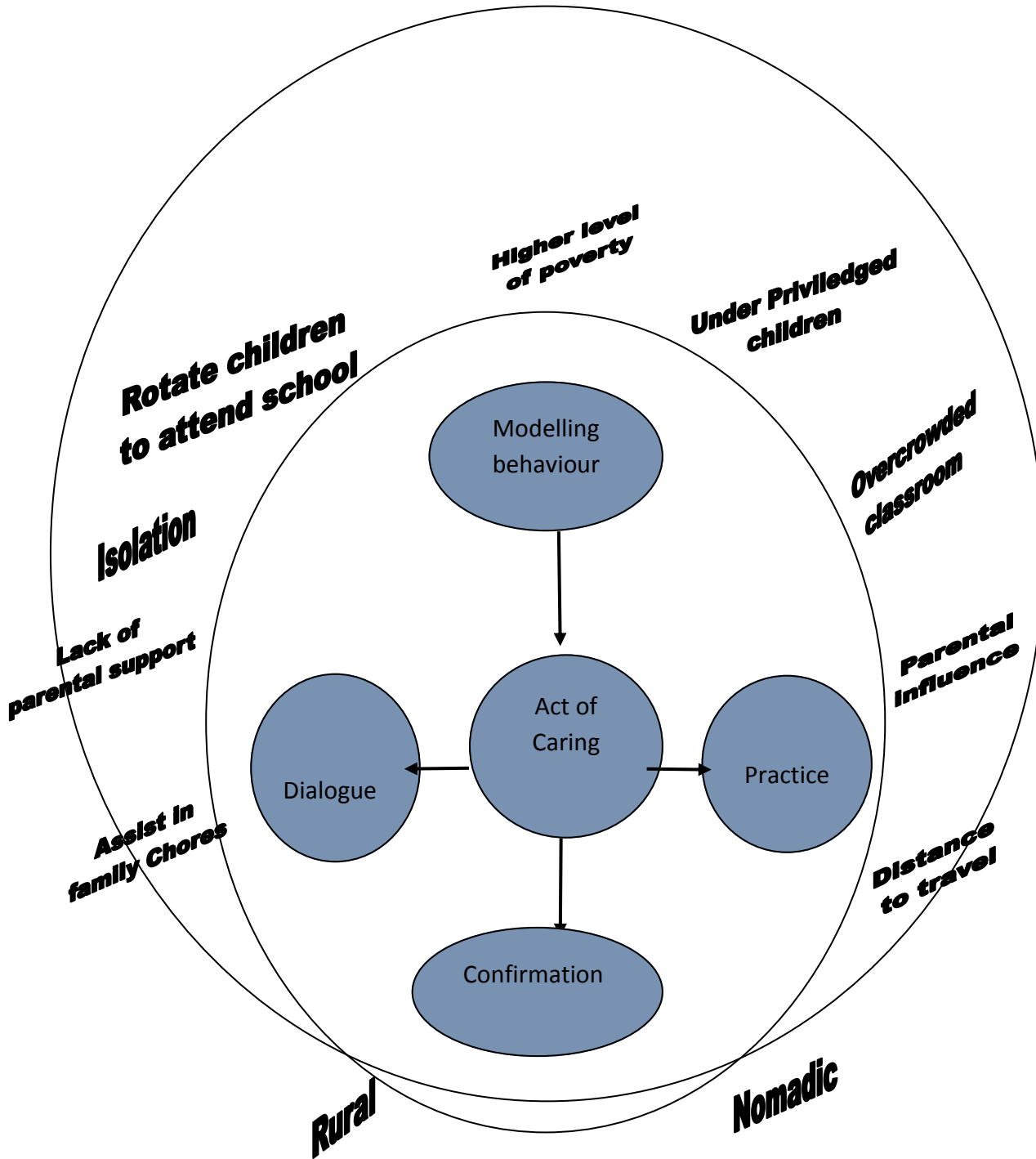


Figure 1: Four Elements of the Act of Caring (Nodding 1992)

2.8 Summary of the chapter

In this chapter, the literature concerning learner school absenteeism and the role of parents in reducing absenteeism has been cited and discussed. The literature has revealed that factors contributing to learner absenteeism are diverse but that, generally, they fall in four broad groups or categories, namely: person/individual factors, socio-economic factors, family factors and school-related factors. The strategies used for reducing learner absenteeism and the benefits of regular school attendance have also been examined. In the next chapter, Chapter 3, the research design and methodology of the study are given and discussed.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

The previous chapter presented a literature review related to learner absenteeism. This chapter discusses the research approach, design and methodology applied in this research study in an effort to obtain appropriate data that would answer the research questions on how teachers in four rural primary schools in the Kavango region of Namibia manage learners' school attendance. The chapter also presents a logical process for identifying the research participants, collecting and analysing data. The study is located within a qualitative interpretive research paradigm.

3.2 Research Approach

The research approach to this study is a qualitative one. Qualitative research was considered suitable for this study because it attempts to examine an incident in a usual location where the focus is on understanding the social incident holistically (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005). Qualitative research concentrates on the meanings attached to particular viewpoints or contexts and since different people or groups often have different viewpoints, there are many different meanings regarding a particular phenomenon (Gay & Airasian, 2003). Leedy and Ormrod (2005) argue that qualitative research, typically, answers questions regarding natural phenomena with the purpose of describing and understanding the phenomena from the participants' points of view. Qualitative research seeks to probe the research setting in-depth to obtain a fuller understanding of the way things are and why and how the participants in the particular context perceive them. Qualitative research also provides insights into what people believe and feel about the way they are and it involves the text of spoken words to document variables as well as an inductive analysis of the collected data (Gay & Airasian, 2003).

The qualitative approach was deemed suitable for this research study as the researcher intended understanding and gaining an insight into the experiences of teachers regarding the management of learner absenteeism in rural primary schools in the Kavango region of Namibia. Qualitative inquiry not only enabled the researcher to explore the experiences of the teachers regarding learner absenteeism but also to understand how they manage learner school attendance within a rural school context. This approach facilitated the conversation between the researcher and the participants in interviews to obtain a clear picture of what was exactly happening at the research site.

The research approach in this study was qualitative and the advantage of using this approach was that it is naturalistic and tries to understand the phenomenon from the participants' point of view (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005; Lichtman, 2012). Qualitative data sources included observation (fieldwork), interviews and document analysis (Creswell, 2009). My thought was that since there are multiple realities, the process of managing school attendance may be experienced by the teachers in different ways. Managing the absenteeism of learners may vary from one school to the next or from one teacher to the next in the same school. In undertaking this study, I wanted to gain more insight into the management challenges faced by the teachers and the strategies they use to reduce absenteeism. I also explored the role of the parents in managing learner absenteeism - as perceived by the teachers; these experiences should be seen through the eyes of rural primary school teachers and as they are portrayed in their own words.

3.3 Research Paradigm

This study is located within an interpretive paradigm which considers the experiences of individuals as the main source for interpreting the reality of a phenomenon. According to Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007:21), an interpretive paradigm is an investigation of collective disciplines and a lens through which the researcher scrutinizes a natural phenomenon. The ontological perspective of an interpretive

researcher is the belief in multiple realities and an understanding of the existing experiences of the participants through the subjective meaning that they attach to it (Wahyuni, 2012). Within the interpretive paradigm the researcher tries to make sense of the meaning of the participants' world by talking to them (Johnson & Christensen, 2012; Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). Thus, this research paradigm allows the researcher to interpret the experiences, thoughts and opinions of the participants in their own setting and cultural context. In addition, the researcher is able provide "thick" descriptions of the data to allow the reader to conjure up a vivid picture of the circumstance of the study (Lichman, 2012).

The advantage of conducting this study within this research paradigm is that it permits the researcher to comprehend, draw logical conclusions and view the participants from an individual viewpoint and understand that different people may distinguish the same social phenomenon differently. Therefore, in this study the researcher believes in the existence of multiple realities and has presented an interpretation of the insights, views and understanding of the participants' knowledge regarding the management of learner absenteeism in rural primary schools in the Kavango region of Namibia.

The choice of a research paradigm was directed by the purpose of the study and the nature of the phenomenon to be studied (Silverman, 2013). Research paradigms are differentiated by ontological and epistemological assumptions. Ontology is how the researcher perceives reality and epistemology is concerned with the way knowledge is generated, understood and used (Wahyuni, 2012). As a researcher I believe that there are multiple realities and that knowledge is socially constructed. The reality of a phenomenon is determined by the perceptions and experiences of the participants, while what contributes to acceptable knowledge is subjective meaning of a social phenomenon (Wahyuni, 2012). The methodological paradigm is, therefore, interpretive by nature. An interpretive paradigm is an investigation of a collective discipline and a lens through which the researcher scrutinizes a natural phenomenon (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007). Interpretive researchers believe in multiple realities and understand

the lived experiences of the participants through the subjective meaning that they attach to them (Wahyuni, 2012). In doing this research, I aimed to make sense of the meanings of the participants' world by talking to them during the interviews (Johnson & Christensen, 2012; Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). I will present a "thick" description of the data to enable the reader to have a vivid picture of the context of the study (Lichman, 2012). Doing research within an interpretive paradigm helped to enable me, as the researcher, to understand the management of learner absenteeism in specific primary schools in rural areas. The interpretive paradigm provided an opportunity to interact with the participants and gain insights, views and an understanding of participants' experiences of managing of learner absenteeism in rural primary schools in the Kavango region of Namibia.

3.4 Research design

The research design for this study was case study. Yin (2003) describes a case study design as a research design in which the researcher is able to explore the experiences of the research participants or organisations. Case study involves a systematic way of generating and analysing research data. Yin (2003) and Cohen and others (2007) states that case study is a bounded system and the cases are studied within a specific timeframe and research context. The researcher needs to give a rich description of the research context to give the reader an opportunity to decide on the applicability of the study. Brink and Wood (1998) maintain that case study research examines relevant factors in detail to arrive at an appropriate description of the reality of the existing situation. In this study the experiences of participant teacher regarding the management of learner absenteeism in four schools were investigated to provide an understanding of, and insight on, how teachers address the phenomenon of learner absenteeism. The multiple-site sources of data enabled the researcher to evaluate the diverse experiences from different research sites by interviewing the different participants to acquire a more holistic picture of the problem being studied (Wahyuni, 2012). The choice of the case study was to enable the in-depth investigation of the

viewpoints of the participants and their actions concerning learner absenteeism (Creswell, 2009). While the research paradigm provides the fundamental belief for undertaking the research, research design describes the procedures in conducting a study (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011). This study used a case study research design involving multiple sites (different schools). A case study research design is used when the researcher wants to investigate unknown areas of research (Durrheim, 2002). The data collected from different sites is compared and holistic findings are presented (Wahyuni, 2012). In this study I focused on learner absenteeism in rural primary school in the Kavango region of Namibia. The rationale of the study was to explore how teachers manage learner absenteeism in rural primary school in the Kavango region of Namibia in order to gain some insight into the management challenges encountered by the teachers and their perceptions of parental involvement in rural primary schools.

3.5 Research Methodology

Research methodology includes the selection of the research site, sampling, data collection methods, and research procedures and data analysis, (Merriam, 2009).

3.5.1 Research site

This study was a small-scale interpretive study conducted in selected primary schools in the Kavango region of North-Eastern Namibia. The four rural schools were purposefully selected from the 329 government schools in the Kavango region where the researcher gained an insight into the experiences of the different teachers in the selected schools. According Merriam (2009), interpretive research uses a small sample or even single cases, selected purposefully to allow the researcher to focus in-depth on issues important to a study. The focal point of this study was on the management of learner absenteeism in rural primary schools. The researcher explored how participant teachers managed learner absenteeism to gain an insight into the management challenges faced by teachers in curbing learner absenteeism and their perceptions regarding parental involvement in learner absenteeism issues.

3.5.2 *Sampling*

Sampling is a process of selecting people who will be included and involved in a research study (Remler & Van Ryzin, 2011). A sample of eight teachers of which two per school was selected from a population of teachers in the Kavango region of Namibia. Purposive sampling was used as opposed random sampling to select the participants for this study (Remler & Van Ryzin, 2011) as it is used to include people with useful, in-depth and unique perspectives of the phenomenon (Cohen, Marion & Marrison, 2008; Patton, 2002). As the researcher, I used purposive sampling in order to obtain the type of information required for this study; it enabled the selection of participants with a potential to provide rich data and thick descriptions of their experiences of the phenomenon (Johnson & Christensen, 2012; McMillan & Schumacher, 2006). The selected teachers were those responsible for learners' school attendance/school discipline or who had served on the disciplinary committees where learner school attendance was an issue. The assumption was that those teachers had the potential to provide knowledgeable data on the management of learner absenteeism. Another criterion was that the sample had to include teachers with more than two years' teaching experience. The reason for selecting experienced teachers was based on the notion that they may have had more exposure to the phenomenon than newly appointed teachers. The participants were both male and female teachers.

The researcher identified the participants with the assistance of the principals who recommended teachers who fitted the researcher's criteria for purposive sampling. The researcher then requested permission from the principals to meet with the teachers to inform them about the study. The teachers were given consent letters which they responded to in private and, later, returned them to the researcher. Individual appointments were then made with teachers who gave their consent to be interviewed. The appointments were made for interviews after school hours at venues preferred by the individual teachers.

The participants in this study were selected by using a purposive sampling procedure in order to identify those with the potential to provide a rich data and thick descriptions (Johnson & Christensen, 2012; McMillan & Schumacher, 2006). In sampling, the emphasis is on the detail and quality of individuals or small group experiences (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011). According to Patton (2002), it may be advantageous to study a broad range of subjects (maximum variable sample), outliers (deviant sample) and subjects who have specific experiences (critical case samples). The participants for this study were selected on the basis of their potential to provide rich data and their knowledge about the phenomenon being studied. The intention of the researcher was not to generalise findings because the small sample size does not represent the wider population of people who have experienced the phenomenon (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2010). The information-rich cases were the participants who had the most information and the ones who could provide insight and a deeper understanding of the management of learner absenteeism in the classroom. The selected teachers were members of disciplinary committees; subject teachers; class teachers who monitored the register; and guidance and counselling teachers who dealt with truant learners. Due to time and the cost of data collection, the study was done in one circuit involving 4 primary schools out of 335 schools in the Kavango region. A total of 8 participants, 2 from each school, were selected for the study. The selected schools were those with high learner absenteeism rates.

3.5.3 Data collection methods

Semi-structured interviews

Data collection in this study was done by means of semi-structures interviews (Burton & Jones, 2008). Rubin and Rubin (2009) describe an interview as a procedure that takes place between two or more individuals who exchange a few words, discuss and agree on particular facets related to several approved questions. In the interviews the participants shared their understanding of managing a classroom to curb learner

absenteeism in a rural primary school. A number of open-ended questions were prepared, based on information from the literature review, the set research questions and the goal and objectives of the study (Burton & Jones, 2008). The questions allowed for probing in order to clarify answers and for gathering detailed information. The advantages of using semi-structured interviews are that they are flexible and that they give the researcher/interviewer the option to regulate the questions asked. The researcher is able to ask people about their viewpoints and opinions of facts, feelings and rationale for accomplishment and what motivates them (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005). The interviewer can also encourage the participants to provide more precise and absolute information. The semi-structured interviews were an opportunity for the participants to provide in-depth data that could not be collected by using questionnaires. Some disadvantages of using semi-structured interviews are that the responses given by the participants may be subjective and biased because of their enthusiasm to satisfy the interviewer; the interviewer may look for answers that sustain fixed views by asking leading questions; interviews are time-consuming, work demanding and expensive; they limit the number of participants that are interviewed in contrast to mailing questionnaires to a large number of people; and depending on the topic participants may be unhappy with the interviews and reluctant to share their true thoughts and feelings. In terms of this study the participants answered all the questions and the interviews did not take more than one hour each.

The data collection method was semi-structured interviews. An “interview” is an interactive process that takes place between two or more individuals, involving an exchange of words and discussion. It is a process in which the researcher asks the interviewee (participants) questions; responds; and shares his/her thoughts, knowledge, reasoning and feelings about the subject being researched (Christensen & Johnson, 2008; Seidman, 2012). I chose interviews as a data collection strategy for this study because interviews would enable the participants to talk about and interpret their experiences and communicate how they observe circumstances from their individual

perspectives (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2005). The interviews allowed the participants to provide data related to their experiences of managing classrooms to curb learner absenteeism in rural primary schools in the Kavango region of Namibia. The interviews were conducted at the schools after school hours. The participants were required to answer a set of predetermined questions related to their experiences and to express their views about the management of learner absenteeism. The questions asked allowed for probing for the clarification of answers and for further details. The duration of the interviews was one hour for each participant. As the researcher, I ensured a depth and wide range of data by using multiple participants (Burton & Jones, 2008).

I planned to do a document review to provide secondary data for triangulation (Wahyuni, 2012) but, unfortunately, the expected documents, such as student records, internal school policy/school rules on school attendance and punishment books did not exist in the schools that were involved in the study. The only available document was the class register that showed percentages of learner absenteeism.

Document review

The document review was used as a secondary data for triangulation purpose. Unfortunately documents such as student records on absenteeism, internal school policy on learner absenteeism, school rules on how to remedy learner's absenteeism/school attendance and punishment books were not found at the selected schools in the study. The only available documents used was a class register which indicates the attendance of learners during a particular day or how many learners (boys & girls) are present or absent in that particular day.

The four identified schools in the Kvango region of Namibia according to the information obtained from the attendance register showed that the number of girls present everyday were more than of the boys. Moreover, both learners at the selected schools tend to be absent or stay at home on Mondays and Fridays every week. This tendency was observed in the class register of both grades from the selected schools.

Even though these four selected schools have different absenteeism rates. This shows as high as showed in the general statement about the absenteeism in the Northern Namibia particularly related to absenteeism of boys. The overall absenteeism rate among boys in the four selected schools is 45% which is high than the recommended standard of 3% as well as the indication of absenteeism in the literature.

There are various reasons for absenteeism rates as discussed in chapter 2. The class register also helped me to acquire more understanding on the absenteeism of learners in rural primary school at selected schools in the Kavango region of Namibia. Even though all schools selected did not have a proper control of learners' absenteeism or policy to address this issue at school level. In other words no sampled letters written by teachers to parents regarding their children poor attendance were found at school.

Finally according the class register from the sampled schools approximately 100 learners out of 269 learners were found not in the class, 65 learners out of 135 were also not found in the class, 35 learners out of 100 learners were not in the class as well and 30 learners out of 60 learners were not in the class in one day. Which means this number can be doubled during the whole week at the selected schools.

3.5.4 Research procedures

During the data collection process the researcher spent one week at each research site. Interviews were carried out as planned with the participants and according to times that were suitable to them. Prior to the interviews, the participants were given consent letters to read and sign and a copy of the letter from the regional director was given to the principal. Informed consent can be explained as the measures in which participants decide whether or not to take part in a study after being well-informed of details that could influence their decision (Cohen *et al.*, 2005). The purpose and significance of the study was explained to the participants which was done to re-assure the participants and to obtain their consent.

3.5.5 *Data analysis*

Qualitative data collection often yields a large amount of information that needs to be sorted into categories and themes (Kumar, 2011). In this study, a content analysis approach was used to make sense of the data. The first step in the processing of the data was the transcription of the recorded interviews. I listened to the tapes and transcribed them *verbatim* onto an analysis table. I then re-read and colour-coded segments from the transcripts. The coded data was then arranged in categories and the categories were merged into themes and sub-themes related to the research questions.

Qualitative data collection often yields a large amount of data that needs to be sorted into categories and themes (Kumar, 2011). The initial handling of data involves transcribing audio recordings; cleaning the data by removing all information that may lead to identifying the participants and the data collection sites; and applying codes to represent the participants and the organisations involved in the study (Wahyuni, 2012). In this study, the transcribed data was coded and organized into groups and sub-groups according to correspondent and diverse of themes and entered on the computer (Kumar, 2011). The research question and the aims of the study were used as a guide in the analysis of the data (Wahyuni, 2012). The analysis was started by carefully reading through the descriptive responses given by the participants to each question and assigning codes to the data and making logical connections between the codes to merge them into categories. From the categories broad themes were developed and linked to the research questions.

3.6 **Credibility and Trustworthiness**

In order to ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the research findings, a researcher engages in research activities that make the findings believable, convincing, trustworthy and confirmable (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005). Qualitative research demands the use of various approaches with a purpose to increase trustworthiness (Creswell, 2009). To ensure the trustworthiness of the research findings of this study, data from the

different participants was triangulated (Maxwell, 2007). The information from different participants was collated in order to extract familiar themes and sub-themes. Various studies indicate that “triangulation reduces the risk of biased conclusions which may be a result of limited data sources (Maxwell, 2007). In this study, the sampling of teachers from various rural primary schools facilitated the crystallization of responses about classroom management related to curbing learner absenteeism and reducing bias from the study.

An audit trail of the processes followed and the decisions made throughout the research are presented in the annexures. A tape recorder was used for accurate data capturing and the transcriptions were *verbatim*. The interview transcripts and the data analysis table were shared with the participants to comment on the accuracy of the data and to provide any additional information. The researcher uses direct quotations from the interview transcripts to strengthen the themes presented in the chapter on the research finding, giving the participants a voice and illustrating their experiences. The thick description which the researcher provides is for the purpose of giving the reader the opportunity to decide on the relevance of the findings of the study to other contexts (Merriam, 2009). Member-checking serves to decrease the incidence of incorrect data capturing and interpretation and it provides findings that are authentic and original (Creswell, 2007). The importance of conducting member-checking is that it allows the researcher the opportunity to verify the accuracy and completeness of the findings which helps to improve the credibility of the study (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006).

Peer review is another strategy that was used to improve the quality of the research. It is a process to ensure that the information in any academic publication is verified and the researcher sent drafts of the dissertation to his supervisor and co-supervisor for comments on quality and accuracy of the research process and findings.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

Ethics is concerned with moral principles; in research it is the researcher's principled accountability to guard the human rights and well-being of the participant members (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006). In this study the researcher gave a letter of informed consent to participants which informed them of details of the research. Informed consent is the agreement to participate in the study after being informed of its purpose, procedures, risks, benefits and confidentiality (Johnson & Christensen, 2008). The researcher considered the four main ethical issues: protect from harm; informed consent; right of privacy; and honesty throughout the research (Cohen, *et al.*, 2005). All participants were informed that they would not be exposed to any harm in the process of being involved in the study. The privacy, anonymity and confidentiality of participants were protected throughout the study. Anonymity involves concealing the identity of the participants by using code names or labels (Schulze, 2002). The researcher ensured that participants' identities were kept anonymous and confidential by using code labels, such as "Teacher 1". Participation in this study was voluntary and the participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time should they feel uncomfortable about continuing. The researcher also established a rapport with the participants to gain their trust before starting with the interviews.

3.8 Summary of the chapter

In this chapter, the research approach, design and methodology was discussed. The reasons for choosing a qualitative approach were given as well as the justification for an exploratory research design. Sampling and data collection methods were specified. The credibility and trustworthiness of the research process were presented and ethical guidelines that the researcher adhered to were cited. The findings of the study will be given and discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

4.1 Introduction

The previous chapter outlined and discussed the research approach, design and methodology. This chapter presents the findings from the data gathered during the semi-structured interviews with primary school teachers in the rural areas of the Kavango region of Namibia. The gap identified in the literature on learner absenteeism is that most studies done on this topic focus on factors that contribute to learner absenteeism and the consequences of not attending school. Little is known about how teachers manage the absenteeism and the challenges they experience. Furthermore, there are few studies on learner absenteeism in the Kavango region of Namibia.

The aim of this study was to investigate how teachers manage their classes in order to control learner absenteeism in rural primary schools in the Kavango region of Namibia. The study intended to gain some insight into management challenges faced by the teachers and the strategies they use to reduce learner absenteeism. In this study, the views of the teachers regarding parental involvement in learner school attendance have been explored. The following section presents the biographical information of the teachers who participated in the study - followed by the discussions of the themes identified from the research findings.

4.2 Biographical Information

Table 4.1, below, contains the biographical information of participant teachers in terms of their gender, the grades they teach and their years' teaching experience.

Table 4.1: Biographical Information of Teachers Involved in the Study

Participants	Gender	Grade	Teaching experience and school
Teacher 1	Male	1-2	18 years School 1
Teacher 2	Male	3-4	31 years School 1
Teacher 3	Female	Pre-primary	20 years School 2
Teacher 4	Male	5-7	8 years School 2
Teacher 5	Male	1-2	25 years School 3
Teacher 6	Male	3-4	20 years School 3
Teacher 7	Male	5-7	10 years School 4
Teacher 8	Male	5-7	8 years School 4

4.3 Research Questions and Themes

The research questions and the themes are reflected in the following table, Table 4.2, which is followed by a detailed explanation.

Table 4.2: Research Questions and Themes

RESEARCH QUESTION	THEMES
1. What are the factors that contribute to learner absenteeism in rural primary school in the Kavango region of Namibia?	1. Family causes 2. Individual causes 3. School causes 4. Environmental causes 5. Socio-economic causes

2. How do teachers perceive parental participation in learner absenteeism?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Lack of teacher-parent partnership 2. Lack of value for education 3. Lack of learner support
3. What are the classroom management challenges faced by teachers due to learner absenteeism?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Teaching challenges 2. Learner challenges 3. Lack of parental involvement challenges
4. What are the strategies used to reduce learner absenteeism?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. School strategies 2. Teacher strategies 3. Establishing positive relationship strategies

4.4 Research Themes

4.4.1 Theme 1: Factors that contribute to learner absenteeism

The findings of this study show that all the teachers interviewed acknowledged that learner absenteeism was a problem in their schools. They perceived the factors that contribute to learner absenteeism as **family, individual, school, environmental and socio-economic**. Most of the teachers were concern about learners being, necessarily, involved in performing domestic chores at home and in the field as one of the reasons for school absenteeism. The teachers said:

“Some of the problems I have realised that stop learners from attending school are cattle herding, ploughing, labour, domestic work and hunting (Teacher 1).”

“I can say that they stay with siblings to care for them and also do domestic work instead of coming to school (Teacher 7).”

These findings confirm those of a previous study (Nelson Mandela Research Report, 2005) which reports that in many rural areas learners spend a certain amount of time

before or after school each day on family and agricultural chores, such as herding cattle, fetching water or firewood and the boys, especially, stay at home to look after the livestock. Romeo *et al.* (2008) and Postiglione *et al.* (2006) found that some learners miss school to assist with family chores. Studies by Sutphen, Ford and Flaherly (2010); Weideman *et al.* (2007) and Reid (2008) indicate that child labour, which includes farm work, herding cattle, fetching water or firewood, is a common practice in rural areas.

Other teachers who participated in this study were of the opinion that a lack of parental support in terms of informing their children about the importance of education; motivating them to attend school; and establishing teacher-parent relationships discouraged the children from attending school regularly. Some of the comments made by the teachers included the following:

“Some of the problem I came across in my classroom: Parental involvement, some parents do not realize the importance of education (Teacher 8).”

“I found out in my classroom that no motivation from parents and teachers, no parental involvement, sickness, hunger, stay with siblings at home (Teacher 2).”

The teachers also cited various personal reasons, such as absenteeism of female learners during their menstrual periods; learners’ lack of motivation to attend school, especially over-aged learners; sickness; and early marriage. They said:

“Some of the problems I have realized are menstruation. Some learners miss school because of it (Teacher 4).”

“Some of the learners are afraid to come to school because of not doing the homework given to them and during their menstruation period (Teacher 5).”

Similarly, Weidman *et al.* (2007) and Reid (2008) suggest other socio-economic reasons for learner absenteeism, including teenage pregnancy and menstruation. They stress that some learners do not attend school due to sickness or ill-health - even when they only have a mild illness that should not stop them attending classes (Budlender, 2006;

DeSocio *et al.*, 2007). School absenteeism because of homework not being done was a unique finding in this study. Kearney (2008), however, also found that too much homework could contribute to learner absenteeism and could result in a fear of assessment tests. Similarly, studies done Unesco in 2004 and 2009 found that in the southern African context a lack of parental support of homework left learners with too great a task to complete without any assistance and this encouraged truancy amongst the learners. Some learners tend to stay away from school because, in their opinion, they do not see the benefit of attending school regularly.

Some of the teachers interviewed saw peer pressure, teacher attitude, incomplete homework and a lack of motivation as aspects in the school environment as causes of learner absenteeism. Teacher 2 was of the opinion that some teachers become angry with learners in the class and so the learners do not feel free to ask them questions and sometimes they stay at home because of the teacher's attitude. The teachers commented:

"Learners do not come to school because of peer pressure; they stay at home because their friends are staying at home and are not interested in attending school (Teacher 3)."

"Some learners do not attend school because their friends do not want to come to school (Teacher 5)."

According to the findings of this study, peer influence related to learner absenteeism was due, mainly, to the lack of interest in going to school. Reid (2005) also reports on the peer pressure factor, but suggests that learners were afraid to go to school because their peers pressurised them to join, and be involve in, the activities of the group which took place during school hours.

Teacher's attitudes to the learners were also mentioned in this study as a reason for learner absenteeism. According to Kearney (2008) and Reid (2005), a poor relationship between teachers and learners may force the learners to stay at home instead of attending school. If learners have a poor or conflicting relationship with their teachers

they will try to avoid those teachers. Moseki (2004) believes that factors such as insults and humiliating remarks by teachers contribute to the absenteeism of learners at schools.

The socio-economic status of the learners and their families was also mentioned by the teachers as a reason for poor school attendance. All the teachers suggested that hunger was a problem that affects school attendance as some learners do not have food to eat at home and, therefore, they do not have the energy to come to school due to hunger, especially if they have to walk great distances. Learners are also required to work in the fields during the harvesting period. While some learners are used as child labour to earn wages, others accompany their parents to draw their pension money on pay days which coincide with teaching and school hours. The teachers included the following in their responses:

“Some of the problems that make learner absent from school I realized are: escorting parent to get their pension money, ploughing or harvesting time to get money (Teacher 6).”

“Some learners do not come to school because they work on farms for wages to help buy food and groceries for the family (Teacher 4).”

Other studies have identified socio-economic status as a common reason for non-school attendance. Learner absenteeism in rural areas may be due to a practice of child labour where families make their children work to subsidize the family income or to perform extensive domestic duties as their parents work in the fields (Zahafs *et al.*, 2005; Budlender, 2006). Some learners may be taken out of school by their parents to boost the family income by involving them in cheap labour at an early age (Teasley, 2004). The Nelson Mandela Research Report (2005) also suggests that in South African rural areas learners are absent from school due the need for them to provide family meals at home.

Some teachers were of the opinion that some learners did not come to school because of hunger. They regarded the lack of food to eat before coming to school as a deterring factor to school attendance. The teachers said the following:

“Hunger is unforeseen problem; therefore, learners may not come to school if they do not have something to eat at home (Teacher 3).”

“Poverty leaves children without hope for education or improving their living conditions as they are left vulnerable to the risk of dropping out of school (Teacher 8).”

A similar finding was cited in the Nelson Mandela Research Report (2005) where it was noted that hunger is another contributing factor to learner absenteeism as some learners go to school without having had any breakfast or having missed a meal as they appear to be weak and do not participate in class.

Teachers 4 and 7 believe that the problem of learner absenteeism in their classrooms is linked to the changing season/time of the year. They maintained that many learners were often absent from school during cold, rain and harvesting period; other learners walked long distances to school which made their school attendance irregular - due to fatigue.

“Some of the problems that I found with learners in my classroom are that they walk long distance to school and during cold, rainy and harvesting period they do not attend school (Teacher 7).”

“In my experience there is a problem of learners absenteeism in the classroom which combine all learners coming from far away from the school and those staying nearby the school, the learners usually are absent on Mondays and Fridays (Teacher 6).”

This finding confirms one in the UNESCO report (2009) that suggests that because learners may have to walk long distances to school in rural areas where there is no proper transport infrastructure, it may be the cause of learner absenteeism.

Another cause of absenteeism that emerged and that is unique to this study is that learners do not attend school on pension pay day when they are required to escort their parents to the pay stations. One teacher said:

“I can say that the main reason for going with their parents to the pay station is to buy basic requirements, such as pens, books and clothes (Teacher 6).”

In this theme most teachers interviewed acknowledge that learner’s absenteeism is a problem in their schools which can be categorised into school, family, individual and socio economic. The teachers were mostly concerned of learners being by involving in domestic chores at home and in the field contribute to learner’s absenteeism. Furthermore, teachers also highlighted that lack of parent support in terms of motivating them to attend school, establishing teacher-parent relationship discouraged learners from attending school regularly.

Other factors identified by teachers are hunger, peer pressure, distance to school, and child labour and escorting parents during pay days all contributes to learners absenteeism.

4.4.2 Theme 2: Teachers’ perceptions of parental participation

All the participant teachers seemed to have observed different aspects of parental behaviour that could influence a lack of learner school attendance. The teachers were of the opinion that a lack of teacher-parent partnerships was a cause of learner absenteeism. Most of the teachers maintained that parents did not come to school when they were invited by the teachers. Some argued that parents did not care whether their children were in the class or not as they assumed that the teachers had the sole responsibility of ensuring that their children attended school.

“I do agree that parents are the main contributor to learner absenteeism in my classroom. Due to the fact that parents do not visit school to see how their children are attending their classes. Moreover, they do not even care about the

attendance of their children at school and even not attend parent meetings arranged by the school (Teacher 2)."

"They do not come when I invite them in my classroom to check the attendance record of their children and also do not care whether their children are at school or not (Teacher 3)."

According to Sheldon (2009), even though schools do not systematically and consciously work in a partnership with families in order to reduce absenteeism, cooperation and affiliation with families is known to be an important factor in increasing student attendance. The teachers in this study expressed their desire to cooperate with parents to improve school attendance. They also noted a negative attitude of some parents to education. They spoke about the various behaviour patterns of parents that suggest a lack of value for education which included keeping learners at home for domestic work; a lack of interest in monitoring learner school attendance; and a lack of commitment to the education of their children.

"Sometimes they just keep their children at home during school hours to assist them with domestic work (Teacher 6)."

"I have realized that parents keep their children at home during school hours without informing me as a teacher of the absenteeism. Furthermore some parents do not come to school when I invite them or even not attend parent meetings (Teacher 1)."

Another parent-related problem mentioned by the teachers was the illiteracy of parents. They speculated that some parents lack confidence to engage with teachers on educational issues because they are uneducated while others are afraid to ask teachers questions when they visit the schools because they feel intimidated.

"I think some of the reasons are lack of knowledge towards education and being illiterate, parents do not have time to attend to school matters rather than their private matters (Teacher 1)."

The relevant literature suggests that parental participation is, generally, perceived as a way to improve the quality of education (Singh, Mbokodi & Msila, 2004). In order to

educate children effectively, parents and families should become fully involved in the process of educating learners (Rothstein, 2005). In the US studies show that in schools where parents are involved in the education of their children, the performance of the learners is likely to be better than in schools with low parental involvement - irrespective of the socio-economic status of the learners' families (Department of Education, 2004).

Parental involvement in this study differs from that cited in the literature because parents in rural Namibia tend to lack educational experience which has led to ignorance and their lack of value of education. They are, therefore, unable to motivate their children in terms of the importance of education. The value of education for families in the rural areas may not be the same as for families in the urban areas where more parents are literate. Parents in rural areas, where the study was undertaken, have little knowledge of education; they do not visit schools - even when they are invited by the teacher; and they do not attend arranged teacher-parent meetings. Moreover, the findings of this study show that the lack of parental participation in managing learner absenteeism is because some parents are guilty of keeping learners at home for domestic work; they have no interest in monitoring their children's school attendance; and show no commitment to their education.

Related to this imbalance in the teacher-parent relationship, some teachers were concerned that the lack of parental support for teachers could be a result of teachers not involving parents in school matters, such as developing school rules; parents are, therefore, often not committed to ensuring that the rules are enforced.

"Classroom rules and school rules are set up without the involvement of parents so learners find it difficult to understand them or follow them as expected (Teacher 5)."

It seems that teachers in this study recognise the importance of parental involvement in ensuring that learners attend school. Many researchers cite the importance of the role a strong positive bond between home and school plays in the development and education

of children (Sanders & Sheldon, 2009; Richardson, 2009; Sheldon, 2009). Moreover, positive parental involvement relates closely to children's successes in school, whereas poor parental involvement obviously does not (Bridgeland *et al.*, 2006; Orfield, 2004).

A school becomes successful when there is a strong and positive relationship between learners, parents, teachers and the community (Sanders & Sheldon, 2009). In addition, learners are more likely to experience academic success if their home environment is supportive of their education (Sander & Sheldon, 2009). The case of the learners in the context of this study is different as, at times, their parents kept them out of school to attend to domestic matters or to help generate a family income - because of the impoverished state of some of the families.

Despite the gap in education levels between the parents and the teachers, most of the teachers firmly believe that parents could still play an important role in ensuring good learner school attendance. Parents could ensure the care, comfort and safety of the learners by providing food and clothes; by walking them to school; and by making sure that they have adequate rest by putting them to bed early. According to two of the teachers, parents should

"Wake up their children in the morning, provide them with basic needs, such as food, and escort them until at the school premises and visit the school to check the attendance record of their children (Teacher 8)."

"Assist children with school work, Contact teachers when they experience problem at home, create a good teacher-parent relationship and Provide basic needs such as food and money (Teacher 5)."

In the context of this study the role that the family plays in supporting learners to attend school is different from what is commonly reported in the literature. For example, walking long distances with learners to school and making sure that they have adequate overnight rest to be able to walk those distances is due to the rural environment in which the learners live. In other contexts the role of parental participation includes monitoring learners' whereabouts; discussing school with the

children; volunteering for various tasks at school; being members of parent-teacher associations, and helping the learners with their homework, among other functions that help improve school attendance (Sanders & Sheldon, 2009).

The literature gives some reasons why parents are not involved in partnerships with teachers as the following: language barriers; culture differences between families and school officials; lax family attitudes; and school-based racism and discrimination. This study highlighted other reasons, including the illiteracy of some parents in rural areas; their lack of confidence to engage with teachers on educational issue because they are uneducated; and being afraid to ask teachers questions when they visit the schools because they feel shy and intimidated. Further reasons identified in the study for parents not being involved in school matters are the following: the negative attitude of some parents to education; a lack of parent-teacher partnerships and little parental support for teachers which could result in the teachers not involving parents in school matters, such as developing school rules.

In this theme teachers were of the opinion that teacher-parent partnership was one the cause of learner's absenteeism. Most teachers said that parents do not attend parents meetings, do not adhere to invitation to school by teachers, negative attitude of some parents to education contributes to learner absenteeism. Even though in the context of this study parents have the role to play such as walking with learners to school , making sure that their children get enough rest due to the rural environment in which the children live.

Lastly some factors identified by teachers for parent not involved in school attendance/matters were negative attitude of some parents to education; lack of parent-teacher relationship, little parent support for teachers could result that teachers may not involve parents in school matters such as developing of schools rules.

4.4.3 Theme 3: Classroom management challenges

The absenteeism of learners was experienced by all the teachers as an extra burden to their teaching load. They talked of having to repeat lessons for the absent learners when they returned to school, a practice which was time consuming and which restricted some teachers in achieving basic learner competencies in their subjects because of repetition with absent learners. Learner assessment was also referred to by the teachers as problematic due to their inability to help learners who attended school irregularly to achieve all the learning outcomes:

“The teaching and learning will not materialize as planned, as the teacher, I have to repeat the same lesson again and again to those learners who were not in the classroom, and the assessment that could be done in the same day to meet the basic competencies will not work as planned (Teacher 2).”

“As a teacher this will require my extra time to cover with those learners and this will lead on to cover all basic competencies in a term. This become overloaded with extra work to me as a teacher, I need to cover two group learners during my given/allocated time. I have to repeat the lesson presented to absent learners (Teacher 7).”

In the literature Reid (2005) suggests that when learners are absent from the classroom they are unable to do and submit assignments or homework given on a specific day. This may result in an underachieving or poor performance in different subjects. Moreover, absenteeism also inhibits learners in gaining knowledge from the presented lesson. If a large number of learners in the class miss school regularly, teaching and learning is disrupted as a teacher may be forced to repeat the lesson or slowdown for the absent learners to catch up with those who attend school regularly. (Chang & Jordan, 2010; Education Commission of States, 2009; Balfanz *et al.*, 2008; Naver *et al.*, 2008; Sunduis & Fameth, 2008). In this study the teachers said that they had to find ways of assisting absent learners to catch up with the rest of the class as absenteeism reduced the possibility of the learners passing into the next grade as well as increasing the risk of them dropping out of school (DeSocio *et al.*, 2007).

Another challenge that the teachers spoke about was learners who did not comply with school rules and unsupportive parents who did not come to school when invited by the teachers to discuss their children's conduct. Experiences were cited where parents confronted teachers about learner discipline matters and this frustrated some of the teachers.

"Some parents do not come when I invite them, other parents threaten me as teacher for punishing their child for being absent from my classroom, No strict rules at schools and learners attitude towards education (Teacher 1)."

"One of the challenges is parent's attitude as they do not allow me as a teacher to punish their children when they are absent. They sometimes come to school very angry with me because I have punished the learner (Teacher 2)."

In this theme teachers said that learner's absenteeism was experienced as an extra burden to their teaching load. Teachers are of the opinion that they have to repeat lessons to absent learners when they return to school which becomes time consuming and restrict other learners in achieving other basic competencies.

Other challenges spoke by teachers were learners who do not comply with school rules and unsupportive parents who do not adhere to invitation of teachers to discuss their children conduct.

4.4.4 Theme 4: Strategies for reducing learner absenteeism

Regarding the question of strategies that the teachers used in reducing learner absenteeism, their responses can be categorized as: **school-based, individual educator-based and harmonious relationship-based** strategies.

The teachers spoke about whole school strategies, such as school feeding programmes and free primary education, as some factors that encouraged learners to attend school regularly because they would be fed at school and were not expected to pay fees. In

their discussions some of the teachers indicated that learners who attended school regularly were recognised and acknowledged in morning assembly.

“Feeding scheme has helped in making learners attend school. To me it does simple because more learners come to my classroom when the food is available at school but few turned up when it is finished or not yet delivered at school (Teacher 1).”

“At school I make use of school feeding programmed at school encourage the learners to attend school. I make sure that all learners in my classroom have to eat (Teacher 3).”

This study also revealed that in some schools extra-curricular activities, such as soccer, netball and culture activities, like choir, were provided to encourage learners to attend school regularly. Some of the schools also had award-giving ceremonies where certificates were given to students with the best attendance records.

“I sometimes arrange sport activities at school in a sort of grade completion; allow them to join the culture group. I sometimes give rewards to the learner with good attendance record or sometimes acknowledge them to keep their good record (Teacher 3).”

Some teachers gave learners gifts, like sweets and pens, as motivation to attend school:

“I normally give presents to the children with good attendance record such as sweets, pens to encourage them to attend school and for the other learners to learn that they should also attend school (Teacher 8).”

Internationally, there are studies that have proposed multi-disciplinary and inter-disciplinary measures that could be implemented to reduced learner absenteeism. The measures include legal issues; counselling; conflict resolution; skill training groups for aggression and for victimized children; extracurricular activities to reduce racial tension; expulsion of violent children; outreach projects to the community; increased school safety; and police involvement (McCluskey, 2004; Kearney, 2008; Reid, 2004). In Tanzania a study of characteristics associated with primary school attendance amongst

the most vulnerable children indicates that providing school fees, food assistance and holding support meetings improves learner school attendance (Ng'ondi, 2010).

Some strategies for reducing learners absenteeism mentioned by the teachers in this study are in line with Weideman's (2007) finding that a number of strategies are used to reduce learner absenteeism in most South African schools that include sport and other extracurricular activities, merits/demerits, awards and recognition of good school attendance. In addition, the Primary School Nutritional Programme has also contributed to improved school attendance.

The teachers also cited several individual strategies that they used to encourage school attendance and discourage learner absenteeism. Some of the teachers motivated learners to attend school by sharing their own personal experiences with the learners. They also talked of making lessons interesting and encouraging learner participation during the lessons by involving them in class activities. Other teachers gave learner responsibilities that committed them to attend school. The following extracts from the teachers' responses illustrate how they involved learners:

"Encourage and give learners my practical life experiences regarding the importance of coming to the classroom (Teacher 6)."

"I, as a teacher, have to prepare interesting lesson to allow learners to enjoy coming to the classroom. I assign some learners responsibilities as head boy/girl to lead other learners as they feel proud and avoid being absent from school (Teacher 2)."

"Assign learners to ring the bell in the morning those who usually absent themselves from class so that they may keep up with their responsibilities, in this way I do encourage not to be absent in my classroom (Teacher 1)."

Some of the strategies that the teachers referred to have also been cited by the Community Agency for Social Enquiry and the Joint Education Trust, 2007 as good practices that focus on learners. The strategies include individual tutoring for learners with complex problems at school; home visits; and counselling for learners with

particular needs. Peer tutoring has also become an intervention at schools where older learners are trained to work with younger ones who have attendance problems (Teasley, 2004). A teacher-mentor approach is also a way of dealing with learners who have attendance problems. Mentors offer learners a chance of “pro social identification” (DeSocio *et al.*, 2007). In terms of the mentoring programme, learners regularly experience a check-in and check-out process (Teasley, 2007). Another intervention suggested Teasley (2004) is that the family and the school should work as one unit; schools need to support parents to be more vigorously involved in getting their children to school. According to the teachers, some of the mentioned strategies did not seem to have been practical solutions in the rural context in which the study was done.

Some of the teachers used punishment as a way of discouraging learner absenteeism.

“I give punishment to the learners for instance to wash the classroom and clean the toilet (Teacher 3).”

“Give them punishment, such as cleaning the class, toilet, wash windows in the afternoon or after school (Teacher 7).”

“As a teacher I have to follow the rules set up in order to address the problem. Give written/verbal warnings to the learners. Suspend learners from my classroom for certain days (Teacher 5).”

Collaborative strategies were also mentioned by the teachers that were aimed at inspiring learners to attend school. These included talking to the parents of learners who were often absent from school in order to try to solve the problem together and collaborating with other teachers in encouraging regular school attendance.

“I talk to such learners, invite the parents to come to school then we discuss the problem together and agree on way forward (Teacher 3).”

“I invite the parent to check the attendance of their children. Discuss the problem with the parent of such learners with attendance problem (Teacher 6).”

“Education stands into three levels, such as parents, teachers and learners. To fulfil this problem I feel that all the parties should be involved as such (Teacher 8).”

When the teachers were asked how they supported learners with poor attendance records in their classrooms, they spoke about a caring relationship which involved talking to the learners to find out what the problem were that made them miss school. Some teachers did home visits to assess the situation and to talk to the parents of the learners. The teachers informed the parents about their children’s right to education and their responsibilities and duties, as parents, to promote that right to education.

“Talk to the learners to find out what is really the problem by investigating what is happening during home visits to assess the situation at home and talk to parents individually (Teacher 2).”

The relationship with the individual learners was strengthened by motivational talks from the teachers. They also initiated a peer-support system where some learners, mostly prefects, would be given the responsibility of encouraging learners with a poor attendance record to attend school. The teachers participated in remedial teaching and setting extra work to assist learners who did not attend school regularly.

“I also encourage learners in my classroom by giving them motivational speech and remedial teaching to assist them (Teacher 2).”

“Assign learners to ring the bell in the morning those who usually absent themselves from class so that they may keep up with their responsibilities, in this way I do encourage not to be absent in my classroom (Teacher 3).”

Absenteeism, due to personal reasons, like girls not attending school during their menstruation cycle, was addressed by some teachers talking to, and educating, the girls on personal health care during menstruation and by providing them with sanitary pads.

“As a female teacher I usually talk and educate girls regarding menstruation and also by involving parents, especially school boards, to assist me. The school also provides pads to the girls as we realized that it may lead to drop out if not considered well (Teacher 3).”

“Being a woman I have to educate the girls about menstruation and also have to send them home if it happens as we do not have any assistance to be given to girls at the moment at our school (Teacher 4).”

Motivation also plays a significant part in reducing absenteeism (Community Agency for Social Enquiry and Joint Education Trust, 2007). Learners were encouraged to attend school on a regular basis by means of rewards or some acknowledgement. In more developed countries, like the UK and the US, the attendance procedure of using attendance register figures as a first step to curb absenteeism is a preliminary point of departure for monitoring truancy.

A unique finding from this study is that there is a peer support system where some learners, mostly prefects, are given the responsibility of encouraging other learners to attend school; this initiative is not common in the relevant literature. In other words, some learners, such as the head boy/girl are expected to lead others which include inspiring them to be self-motivated to attend school regularly. Similarly, the teachers mentioned educating girls about menstruation, personal care and sanitary hygiene to encourage them to attend school when they were experiencing their menstrual cycle. This is evidence of a caring relationship which involves talking to learners to find out what their problems are and trying to solve them.

According to the findings of this study, teachers do apply the ethic of care to some extent to reduce learner absenteeism in the classroom. Nodding (1992) explains the ethic of care by dividing it into four elements, namely: modelling, dialogue, practice and confirmation. According to Nodding (1992), modelling involves showing care through individual affiliation between a teacher and a learner. From this study it seems that teachers demonstrate caring by creating individual relationships with the learners in their classrooms. This was evident when teachers spoke about talking to individuals learners about their reasons for not attending school and trying to address the problems. The second element, which is the dialogue between the care giver and the person being cared for, is described by Nodding (1992) as discussion between the two

parties that enables the teachers and the learners to talk about their problems and find solutions. In using dialogue, one-caring teachers become facilitators and analysts, changing the focal point of the contacts as the learners' emotions occurred (Nodding, 1992). The findings of this study show that teachers are able to hold discussions with the learners who do not attend school regularly about their problems and the reasons for not attending school. In the process of supporting learners with attendance problems, some of the teachers inform the parents about their responsibility to ensure that their children attend school. Others share their own life experiences with the learners to encourage and motivate them to attend school.

The third element of Nodding's ethic of care is practice. Nodding (1992) suggests that when teachers give learners the opportunity to care for others the ones cared for, in turn, will become carers of others. It means that the cared for are given an opportunity to become the care givers. In this study the teachers seemed to demonstrate the act of caring to the learners by giving them opportunities to help other learners. For example, some teachers assign the prefects the responsibility of walking to school with the habitual absent learners to ensure that they attend school. The teachers also visit the learners at home to assess their situations and to talk to their parents.

Confirmation, the fourth element, is an act of establishing and promoting excellent traits in teachers to increase helpful connections with their learners. Nodding (1992) indicates that the relationship that is established must be based on trust and openness and further argues that in complex conditions, one-caring teachers have the ability to consider the best way to care for learners. From this study it appears that there are trusting, open relationships between some teachers and learners, such as when teachers spoke about giving learners sanitary pads and talking to them about personal care during their menstruation periods.

In this theme the strategies used by teachers to reduce learners absenteeism can be categorised as school based, individual educator based and harmonious relationship-

based. Teachers have of the opinion that school feeding programme, school extra-curricular activities such as soccer, netball, culture all encourage good attendance or learners to attend school regularly.

More over teachers also spoke of ways of supporting learners with attendance problems such as caring relationship which involve talking to learners to find out the really problems, home visits and talk to the parents of the learners with the aim of motivating learners to come to school regularly.

4.5. Summary of the chapter

In this chapter the data gathered by means of semi-structured interviews with teachers from rural primary school in the Kavango region of Namibia was presented. The emerging themes were integrated with references to the literature to determine the similarities and differences between the findings of this study and those of previous studies. The discussion was also, specifically, related to the ethic of care. The next chapter, Chapter 5, provides a summary of the findings; draws conclusions; makes recommendations; and suggests related, relevant topics for future study.

CHAPTER 5

STUDY SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

The purpose of this study was to investigate how teachers in rural primary schools in the Kavango region of Namibia manage their classes in order to reduce learner absenteeism. The study aimed at identifying the challenges faced by the teachers and the strategies they used to reduce absenteeism. In this study, the views of the teachers regarding parental involvement in learner school attendance were also explored. The rationale for the study was embedded in my personal experience as an educator and my interest in how teachers in rural areas manage learner absenteeism. The occurrence of irregular school attendance came to my attention as I am accountable for monitoring and controlling class registers at my school as well as summarizing them for record keeping purposes. It was anticipated that the factors that contribute to learner absenteeism, if known, may be used as a starting point to developing programmes that may help reduce learner absenteeism. Even though there is a policy on learner school attendance in Namibia, there is no system in place to monitor absenteeism in the classroom. Moreover, policy may not affect and change the reality on the ground. It is important to find out what is happening in the schools before one can suggest ways of improving the situation.

5.2 Study Summary

A study summary includes a relook at the factors that contribute to absenteeism in schools; teachers' perceptions of parental involvement in dealing with absenteeism; classroom management challenges; and strategies for reducing learner absenteeism.

5.2.1 *Factors contributing to learner absenteeism*

The findings of this study reveal that all the teachers interviewed acknowledge that learner absenteeism is a problem in their schools. They confirmed that some of the

reasons for learner absenteeism are family, individual, school, environmental and socio-economic in nature. The most common reason for non-school attendance given by the teachers was learner involvement in performing domestic chores within the home and working in the fields. The study also shows that the lack of parental support in terms of assuring their children of the importance of education and not motivating them, as well as a lack of parental involvement in schools and partnerships with teachers, discourage learners from attending school regularly. The participants mentioned various personal reasons for absenteeism. For example, some female learners do not attend school during their menstrual periods. Other personal reasons cited include a lack of motivation, especially with over-aged learners, sickness and early marriage.

The study identifies school-related factors, such as peer pressure, teachers' attitudes, an inability to do homework and a lack of motivation as causes of learner absenteeism. The participants claimed that some teachers became angry with learners in the class and as a result the learners did not feel free to ask questions and sometimes stayed at home because of the attitude of the teacher. Furthermore, the findings of this study reveal that socio-economic conditions of the learners and their families play a role in the learners' refusal to attend school. The participants identified, particularly, hunger as a problem; some learners did not have food to eat at home and they were not able to come to school because of their hunger. Poverty is the cause of some learners being involved in child labour to earn wages. Another reason for absenteeism referred to by the teachers was that learners were expected to accompany their parents to fetch their money on pension pay days. In addition, the study also suggests that absenteeism is linked to the changing season/time of the year. The participants asserted that many learners were often absent from school during cold weather; when it was raining; and at harvesting time. The findings of the study also reveal that some learners are required to walk long distances to school which causes them to attend school irregularly due to fatigue.

5.2.2. Teachers' perceptions of parental involvement

The participants in the study referred to different aspects of parental behaviour that could influence learner school attendance. The findings of the study reveal a lack of teacher-parent partnerships as a cause of learner absenteeism. The teachers claimed that parents did not go to schools when they invited them. They were concerned that parents did not care whether their children were in class or not as they assumed that the teachers were responsible for ensuring that their children attended school. The study also suggests that the negative attitude of some parents to education could contribute to learner absenteeism in the classroom. The teachers spoke about the lack of a supportive relationship with the parents. They explained the behaviour of the some parents as a lack of value for education. They further asserted that such behaviour was reflected in parents keeping learners at home for domestic work; their lack of interest in monitoring their children's school attendance; and, generally, not being committed to the education of their children.

The findings of the study suggest that some of the parent-related problems were due to the literacy levels of the parents. Some of the illiterate parents had no confidence in engaging with the teachers on educational issues. The teachers associated their reluctance to attend school meetings with this lack of confidence caused by their education levels. In terms of the unbalanced relationship, the teachers argued that the lack of parental support for teachers could be a result of teachers not involving parents in school matters, such as developing school rules, and, therefore, they may not be committed to ensuring the enforcement of school rules on school attendance. Regardless of the gap in education levels between the parents and the teachers, most of the teachers believe that parents could still play an important role in ensuring learner school attendance. The teachers further suggested that parents could provide care, comfort and safety for the learners by making sure that they had food and clothes; by walking them to school; and by making sure they had sufficient rest by going to bed early.

5.2.3 *Classroom management challenges*

The findings of the study reveal that absenteeism of learners was experienced by all the teachers as an extra burden to their teaching load. It found that teachers feel the need to repeat lessons for the absent learners when they return to school; they maintained that this practice is time consuming and some teachers are unable to instil a basic competences of the subject in the learners because of re-doing work with learners who were absent. The findings also show that learner assessment is problematic due to the inability of the teachers to help learners who attend school irregularly achieve all the learning outcomes.

Other challenges identified were: learners who do not comply with the school rules and unsupportive parents who do not come to school when invited by the teachers to discuss their children's conduct. The teachers asserted that some parents confronted them on learner discipline matters and this attitude shows a lack of cooperation between the school and home regarding regular learner school attendance.

5.2.4 *Strategies for reducing learner absenteeism*

The findings reveal that the strategies that teachers used in reducing learner absenteeism can be categorized as **school-based, individual educator-based and harmonious relationship-based**. Teachers use school-based strategies, such as the school feeding programmes, to encourage learners to attend school regularly because they can be fed at school. Some of the teachers claimed that their motivational talks with the learners and recognising learners, who attended school regularly, at the morning assemble improved school attendance. This study also found that extra-curricular activities, such as soccer, netball and choir, encouraged learners to attend school regularly. Some schools have award-giving ceremonies where certificates are presented to learners with the best attendance records. In addition, some teachers give learners gifts, like sweets and pens, to motivate them to attend school.

The teachers mentioned numerous individual strategies that they used to encourage school attendance and to discourage learner absenteeism. Some of them motivate learners to attend school by sharing their own personal experiences with the learners; making the lesson more interesting; and encouraging learner participation during lessons by setting them class activities; provide learner with other responsibilities that commit them to attending school. Others use punishment as a way of discouraging learner absenteeism. Collaborative strategies, such as talking to the parents of the learners who are often absent from school to try to solve the problem together and working with other teachers to encourage regular school attendance, seem to be used by the teachers.

As the researcher, I anticipated that Nodding's ethic of care would fit the context of this study. The findings of this study demonstrate the fact that the teachers have a caring relationship with the learners that encourages more regular school attendance. The caring relationship involves talking to the learners to find out what their problems are and the reasons for their non-attendance. Some teachers do home visits to assess the situation of the learners and to talk to the parents. The teachers said that they informed parents about their children's right to education and of their responsibilities and duties in promoting that right to education.

Furthermore, the study has revealed that the teachers' relationships with the individual learners were strengthened by their motivational talks. A peer-support system was used to motivate learners to attend school and, at the same time, encourage learners to care for other learners. Teachers also did remedial teaching and gave extra work to assist learners who did not attend school regularly. Other acts of care included talking to learners, who were absent from school during their menstrual cycle, about personal care and giving them sanitary pads to encourage them to attend school. The teachers'

caring for the learners incorporated the four elements of ethics of care, namely: modelling, practice, dialogue and confirmation (Nodding, 1999).

5.3 Conclusions

In this chapter the main findings of the study have been summarised in the answers to the four research questions: *What factors contribute to learner absenteeism in rural primary school in the Kavango region of Namibia? How do teachers perceive parental participation in learner absenteeism? What are the classroom management challenges faced by teachers in terms of learner absenteeism? What are the strategies teachers use to reduce learner absenteeism?*

The finding of this study that learners absenteeism was a problem in their schools as acknowledge by all teachers sampled in the study. They perceived contributing factors such as family, individual, school, environment and socio-economic. Most of the teachers were of concerned with learners being such as involving domestic chores at home and fields. These funding also confirm previous studies which report that many rural area learners spent a certain amount of time before and after school each day on family and agricultural chores such as herding cattle, fetching water or firewood, and boys stay at home to look after the livestock (Nelson Mandela of learners and their families was also mentioned as contributing factor for poor school attendance. Foristance all teachers suggest that hunger was a problem that affects school attendance and some learners do not have food to eat at home and they do not have energy to come to school, they do not have energy to come to school, especially if they had to walk long distance. Learners are also required to work as child labour to earn wages. Other study also cites socio-economic status as a common reason for non-school attendance. Learner's absenteeism in rural areas may be due to a practice of child labour where families make their children work to subsidize the family income or to perform extensive domestic duties as their parents work in the fields (Zahafs et al, 2005; Budlender, 2006). The Nelson Mandela research report (2005) also suggests that in South African rural areas learners are about from school for them to provide family meals at home. Another cause of absenteeism that emerged and unique to study is that

learners do not attend school on pensioner pay day when they are required to escort their parents to pay stations.

Moreover teachers were of the opinion that lack of teacher- parent's partnership was the cause of learner absenteeism. Most of the teacher maintained that parents did not come to school when they were invited by the teacher. Some argued that parent do not care whether their children were in the class or not as they assure all the responsibility to the teacher of ensuring that their children attend school studies cites that schools do not systematically and conscious work in a partnership with families in order to reduce absenteeism, cooperation and affiliation with families is an important factor to increase student attendance (Sheldon, 2009). Parental involvement in this study differs from that discussed in the literature because parents in rural areas of Namibia tend to lack educational experiences which have led to ignorance and lack of values of education. Therefore, they are unable to motivate their children in terms of the importance of education. The value of education for families in the rural areas may not be the same as for families in the urban areas where more parents are illiterate. Parents in rural areas where the study was undertaken have little knowledge of education, they do not visit schools – even when they are invited by teachers and do not attend arranged parent – teacher meetings. Moreover, the funding of parental participation in managing learners absenteeism because some parents are quilt of keeping learners at home for domestic work, they have no interest in monitoring their children school attendance, and show no commitment to their education.

Furthermore, absenteeism of learners was experience by all teachers as an extra burden to their teaching board. They talked of having to repeat the lesson for absent learners when they returned to school, practice which they see as time consuming and restricted other learners of achieving the required basic competences. In the literature, Reid (2005) suggests competences. In the about from the classroom they are unable to do and submit assignments or homework given on a specific day. This may results in an understanding or poor performance in different subjects. Moreover absenteeism also

inhibits learners in gaining knowledge from the lesson presented. If large number of learners are about everyday teaching and learning may be disrespected as a teacher is forced to repeat the lesson or show down for the absent learners to catch up (Chang & Jordan, 2010; Educational Commission of state ;2009, Balfanz et al; 2008; Naver et al; 2008, Sundius & Famethe, 2008).

On the question of strategies teachers use to reduce learner absenteeism which can be categorised, as school-based, individual, educator-based and harmonious relationship-based strategies. Some strategies for reducing learners absenteeism mentioned by the teachers in the study are in line with Weidman's (2007) findings of a number of strategies used to reduce absenteeism in most South African Schools include sport and extra-curricular activities merits/ demerits, awards, recognition of good school attendance. In addition, the principal school nutritional programmer has also contributed to the improvement of school attendance. A unique finding from this study is that there is a peer support system where some learners, mostly class captain are given responsibility to encourage other learners to attend school; this initiative is not common in the relevant literature. In other-words some learners such as head boys/girls are expected to lead others which include inspiring them, to be self-motivated to attend school regularly. Similarly the teachers mentioned educating girls about sanitary hygiene to encourage them to attend school when they experienced their menstrual cycle. This is evidence of a caring relationship which involve talking to learners to find out what their problems are and trying to solve them.

Although most of the findings are similar to those that have been reported in earlier studies, the main contribution of this study is the association of the ethic of care with the strategies teachers used to encourage learner school attendance. All four components of the ethic of care – as described by Nodding - can be identified in this study which makes a contribution to the literature by extending the theory of the ethic of care and focuses on caring for learners to improve their school attendance in a rural school context. It shows the different ways in which the concept of care supports

learners by feeding them and encouraging them to attend school regularly. Over and above this, it seems that teachers in rural schools need to identify the causes of learner absenteeism and be creative in finding ways of improving school attendance by addressing the needs of individual learners. I accumulated a great deal of knowledge during this study, from both international viewpoints and from the participants of the study. Therefore, I think that this study may provide some insights and interest in the ethic of care in terms of school attendance in the rural areas of the Kavango region in Namibia.

5.4 Recommendations

In this chapter the recommendations are made based on the four research questions

1. What factors contribute to learner absenteeism in rural primary school in the Kavango region of Namibia?
2. How do teachers perceive parental participation in learner absenteeism?
3. What are the classroom management challenges faced by teachers in terms of learner absenteeism?
4. What are the strategies teachers use to reduce learner absenteeism?

Recommendation: - Factors contributing to learner absenteeism

One of the most common reasons for learner absenteeism in the context of this study was doing domestic chores and working in the fields. It is recommended that teachers and parents should have regular meetings to discuss ways in which learners are able to attend school and also help their parents with different chores. For example, some chores could be done after school hours or over weekends to enable the learners to attend school more regularly.

Recommendation: - Teachers perception of parental participation in learner absenteeism

1. It is important that schools, particularly rural schools, should formulate ways in which to actively involve parents, learners and teachers in the management of learner absenteeism in the classroom. These strategies should consider the family, school, individual, environmental and socio-economic factors affecting learners and preventing them from attending school regularly. Schools should consider formulating policies that aim at reducing learner absenteeism and which are more open to harmonious parent-teacher-learners relationships.
2. Teachers should take cognisance of the fact that most parents in rural areas are illiterate and impoverished and need more encouragement to be involved in school activities and to provide greater support for their children. Depending on the school context, all stake-holders should discuss and identify strategies that could be implemented in the school to change the culture of parental non-commitment to supporting learners in attending school.

Recommendation:- Challenges faced by teachers in terms of learner absenteeism

1. Based on the findings of this study that indicate a lack of participation of parents in dealing with learner absenteeism, the Department of Education in the Kavango region of Namibia should consider developing policies that encourage parental involvement in school matters and on school boards.
2. Workshops and intensive training programmes should be encouraged to equip teachers with the skills required for the management and monitoring of learner absenteeism in classrooms. Best practices should be shared in such workshops.
3. Adult Education should be introduced to empower illiterate parents; change their negative attitudes; and allow them to appreciate the value of education.

Further recommendations are that the Department of Education in the Kavango region of Namibia should play a more active role in making sure that there are sufficient literacy centres in the rural areas that are well-organised and effectively utilized.

Recommendation: - Strategies of reducing learner absenteeism

1. The ethic of care should be implemented through relationships established between the teachers and the learners as an effective strategy for reducing learner absenteeism in schools where learners experience challenges - as indicated by the teachers in this study.
2. A school feeding programme should be established in schools as it has a positive effect in encouraging school attendance, especially in areas where parents are unable to provide adequate nourishment for their children for socio-economic reasons.
3. School authorities and teachers should think about creative ways of making school an interesting place where learners look forward to attending class and to socializing with their peers in extra- curricular activities.

5.5 Delimitations

This study was limited to 4 rural primary schools and explored the experiences of only 8 teachers. No urban or secondary schools were involved in this study. The study concentrated on selected rural primary schools in the Kavango region of Namibia only. The focus of the study was on how teachers from the selected schools manage their classrooms in order to reduce learner absenteeism. The researcher based the study on exploratory research design and interviews as a data collection strategy hence the study was located within a qualitative research framework.

5.6 Limitations

One of the limitations that I experienced in this study was the unavailability of documents. I had planned to obtain valid documents in the schools, such as school policies on learner absenteeism, attendance policies, and punishment books but, unfortunately, these documents did not exist in the schools. All schools were not willing to give out these documents. The only document available was the class register which records learners who are present and those that are absent in that particular day. I had to rely, mainly, on the interview data. Another limitation was that since the study involved only rural primary schools in one circuit, the socio-economic backgrounds of these schools may not be the same as those of other schools and the findings cannot be generalized to all rural primary schools in the Kavango region of Namibia. The interpretation of data was guided by Nodding's (1984) theory of the ethic of care - other theories were not included. Another limitation of the study is the non-involvement of other stake-holders, such as temporary teachers; teachers who do not deal with disciplinary issues; parents of the learners; learners; school board members; and school principals. Their perceptions and experiences could have been cross-checked with the data from the interviews with the teachers.

5.7 Future Research

This case study focused on the experiences of teachers concerning learner absenteeism; the challenges they face; and the strategies they use to reduce absenteeism. Future research could include other stake-holders to compare their experiences and their strategies for reducing learner absenteeism. Studies, similar to this one, could be undertaken in other regions in Namibia and a comparison of findings could be made across the different regions.

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ANNEXURE A

PERMISSION LETTER FROM KAVANGO REGION



REPUBLIC OF NAMIBIA
KAVANGO REGIONAL COUNCIL
DIRECTORATE OF EDUCATION

Tel: 258911
fax:2589213.....

Enquiries: Fanuel Kapapero
Email: kapapero@iway.na

Inspector of Education
Principals
School board members

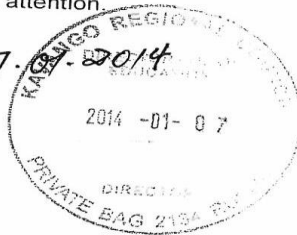
Re: Permission to conduct research in Ndiyona Circuit of the Kavango region:
Mr. M. M. Katanga

The Directorate of Education in the Kavango regional Council has received a request from Mr. Katanga, a Principal at Tara-Tara Senior Primary school, currently pursuing his Master of Education at the University of Pretoria. He intends to conduct a research at schools in Ndiyona circuit. The Directorate of Education is satisfied with the explanation as outlined in the letter and hereby grants permission to Mr. Katanga to conduct research in Ndiyona circuit.

Kindly accord him your usual support and cooperation.

I thank you for your kind attention.


Fanuel Kapapero
Acting Director



ANNEXURE B

REQUEST TO DO RESEARCH IN THE KAVANGO REGION OF NAMIBIA



UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA
Faculty of Education

Tara-Tara Senior primary school

P.O.BOX 2241

Ndiyona Circuit

06 December 2013

The Circuit Inspector
Kavango Regional Council
Directorate of Education
P/bag 2134, Rundu
Ndiyona Circuit

Dear Sir/ Madam

RE: PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN SCHOOLS IN NDIYONA CIRCUIT:

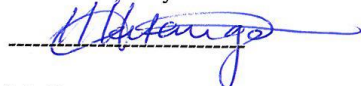
I am a student studying through the University of Pretoria. I am at present enrolled for my Masters Degree in Education Management, Law and Policy studies. I have to complete a research module and one of the requirements is to conduct research and write a research report about my work. I have already obtained permission from the Directorate of Education, Kavango Regional Council to conduct research in Ndiyona circuit. My supervisor is Dr Teresa Ogina. In line with the requirements of research ethics and my research design and methodology I am requesting permission to conduct research interviews with teachers in rural primary schools in Ndiyona circuit, in Kavango region Namibia. My research topic is "**Management of learners' absenteeism in rural primary school in Kavango region of Namibia**". Learners' absenteeism is a challenge in most schools and it has a negative effect on school performance. Some research has been done on this topic internationally and I am interested in establishing how teachers manage learner's absenteeism in the classroom in rural primary school in Kavango region of Namibia. The study intends to gain insight into management challenges faced by the teachers and the strategies they use to reduce absenteeism. In

also explore the views of the teachers regarding parental involvement in learner school attendance. However, the parents and learners will not be involved in the study. The teachers views of parental involvement are for the purpose of research and the information will not be used for other purposes or disclosed to other parties. The interview will take place at a site and time that will suit teachers and will not interfere with teaching, learning and other school activities. The duration of the interview will be about one hour. The interview will be audio taped after obtaining consent from the participants and transcribed for analytic reason. Only my supervisor and I will have access to this information obtained from interviews. Follow-up interviews will be done for clarity and depth of the data. Teacher's involvement is voluntary and they can withdraw from the study at any time. The identity of the school and all involvement will be protected by using pseudonyms during data collection and analysis. The data Collected will be in my possession and after completion of my study the data will be handed over to my supervisor for safe keeping at the Department of Education Management and Policy Studies, University of Pretoria. This is according to the University of Pretoria policy requirements on research data storage. In my research report and any other academic communication, pseudonym will be used for the school and teachers and no other identifying information will be given.

The findings of this study may contribution towards to the existing literature on learner's absenteeism. The research may also identify effective strategies or techniques that may be used to reduce learner's school absenteeism.

I hope that my request will be granted/attended to as soon as possible.

Yours sincerely



Mr Katanga MM

Contact: +264812183562 & Email: katangamm7@gmail.com

ANNEXURE C

LETTERS OF INFORMED CONSENT



UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA
Faculty of Education

Dear Headmaster

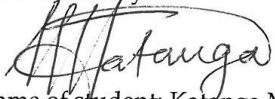
RE: PERMISSION AND CONSENT TO DO RESEARCH IN THE SCHOOL

I am a student studying through the University of Pretoria. I am at present enrolled for my Masters Degree in Education Management and policy studies. I have to complete a research module and one of the requirements is that I conduct research and write a research report about my work. I would like to request your permission to conduct research interviews with teachers at school. My research topic is: **Management of learner's absenteeism in rural primary school in Kavango region of Namibia**. Learners' absenteeism is a challenge in most schools and it has a negative effect on school performance. Some research has been done on this topic internationally and I am interested in establishing how teachers manage learner's absenteeism in the classroom in rural primary school in Kavango region of Namibia. The study intends to gain insight into management challenges faced by the teachers and the strategies they use to reduce absenteeism. In this study, I will also explore the views of the teachers regarding parental involvement in learner school attendance. However, the parents and learners will not be involved in the study. The teachers views of parental involvement are for the purpose of research and the information will not be used for other purposes or disclosed to other parties. I attached a copy of interview schedule for your information. The interview will take place at a site and time that will suit the teachers and will not interfere with teaching, learning and any other school activities. The interview will take about an hour. Follow-up interviews may be done for clarity and depth of the data. The information obtained will be accessed by only me and my supervisor and will not be disclosed to other parties. Teacher's involvement is voluntary and they can withdraw from the study at any time. The identity of your school and all participants will be protected by using pseudonyms during data collection, analysis and writing up of the research report. The data collected for this study will be in my possession and after completion of my study

the data will be handed over to my supervisor for safe keeping at the Department of Education Management and Policy Studies, University of Pretoria. This is according to the University policy requirements on research data storage. The findings of this study may contribute to the existing literature on learner's absenteeism. The research may also identify effective strategies or techniques that may be used to reduce learner's school absenteeism.

If you agree to allow me to conduct this research in your school and willing to help me identify the participants, please fill in the consent form provided below. If you have questions about this research do not hesitate to contact me or my supervisor. The contact details are stated below.

Yours Sincerely



Name of student: Katanga M M

Date.....23/06/14.....

Contact number of student: +264812183562

Email: katangamm7@gmail.com

Supervisor: Dr T A Ogina

Email: taogina@up.ac.za



UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA
Faculty of Education

LETTER OF INFORMED CONSENT

Dear Teacher

I am a student studying through the University of Pretoria. I am at present enrolled for my Masters Degree in the Faculty of Education, Department of Education Management and policy studies. I have to complete a research module and one of the requirements is that I conduct research and write a research report about my work. I would like to invite you whether you will be willing to participate in this study. Your participation is voluntarily. My research topic is: **Management of learner's absenteeism in rural primary school in Kavango region of Namibia**. Learners' absenteeism is a challenge in most schools and it has a negative effect on school performance. Some research has been done on this topic internationally and I am interested in establishing how teachers manage learner's absenteeism in the classroom in rural primary school in Kavango region of Namibia. The study intends to gain insight into management challenges faced by the teachers and the strategies they use to reduce absenteeism. In this study, I will also explore the views of the teachers regarding parental involvement in learner school attendance. However, the parents and learners will not be involved in the study. The teachers views of parental involvement are for the purpose of research and the information will not be used for other purposes or disclosed to other parties. If you agree to participate, you will be interviewed about this topic. The interview will take place at a site and time that will suit you, in order not to interfere with school activities or teaching time. The interview will not take longer than an hour. Participation in this study is voluntary. You will not be penalised in any way if you decline from participating in this study. If you decide to participate and later want to discontinue you have the right to pull out from the study at any time. The interview will be audio taped with your consent and transcribed for analytic reason. Only my supervisor and I will have access to this information. Follow-up interviews will be done for clarity and depth of the data when necessary.

ANNEXURE D

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

The teacher interview protocol

Date.....30-06-14..... Venue.....School.....
Interviewer.....Mr. Katanga..... Duration.....One hour.....
Interviewee.....T6..... Pseudonym.....T6.....
Time of interview.....15H00.....
Male/Female.....Male.....

Topic: **Management of learner's absenteeism in rural primary school in Kavango region of Namibia.**

The purpose of my study is to investigate how teachers manage their classes in order to control learners' absenteeism in rural primary schools in Kavango region of Namibia to gain insight into management challenges faced by the teachers and the strategies they use to reduce absenteeism. In this study, I will also explore the perception of teachers regarding parental involvement in learner absenteeism. Pseudonym will be utilised in the interviews, data analysis and the findings. The data collected in this study will be used for research purposes only and treated as confidential. Access to the data will be granted to the researcher and the supervisor only. Please sign the consent form at the back of this document.

Thank you for your participation.

Questions:

1. Can you tell me about your experiences concerning learners' absenteeism in your classroom?
2. What do you think are the main problems why learners do not come to school?
3. Do you think that some of the reasons for learners' absenteeism are because of the parents?
4. What is your opinion about the role of parents in learners' absenteeism?
5. What are the challenges in managing learners' absenteeism in your classroom?
6. What do you do to discourage learners' absenteeism in your classroom?
7. What do you do to encourage learners' absenteeism in your classroom?
8. How do you support learners with poor attendance record in your classroom?
9. What do you do to learners who are often absent from your classroom?
10. Is there anything you would like to share with me regarding learners' absenteeism that is not covered in our discussion?

ANNEXURE E

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

TEACHER 5:

- 1. Can you tell me about your experiences concerning learner's absenteeism in your classroom?**

To my experience there is a problem of learners absenteeism in the classroom which combine all learners coming from far away from the school and those staying nearby the school, the learners usually are absent on Mondays and Fridays.

- 2. What do you think are the main problems why learners do not come to school?**

Some problems I found out are: Illnesses, parent want them to do the household work, personal problems/feeling not to come to school, hunger, afraid to come of not doing their homework given to them and menstruation.

- 3. Do you think that some of the reasons for learner's absenteeism are because of the parents?**

Yes, parent's contributor most to the problem of learner's absenteeism but on the other side learners themselves also because they do not care whether their children is in the class or not. Moreover they do not come when you invite them or even attend parent meeting at all.

- 4. What is your opinion about the role of parents in learner's absenteeism?**

Some parents role I realized are: Escort their children to school, Visit the school and attending meetings, respond if invited by the teacher at school, to the phone call and Encourage children to come to school and sleep early so that they get enough rest, Wake them up in the morning every day, Assist children with school work, Contact teachers why experience problem at home, Create a good teacher-parent relationship and Provide basic needs such as food and money.

- Probe: Tell me about the parental involvement regarding learner's absenteeism in your classroom?**

There is a lack of parental involvement because parents do not visit my classroom to see the attendance of their children and do not come when you invite them to school at all or attend parent meeting arranged by the school.

- What problems do you think that makes parents not to involve in learners absenteeism in your classroom?**

I think our parents lack knowledge and do not realize the importance of education or why their children should be in the class. More over Classroom rules and school rules are not set up with involvement of learners so learners find it difficult to understand them or follow them as expected.

5. What are the challenges in managing learner's absenteeism in your classroom?

Hunger is unforeseen problem therefore learners will not come in my class if they did not eat anything at home. Parent's attitude sometimes makes me as a teacher to manage it properly as parents want to fight me as a teacher when I punish their children for been absent.

Probe: What other challenges do you encounter if most learners are not present in your classroom?

I have to repeat the same work done by other learners in the classroom; it becomes boring and overloaded to me as a teacher. Assessment and some basic competencies will not be met as planned in a given term.

6. What do you do to discourage learner absenteeism in your classroom?

Use the register to count the day of absenteeism so that they are well inform and encourage them to reform from absenting themselves from the classroom. Punish the learners by giving them easy task such as cleaning the classroom, toilets etc. Inform the parents/talk to them regarding the absenteeism in the classroom. Give them a lot of class activities to be completed

7. What do you do to discourage learner's absenteeism in your classroom?

Encourage and motivate them

Have a discussion with the learners with attendance problem

Build team work or communicate with other teachers.

Probe: Do you think school feeding programmed boost learners attendance in your classroom?

Yes it does as many learners turned up if food is available at school and few comes in my class when they got finish or even not delivered at school.

8. How do you support learners with poor attendance record in your classroom?

I usually talk to the parent of the children by sharing with them the number of days absent and try to assist such children at an early stage and Invite the school board to assist such learners with attendance problem. As the teacher I have to give them the work missed in the afternoon to keep them in line with other learners and Talk to the parent and invite them to school.

9. What do you do to learners who often absent from your classroom?

As a teacher I have to follow the rules set up in order to address the problem.

Give written/verbal warnings to the learners.

Suspend learners from my classroom for certain days.

10. Is there anything you would like to share with me regarding learner's absenteeism that is not covered in our discussion?

The problem I noticed is that the school feeding programmed really assist this problem but it usually comes very late to school, I also observed that learners come to school when food is available, this may sometime lead to dropout from school.

ANNEXURE F

EXAMPLE OF ANALYSIS TABLE

Questions and sub	Responses	Segments	Comments/codes
1. Can you tell me about your experiences concerning learner's absenteeism in your classroom?	<p><u>Teacher 1</u></p> <p>According to my experience there is a problem with learner's absenteeism in my classroom.</p> <p><u>Teacher 2:</u></p> <p>There is a problem of learner's absenteeism in my class room as I experience since I came to this school.</p> <p><u>Teacher 3</u></p> <p><i>To my experiences there's a problem of learners absenteeism In my classroom, this problem to me sometimes leads to drop out of learners from school due to circumstances they face at home and at school, I experiences that learners do not come to school on Fridays in my classroom.</i></p> <p><u>Teacher 4</u></p> <p>To my knowledge there is a problem of learner's absenteeism in my classroom</p>	<p>there is a problem with learner's absenteeism in my classroom</p> <p>problem to me sometimes leads to drop out of learners from school</p> <p>learners do not come to school on Fridays</p> <p>problem of learner's absenteeism in my classroom which can be linked to the changing of seasons</p>	<p>All the teachers talked of learner absenteeism being a problem in the classes</p> <p>Absent particular days - Mondays and Fridays</p> <p>Reasons for learner absenteeism-</p> <p>Seasons - cold, rainy, harvest.</p> <p>Early marriage</p> <p>Distance from school</p>

	<p>which can be linked to the changing of seasons especially here in rural area</p> <p><u>Teacher 5</u></p> <p>To my experience there is a problem of learners absenteeism in the classroom which combine all learners coming from far away from the school and those staying nearby the school, the learners usually are absent on Mondays and Fridays.</p> <p><u>Teacher 6</u></p> <p>I experience a problem of learner's absenteeism in my classroom every day.</p> <p><u>Teacher 7</u></p> <p><i>According to my experience there is a problem of learner's absenteeism in my classroom that can be linked to the changing season/time of the year; I realize that many learners usually absent themselves during cold, rain, harvesting period and early marriage.</i></p> <p><u>Teacher 8</u></p> <p>According to my knowledge there is a problem with learner absenteeism in my classroom.</p>	<p>absenteeism in the classroom which combine all learners coming from far away from the school and those staying nearby</p> <p>absent on Mondays and Fridays.</p> <p>absenteeism in my classroom every day.</p> <p>many learners usually absent themselves during cold, rain, harvesting period and early marriage.</p>	
<p>2. What do you think are the main problems why</p>	<p><u>Teacher 1</u></p> <p>Some of the problem I have realized are cattle herding,</p>	<p>cattle herding, labor, domestic work,</p>	<p><u>Domestic responsibilities</u></p> <p>Cattle herding,</p>

<p>learners do not come to school?</p>	<p>labor, domestic work, hunting, peer pressure, hunger, seasonal (rain and cold), poverty.</p> <p>Teacher 2:</p> <p>Some of the problems I found out in my classroom are as follows: attitude of the teachers, no motivation from parents and teachers, no parental involvement sickness, hunger, stay with siblings at home, cattle herding.</p> <p>Teacher 3</p> <p>Some problems I found in my classroom are :Cattle herding, domestic/household work, peer pressure, labor(wages), menstruation(girls), hunger, rain and cold seasons, long distance, lack of parental involvement.</p> <p>Teacher 4</p> <p>Some of the problems I have realized are: Menstruation, illness, cattle herding and harvesting time.</p> <p>Teacher 5</p> <p>Some problems I found out are: Illnesses, parent want them to do the household work, personal problems/feeling not to come to school, hunger, afraid to come of not doing their homework given to them and</p>	<p>hunting, peer pressure, hunger, seasonal (rain and cold), poverty.</p> <p>attitude of the teachers, no motivation from parents and teachers, no parental involvement sickness, hunger, stay with siblings at home, cattle herding.</p> <p>domestic/household work, peer pressure, labor(wages), menstruation(girls), hunger, rain and cold seasons, long distance,</p> <p>Menstruation, illness, harvesting time.</p> <p>Illnesses, parent want them to do the household work, personal problems/feeling not to come to school, hunger, afraid to come of not doing their homework given to them and menstruation.</p>	<p>labor, hunting, household work, ploughing, parent want them to do domestic work</p> <p>Personal reasons</p> <p>peer pressure, sickness</p> <p>menstruation periods</p> <p>lack of motivation to attend school</p> <p>early marriage</p> <p>Family responsibilities</p> <p>Caring for siblings</p> <p>Parental support</p> <p>-lack of emphasis on importance of education, no encouragement, lack of motivation, no parental involvement</p> <p>Socio-economic</p>
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	<p>menstruation.</p> <p>Teacher 6</p> <p>Some of the problem I realized are: Cattle herding, menstruation, long distance, escort parent to get their money (pensioner), domestic work, ploughing or harvesting time, stay with siblings, do not do the homework, lack of parental involvement.</p> <p>Teacher 7</p> <p>Some of the problem I found in my classroom is: Long distance, coldness, harvesting period, rain, hunger, lack of parental involvement, no encouragement from parent/teachers, stay with siblings, labor, and domestic work.</p> <p>Teacher 8</p> <p>Some of the problem I came across in my classroom: Parental involvement, poverty (hunger), does not realize the importance of education being in the classroom.</p>	<p>escort parent to get their money (pensioner), Ploughing, no encouragement from parent/teachers, does not realize the importance of education for being in the classroom.</p>	<p><u>activities</u></p> <p>Child labour for wages, Harvesting time Accompany parents on pension payment days</p> <p><u>Poverty</u></p> <p>hunger</p> <p><u>Environmental reasons</u></p> <p>seasonal (rain and cold), long distances to walk to school walking long distances to school</p> <p><u>School factors</u></p> <p>Peer pressure Attitude of teachers, no motivation. Absent from school because of undone homework</p>
<p>3. Do you think that some of the reasons</p>	<p>Teacher 1:</p> <p>Yes, I strongly agree that</p>	<p>parents keep their</p>	<p>Parents as one of the contributing</p>

<p>for learner's absenteeism because of their parents?</p>	<p>parent is the main contributor to the absenteeism of learner's in my classroom. I have realized that parents keep their children at home during school hours without informing me as a teacher of the absenteeism. Furthermore some parents do not come to school when I invite them or even not attend parent meetings.</p> <p>Teacher 2:</p> <p>I do agree that parents are the main source/contributor to the learner's absenteeism in my classroom. Due to the fact that parents do not visit school to see how their children are attending their classes. Moreover they do not even care about the attendance of their children at school and even not attend parent meetings arranged by the school.</p> <p>Teacher 3</p> <p>Yes, they do contribute a lot to the learner's absenteeism at school as <i>they do not come when I invite them in my classroom to check the attendance record of their children and also do not care whether their children are at school or not.</i> To me it seems everything is left in my hands as teacher.</p>	<p>children at home during school hours without informing me as a teacher of the absenteeism</p> <p>parents do not come to school when I invite them or even not attend parent meetings.</p> <p>fact that parents do not visit school to see how their children are attending their classes they do not even care about the attendance of their children at school and even not attend parent meetings arranged by the school do not come when I invite them in my classroom to check the attendance record of their children everything is left in my hands as teacher.</p>	<p>factor to learners absenteeism</p> <p>All teachers stated that parents are the main contributing factor.</p> <p>Parents keep their children at home</p> <p>Parents do not come when they are invited by the teacher</p> <p>Do not attend parent meeting</p> <p>Do not visit school to check the attendance of their children</p> <p>Parents do not care whether their children are in the class or not.</p>
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	<p><u>Teacher 4</u></p> <p>Yes I do agree that parents contribute a lot to the learner's absenteeism in my classroom.</p> <p><u>Teacher 5</u></p> <p>Yes, parent's contributor most to the problem of learner's absenteeism but on the other side learners themselves also because they do not care whether their children is in the class or not. Moreover they do not come when you invite them or even attend parent meeting at all.</p> <p><u>Teacher 6</u></p> <p>Yes, parents do contribute most on the learner's absenteeism in the classroom as they do not come to school when they are invited or even attend parent meeting. Sometimes they <i>just keep their children at home during school hours to assist them with domestic work.</i></p> <p><u>Teacher 7</u></p> <p>Yes, I strongly feel that parents contribute a lot to learner absenteeism in my classroom.</p> <p><u>Teacher 8</u></p> <p>Yes, parent is the main contributor to learner's</p>	<p>keep their children at home during school hours to assist them with domestic work.</p>	<p>Everything is left in the hands of the teachers</p> <p>Keep their children t home to assist them with domestic work.</p>
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	absenteeism in my classroom.		
What is your opinion about the role of parents in learner's absenteeism?	<p>Teacher 1:</p> <p>As parent they have the following role to attend to such as they have to wakening our children early in the morning and Escort their children to school, help them with school work at home , attend parent meetings and visit school.</p> <p>To me there is a lack of parental involvement regarding learner's absenteeism in my classroom as parents do not care whether their child is at school or not. Moreover some parents do not even turn up when parent meeting is arranged at school.</p> <p>Teachers 2:</p> <p>Some of the roles I may give you are as follows: Escort them to school; Build a good teacher - parent relationship, Come to school to check whether their children are in the classroom every morning, as well as attending classes assist their children with school work at home.</p>	<p>wakening their children early in the morning and Escort their children to school, help them with school work at home , attend parent meetings and visit school.</p> <p>a lack of parental involvement regarding learner's absenteeism in my classroom as parents do not care whether their child is at school or not</p> <p>some parents do not even turn up when parent meeting is arranged at school.</p> <p>Build a good teacher - parent relationship, Come to school to check whether their children are in the classroom every morning</p> <p>a lack of parental involvement because parents do not come or assist when I invite them or request them to</p> <p>do not even visit their</p>	<p>Parental responsibilities/ roles:</p> <p>Wake their children early in the morning</p> <p>Escort their children to school</p> <p>Help them with school work</p> <p>Visit schools</p> <p>All teachers express that there is a lack of parental participation</p> <p>Build a good teacher- parent relationship</p> <p>Come to check whether their children are in the classroom every day</p>

	<p>To me there is a lack of parental involvement because parents do not come or assist when I invite them or request them to. They do not even visit their children in my classroom to check their attendance.</p> <p>Teacher 3</p> <p>Some of the roles I may give you are: Give time to the children to rest at night so that they woke up in good mood, Wake up their children in the morning.</p> <p>Escort their children to school.</p> <p>To my experience there is a lack of parental involvement in my classroom as parents do not come when I invite them or assist me when with learners with attendance problem. Some parents do not even attend parent meeting arranged by the school.</p> <p>Teacher 4</p> <p>Wake up their children at home.</p> <p>Provide some basic needs such as clothes, food etc.</p> <p>Escort learners at school.</p>	<p>children in my classroom to check their attendance.</p> <p>Give time to the children to rest at night so that they woke up in good mood</p> <p>Provide some basic needs such as clothes, food etc.</p> <p>attending meetings, respond if invited by the teacher at school, to the phone call and Encourage children to come to school.</p>	<p>Do not visit their children in my classroom</p> <p>Give enough time to the children to rest</p> <p>Provide some basic needs such as clothes, food</p> <p>Attend meetings</p> <p>Respond if they are invited by the teacher at school or phone call.</p>
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<p>attend parent meeting.</p> <p>I noticed that most parents are not involved due to the fact that they do not come when I invite them to school or even attend parent meeting arranged by the school.</p> <p><u>Teacher 5</u></p> <p>Some parents role I realized are: Escort their children to school, Visit the school and attending meetings, respond if invited by the teacher at school, to the phone call and Encourage children to come to school and sleep early so that they get enough rest, Wake them up in the morning every day, Assist children with school work, Contact teachers when they experience problem at home, Create a good teacher-parent relationship and Provide basic needs such as food and money.</p> <p>There is a lack of parental involvement because parents do not visit my classroom to see the attendance of their children and do not come when you invite them to school at all or attend parent meeting arranged by the school.</p> <p><u>Teacher 6</u></p>	<p>attend parent meeting.</p> <p>I noticed that most parents are not involved due to the fact that they do not come when I invite them to school or even attend parent meeting arranged by the school.</p> <p><u>Teacher 5</u></p> <p>Some parents role I realized are: Escort their children to school, Visit the school and attending meetings, respond if invited by the teacher at school, to the phone call and Encourage children to come to school and sleep early so that they get enough rest, Wake them up in the morning every day, Assist children with school work, Contact teachers when they experience problem at home, Create a good teacher-parent relationship and Provide basic needs such as food and money.</p> <p>There is a lack of parental involvement because parents do not visit my classroom to see the attendance of their children and do not come when you invite them to school at all or attend parent meeting arranged by the school.</p> <p><u>Teacher 6</u></p>	<p>Contact teachers when they experience problem at home.</p>	<p>Contact teachers when they experience problem at home.</p>
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	<p>I think parents have the following roles: Escort their children to school, Wake them up in the morning every day and Provide basic needs such as food and money. Attend meetings, help them with school work and visit school every day to see how their children are attending classes.</p> <p>There is a lack of parental involvement because parents do not visit my classroom to see the attendance of their children and do not come when you invite them to school at all or attend parent meeting arranged by the school.</p> <p><u>Teacher 7</u></p> <p>Some of the roles of the parents are: Visit school to check the attendance of their children</p> <p>Escort their children to the classroom.</p> <p>Wake them up on time in the morning.</p> <p>Provide basic needs such as food.</p> <p>There is a lack of parental involvement because parents do not visit my classroom to see the attendance of their children and do not come when you invite them to</p>	<p>Visit school to check the attendance record of their children.</p>	<p>Visit school to check the attendance record of their children.</p>
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	<p>school at all or attend parent meeting arranged by the school.</p> <p><u>Teacher 8</u></p> <p>Some of the roles of the parents are: Wake up their children in the morning, provide them with basic need such as food, Escort them until at the school premises and Visit school to check the attendance record of their children.</p>		
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ANNEXURE G

PROOF OF LANGUAGE EDITING

DECLARATION OF LANGUAGE EDITING

17 May 2016

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

This is to confirm that I have language edited and proof-read the dissertation by Mr Mudumbi Marcelius Katanga entitled:

**THE MANAGEMENT OF LEARNER ABSENTEEISM IN RURAL PRIMARY
SCHOOLS IN THE KAVANGO REGION OF NAMIBIA.**

The language editing/proof-reading process included the checking of spelling, punctuation, syntax and expression. An attempt was made to simplify complex sentences and, where necessary, combine short sentences to clarify meaning. Attention was given to the use of various language elements, such as prepositions, consistency in language usage and formatting as well as tenses and capital letters.



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